

Inevitable Choice for Survival: The Last Ottoman Grand Strategy

Mevcudiyetini Koruma Adına Nihai Çare: Son Dönem Osmanlı Grand Stratejisi

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Abstract

Today most scholar in the field, defines the concept of grand strategy as the allocation of a state's resources to meet its main objectives. In history no exceptions all states had guiding strategy to grow, exist or survive within the international environment. Even though Ottoman Empire like all other ones in history, had never used the grand strategy term to define their overall purpose, most empire's rulers set main objectives, established priorities, allocate resources and followed long term systemic plans in order to establish regional/global supremacy from fourteenth and eighteenth century successfully. However, their political/military/financial supremacy faded away when they were not able to renew the existing grand strategy according to the shifting international environment during the eighteenth century. This study examines the Ottoman's new revised grand strategy had emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century in order to secure the survival of empire. Within historical context, this paper designed to discuss Mahmud II's innovative and visionary grand strategic approach in detail. While doing it this study overall linked the centralization, westernization, Ottomanization and the balance of power policy in foreign affairs as the main component of renewed grand strategy. Last but not least this study presents an analysis of the attempt to reshape the empire's late period grand strategy aim to outmanoeuvre stronger rivals in an anarchic international order shaped by European great powers.

Key Words: Grand Strategy, Balance of Power, Ottomanism, Centralization, Modernization, Mahmud II.

Öz

Günümüzde grand strateji kavramını konunun uzmanları, bir devletin kaynaklarını ana hedefe/stratejiye ulaşmak için kullanması olarak tanımlamaktadır. Tarihte istisnasız tüm devletler, büyümek, mevcudiyetlerini devam ettirmek veya yıkılmamak için rehber olarak nitelendirilebilecek grand stratejiler takip etmiştir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihteki diğer imparatorluk ve devletler gibi grand stratejiye sahipti ancak Osmanlılar devletin ana amaçları, politikaları veya stratejileri olarak tanımlanan bu kavramı hiçbir zaman kullanmamıştı. Bununla birlikte Osmanlılar, grand strateji yaklaşımı bağlamında değerlendirilen uzun vadeli ana stratejileri, politikaları ve öncelikleri, bölgesel/küresel güç olma adına on dördüncü ve on sekizinci yüzyıllar arasında başarıyla uygulamaya koymuştur. Fakat, değişmekte olan

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küresel dinamiklere uygun bir şekilde grand stratejisini revize edememesi neticesinde, imparatorluk on sekizinci yüzyılda sahip olduğu siyasi, askeri ve finansal üstünlüğü kaybetmiştir. Bu çalışma, Osmanlı'nın yıkılma tehlikesiyle karşı karşıya kaldığı on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ilk yarısında ortaya çıkan ve imparatorluğun bekasını güvence altına almayı hedefleyen yeni grand stratejiyi analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma tarihsel süreç içerisinde II. Mahmut'un grand strateji olarak kabul edilebilecek yaklaşımını detaylı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Bunu yaparken aynı zamanda Sultan tarafından uygulamaya konulan merkeziyetçi, batıcı, millî kimlik odaklı politikalar ve dış politikada güçler dengesi politikası irdelenmiş ve bu unsurlar yenilenen grand stratejinin öğeleri olarak tespit edilmiştir. Son olarak bu çalışma Avrupa'nın büyük güçleri tarafından şekillendirilen anarşik bir uluslararası düzende, imparatorluğun daha güçlü rakiplerini alt etmeyi amaçlayan geç dönem Osmanlı grand stratejisinin anlaşılmasına katkı yapmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Grand Strateji, Güçler Dengesi, Osmanlılık, Merkeziyetçilik, Batıcılık, II. Mahmud.

Introduction

As a classical empire, the Ottoman Empire, had enjoyed supremacy over the European powers for centuries by implementing an overreaching grand strategy in order to sustain territorial expansion from fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. However, at the outset of the eighteenth century, the empire lost superiority over the European powers due to internal and external factors.¹ In particular, Russian Empire, emerged as a threatening rival given its grand strategy of expansion southwards, encroaching on Ottoman territory. Russia's ambitious expansion strategy forced the empire to engage in sustained and costly battles that gravely depleted the empire's financial and human resources. Their expansion had also provoked Slavic population to revolt against the Ottomans.²

Having an intimidating and menacing enemy at the gate and dissatisfied minorities at home were not the only issues for Ottoman rulers to deal with. The empire had fundamental internal issues related to military, political social, financial and administrative domains. Ongoing increase in decentralization forced the empire to depend on local elites (ayans) that further undermined the central authority and further caused unrest among minorities. In addition, the lack of cultural and political ideals fomented unrest and despise amongst outnumbered groups. Despite few attempts to win over dissenters, the empire's policy makers had failed to understand shifting international environment.³

Ottomans had tried to strengthen military capabilities in order to overcome pressing issues throughout the eighteenth century. While they not

- 1 Vedit İnal, "The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Ottoman Attempts to Catch Up with Europe", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol: 47, No: 5, September 2011, pp. 725-756.
- 2 Mehmet Yetişgin, "The Ottoman Way of Governing Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious", *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, Cilt:4, No:21, 2007, pp. 150-151.
- 3 Robert Zens, "Provincial Powers: The Rise of Ottoman Local Notables (Ayan)", *History Studies*, Vol: 3, Issue:3, 2011, pp. 433-447.

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only failed to catch up with the ongoing transitions but also failed to renew the grand strategy of the empire that would preserve territorial peace and stability. Besides, despite political, technological, social and financial reforms aimed to revitalize the empire strength, never ending competition for throne created power vacuum while European powers had been in progress. Furthermore, due to nepotism, favouritism and corruption the empire could not enact impending reforms.⁴

Royal family members had no choice to get the support of certain groups in order to keep their power. Military officials, high ranking officials and religious elites were in a position to lobby for persuading royal family members to secure their own benefits. Their impact on the empire's faith had already started to pose huge threat to the empire around the beginning of sixteenth century. They were almost in total control of state's decision around the end of eighteenth century.⁵ So indeed, the empire was under the control of those groups who were particularly not interested in any reforms target to strengthening the position of Ottoman dynasty. The situation was critical for the empire due to looming total failure.⁶ The empire needed to have a resilient and intelligent rulers or sultans to initiate change. Selim III became the fiercest one reigned from 1789 to 1807. He was one of the mighty sultans-initiated reforms and policies targeting not only the existing order but also shifting the grand strategy of the empire.⁷ However, he failed to achieve his ambitious vision in the face of intense resistance from existing power groups, again military, administrative and religious elites acted against reforms due to fear of losing their privileges. They moved against him and Selim III first lost his throne and then his life. Yet his vision for reforming the state did not come to end since his cousin Mahmud II acted smart and enacted reforms in a long period of time. Being only the sole alternative for the throne kept him alive and protect his power. He instituted wide-ranging reforms shifted the empire's grand strategy in time. It is true that he never used the grand strategy term to define his actions. He was able to reformulate the grand strategy of the empire from 1808-1839.

This study aims to analyze Selim III and Mahmud II's efforts to reform the empire in order to save it from the total failure analyzing by the grand strategic approach. It is a critical analysis of the period in the Ottoman history regarded as a decline by some scholars. The study focuses on how certain policies such as westernization, centralization, Ottomanism and balance of power could be regarded as the empire's new grand strategy. Here,

4 Walter F. Weiker, "The Ottoman Bureaucracy: Modernization and Reform", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3, December 1968, pp. 457-460.

5 Kemal H. Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol: 3, 1972, p. 244.

6 Bernard Lewis, "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire", *Studia Islamica*, No: 9, 1958, pp. 111-113.

7 Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire Under Sultan Selim III, 1789-1807*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 260.

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the purpose is to show how new grand strategy is crucial for shaping the future policies that allowed empire survive in an anarchic environment of the nineteenth century.

The study indeed covers historical research, critical analysis and observation. Since using grand strategy as a historical analysis as a new way first the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the grand strategy are explored. Then it examines the empire through the lens of grand strategy. Finally, all analysis and lessons drawn from the study aims to demonstrate how the empire's new grand strategy was able to shape the Turkish grand strategy during the Republican period a century later.

Grand Strategy Literature

Grand strategy is a relatively new and popular concept that allows scholars/researchers to examine the principal strategy adopted by states. The term has garnered more attention ever since Paul Kennedy published a ground-breaking collection of work entitled *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*.⁸ Since then, his contribution to the conceptual foundation of the term has been phenomenal.⁹ Today the grand strategy is a popular academic concept predominantly in the fields of international relations and strategy studies. Despite its popularity, the lack of a universal definition remains a challenge. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that grand strategy is the highest blueprint shaping a state's policies in military, politics, diplomacy, economic domains, and any source of capacity that allow states to act within the boundaries of settled aims.¹⁰ Within this context, it could be inferred that whether big or small, every state had a grand strategy that shaped their overall aims and even without wording it.

In the past, empires, states and city states had used grand strategic logic in order to achieve their aims. According to Martel, ancient period philosophers and statesmen such as Sun Tzu, Thucydides and modern period scholars, theorists and statesmen such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, Fredrich List and Alexander

8 Nina Slove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of Grand Strategy", *Security Studies*, 2017, p. 1; Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition," Paul Kennedy (ed.) *Grand Strategy in War and Peace*, Yale University Press, New Haven/CT, 1991, pp. 1-5.

9 With the contribution of John Gaddis and Charlie Hill, Paul Kennedy established the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy in 2000. For more information about the program see: Yale University, Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy About", <https://grandstrategy.yale.edu/about>

10 More definitions: Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrines: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, Ithaca/NY, Cornell University Press, 1984, pp.13-14; Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton/NJ, 2006, pp. 9-13; William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice the Need For an Effective American Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp.23-24; Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, pp. 1-3; Thierry Balzac et al., *Comparative Grand Strategy A Framework and Cases*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019, pp.5-8..

Hamilton could be considered grand strategists on the basis of their views on war, strategy, state, international order etc.¹¹ Apart from them in real terms, Antonie H. Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz were the first theorists to use grand strategy into their studies.¹² Having read a translation of *Taktika* written by Byzantine Emperor Leo VI, Jomini established the main principle of the term grand strategy, relating it to military strategy.¹³ Subsequently, during the military campaigns of Napoleon between 1804-1812, grand strategy was used as a distinct term for military operations. Clausewitz contributed much to the development of term by incorporating war and policy into his studies.¹⁴

Later, in the first half of the twentieth century, Basil L. Hart fundamentally shifted the definition of grand strategy.¹⁵ Henry A. Sargeant and Geoffrey West then expanded the terminology by including political, financial, social and psychological instruments into their description.¹⁶ Edward Mead Earle was to become one of the first who elaborated on the grand strategy concept by adding non-military elements and described it as the highest policy of state.¹⁷ By the end of the Second World War, the interest in grand strategy theory had waned since most American scholars in international politics were focused instead on the containment of Soviet expansion and employing classical international theories rather than grand strategy.¹⁸

However, by the 1970s, due to increasing anti Americanism around the globe, American policy-makers started to question existing policies and grand strategy evolved into a major area of research for strategic studies and international relations. Lawrence Freedman was the first to develop the theory of strategy in 1970s.¹⁹ With the publishing of two major books, *The Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices* and *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, the theory was used by historians for the first time,²⁰ and gained more momentum when mainstream awareness reached its peak in

11 Martel, 2015, pp. 23-89.

12 Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, Greenhill Books/Lionel Leventhal Ltd. London, 2006; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (trans: Colonel J.J. Graham), London, 1918.

13 Jeremy Black, "Strategic Culture and the Seven Years War ", Williamson Murray et al, (ed.) *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 64.

14 Martin Kornberger, "Clausewitz: On Strategy", *Business History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2013, p.1066.

15 Lukas Milevski, "The Mythology of Grand Strategy," *Infinity Journal*, Vol: 3. No: 1, Winter 2012, p. 32;

16 Henry Antony Sargeant, Geoffrey West, *Grand Strategy*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1941.

17 Edward M. Earle (ed.), "Introduction," to *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, p. viii.

18 Thomas C. Schelling, "Bernard Brodie (1910-1978)", *International Security*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Winter 1978-1979, p. 2.

19 Milevski, 2016, p. 109.

20 Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins Press, 1976.

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the 1980's. During this decade, scholars like Barry Posen²¹ and Paul Kennedy²² contributed substantially to the development of grand strategy theory. Then by 2000, new studies emerged on grand strategy. Scholars like Eric A. Nordlinger,²³ Gary Hart,²⁴ Edward N. Luttwak,²⁵ Sulman W. Khan²⁶ all published works on grand strategy substantially advancing the theory.

Apart from all these studies, there are some studies specifically focused on the Ottoman grand strategy. Gabor Agoston opened the way for scholars using grand strategy as a tool to comprehend the Ottoman Empire's policies.²⁷ Subsequently Veysel Simsek, Goktug Sonmez and Burak Kadercan contributed much to the understanding of the Ottoman history respectively.²⁸ Today, in addition the aforementioned, there are works about to be printed using grand strategy as a tool to comprehend past and current state's grand strategy. This study is one of those focused on the grand strategy of a failing empire seeking to survive in the age of revolution.²⁹

Renewal of Ottoman Grand Strategy

As one of the long-lasting empires, the Ottoman Empire has an unparalleled place in history. The empire's pre-nineteenth century history is usually divided into two phases: the golden-classical age (1400-1600) and the stagnation-decline period (1600-1800).³⁰ During the golden age, the empire had enjoyed a sustained period of expansion, holding dominion over territories across three continents - Europe, Asia and Africa.³¹ At that time, the grand strategy of the empire was based on steady expansion shaped by geopolitical aims.³² The outstanding success of the empire stemmed from its ability to

21 Posen, 1984, p.7.

22 Kennedy, 1991, p. 4.

23 Swaine D. Michael- Tellis, J. Ashley *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future*, RAND Publishing, 2000.

24 Gary Hart, *The Fourth Power: A Grand Strategy for the United States in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

25 Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of Byzantine Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009.

26 Sulman W. Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2018.

27 Gabor, Agoston, "Information, Ideology, and the Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry," Virginia Aksan-Daniel H. Goffman (ed), *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 75-103.

28 Veysel Simsek, "The Grand Strategy of the Ottoman Empire, 1826-1841", Unpublished PhD. Thesis, McMaster University, Hamilton, September 2015; Burak Kadercan, "Territorial Design and Grand Strategy in the Ottoman Empire", *Territory, Politics, Governance*, Vol. 5, Issue. 2, January 2017, pp. 158-176.

29 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Vintage Books, New York, 1962.

30 Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*, Routledge, 2007, New York, p. 5.

31 Leila T. Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, pp. 1-7; Sevket Pamuk, "Institutional Change and the Longevity of the Ottoman Empire, 1500-1800", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, MIT Press, Vol. 25, No. 2, Autumn, 2004, p. 226.

32 Gabor Agoston, "The Ottomans from Frontier Principality to Empire", John A. Olsen and

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pursue a grand strategy founded on coherent relationship among the empire's political, social, military and financial policies.³³

During the stagnation-decline period. the empire's policy-makers strove to catch up with the enlightened European powers which had made huge advances in the fields of science, technology, politics, education and strategy.³⁴ These efforts were, however, thwarted by both external and internal factors.³⁵ When Selim III took power in 1789, the empire was on the brink of collapse threatened by political, financial and military issues. The grand strategy of the empire founded on expansion proved useless and needed urgent revision. Selim thus introduced new radical reforms to save the empire from the total collapse. However, he failed to execute these reforms and to reform the state in the face of fierce resistance from both the administrative and military ranks. The tension between Selim III and powerful elites descended into a bloody revolt against him, and he was eventually dethroned, on May 29, 1807.³⁶

During the short reign of Mustafa IV (1807-1808), the priority was the restoration of the old order yet this time he was dethroned by the Danubian elite (from here on Ayan) Alemdar Mustafa Pasha, who had a strong army to achieve his goal of reorganizing the empire according to his agenda based on decentralization and strong elites.³⁷ He wanted to enthrone Selim III yet his efforts failed when the supporters of Mustafa IV executed the dethroned Selim III. Subsequently, with the help of Alemdar Pasha, Mahmud II acceded to the throne on July 28, 1808.³⁸

As a result, Mahmud II allowed Alemdar Pasha to be the absolute authority which licenced him to act impulsively. Alemdar Pasha wanted to abolish Janissaries by establishing new army under the name of *Sekban-ı Cedid* (The Keepers of Royal Hounds) similar to *Nizam-ı Cedid* (The New Order) previously established by Selim III. However, he failed due to underestimating the power of the Janissaries. Once again, the Janissaries revolted, on this occasion against the kingmaker, Alemdar Pasha. Surprisingly Mahmud II did not intervene in the revolt which ended in the execution of Alemdar Pasha on November 16, 1808. While this proved a huge relief for the young sultan, left without protection he decided to act cautiously in order to

Colin S. Gray, *The Practice of Strategy from Alexander the Great to the Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 267-269.

33 Martel, 2015, p. 110.

34 Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique", *The American Historical Review*, Vol.117, Issue. 4, October 2012, pp. 999-1027.

35 Vedit Inal, "The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Ottoman Attempts to Catch Up with Europe", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 5, September 2011, pp. 725-756.

36 William L. Cleveland-Martin Buntun, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Westview Press, Boulder, 2009, p. 50.

37 Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, SAQI Books, London, 2013, p. 320.

38 Stanford J. Shaw-Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey Volume II Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 1.

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keep his throne.³⁹

Mahmud II was a quite smart and cautious ruler. During his first fifteen years, he neither moved against his opponents nor revealed his aims to initiate any reforms restructure the grand strategy of the empire. Nonetheless, he was fully aware of the need to create a new grand strategy in order to save the empire from the imminent and total destruction. Therefore, his choice of grand strategy centred on the survival of the empire. He thus tried to introduce reforms that could be formulated as centralization, reformation, nation building and balance of power policy. Despite being unable reverse the decline of the military, he could manage to postpone the total collapse of the empire specifically his claim of reasserting the central authority that had been lacking for many years.

Centralization Policies: Reclaiming the Supreme Authority

The Ottoman Empire had been on the brink of total collapse when Mahmud II took power in 1808. At that time, one of the most pressing issues was the integrity of the empire since ayans had been enjoying uninterrupted provincial authority. Their influence increased in the period when sultans required more soldiers to deal with internal uprisings. Since they acted as an alternative military force used for internal and external security, their presence had been appreciated by sultans.⁴⁰ During the reign of Selim III, local elites emerged as the significant power shaping internal politics, in particular, they wielded influence over rivalry for the throne. Alemdar Mustafa Pasha became the famous ayan who enthroned Mahmud II in 1808. His influence over the new sultan threatened traditional power elites. Their growing influence over the throne became a major problem for the unity of empire since some of them revolted against the central authority, demanding greater privileges.

When he succeeded to the throne, he was well aware of the imminent threat coming from the local elites. However, since he was in need of the protection provided by Alemdar Pasha, he had no choice but to work in harmony. Consequently, he did not hesitate to sign the Deed of Agreement (Sened-i İttifak) with ayans introducing more decentralization on 7 October 1808.⁴¹ Fortunately, he did not wait long or act against Alemdar Pasha since the Janissaries regarded him as their principal enemy, a threat to their very existence. When they moved against him, Mahmud II did nothing to rescue him.⁴² The elimination of Alemdar Pasha was a major setback for him and yet simultaneously it served his purpose. It also enabled him to carry out his centralization policy, vital to his grand strategy, although he did not act against disobedient ayans until 1812.⁴³

39 Necdet Sakaoglu, *Bu Mülkün Sultanları*, Oglak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999, pp. 406-417.

40 Karpat, 1972, pp. 251-252.

41 Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 29.

42 Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, Doğu Batı Yayınları, İstanbul, 1978, pp. 137-145.

43 Mustafa Nuri, *Netayicü'l-Vukuat*, 4, Uhuvvet Matbaası, 1909, İstanbul, p. 98.

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After signing the Treaty of Bucharest with Russia in 1812, Mahmud II finally decided to focus on the ayan issue. However once again, due to the emerging successive diplomatic and military crisis, he was unable to use military force against them.⁴⁴ Instead, he employed the carrot and stick policy towards them.⁴⁵ For instance, when any loyal ayan passed away, he allowed his heir to replace his father as a courtesy, though evidently with greater restriction on their privileges. At the same time, when an ayan showed an inclination of disloyalty or autonomy, he used both threats and punishment. For example, he implicitly set Haznedarogullari against Tuzcuogullari. Their rivalry between 1812 -1834 enabled Mahmud II to focus on more urgent issues. In addition, he used his power of appointment when a disobedient ayan passed away; he deprived their heirs of privileges. As such, he was able to eliminate Capanogullari in 1813 and Karaosmanogullari in 1816 peacefully and Tepedenli Ali Pasha by force in 1821.⁴⁶ Sometimes he used ayans to suppress another disobedient one. He thereby eliminated prominent ayans like Tekelioglu Ibrahim, Dagdevirenoglu Mehmet and ended the control of Mamluk rule in Baghdad.⁴⁷

From the outset of his reign, Mahmud II focused on strengthening and reframing the central authority. As one of the crucial components of his grand strategy, centralization policy allowed him to restore much of the empire's central authority, in particular throughout Anatolia and Rumelia.⁴⁸ Despite that success, the empire was confronted by nationalist movements informed by the ideals of French Revolution. Serbian (1804), Greek (1821) and Bosnian (1829) revolts led to a failure in maintaining the territorial integrity. The destructive impact of the French Revolution and European power politics led the empire to lose more territory over time.⁴⁹ Despite these territorial losses, Mahmud II strengthened central authority through measures such as eliminating powerful ayans. Reclaiming central authority indubitably delayed the final collapse of empire.

Westernization Policies: Road to Integration into Europe

The Ottoman grand strategy based on continuous expansion worked well until the end of the seventeenth century. The first full-scale reform movement was initiated between 1718-1730 during the *Tulip Era*. Selim III wanted to shape the empire's grand strategy through substantial reforms in various areas as well as restructuring the grand strategy of the empire

44 Mehmet S. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008, p.60.

45 Cleveland- Bunton, 2009, p.62.

46 Shaw-Shaw, 1977, pp.17-19.

47 Mehmet Ataullah Efendi, *Sânîzâde Tarihi*, 2, Süleyman Efendi Matbaası, Istanbul, 1873, pp. 349-353.

48 Mehmet A. Yalçınkaya, "The Provincial Reforms of the Early Tanzimat Period as Implemented in the Kaza of Avrethisarı", *Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. 6, No. 6, 1995, pp. 353-356.

49 Frederick F. Anscombe, 'The Balkan Revolutionary Age' *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 84, No. 3, September 2012, p. 572.

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based on a policy of balance of power. He also conceived of secularism with the reformation of bureaucracy and the religious class who were powerful in shaping the policies of empire. His visionary approach became a blueprint for his successor.⁵⁰

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the empire suffered five major revolts that harmed the central authority. Four out of nine sultans were forced to surrender the throne, while numerous statesmen and bureaucrats lost their lives during that period.⁵¹ Mahmud II thus chose to abandon ideas of military reform and instead he put pressure on the high-ranking officers of the Janissary Corps. As a result, there were twenty-four Janissary Aghas from 1808 to 1826.⁵² Other than using his powers of delegation, he did not act to change the power structure in which Janissaries were the principal force until 1820s. Their tarnished image due to failure in the battlefield licenced Mahmud II to execute his removal strategy in 1826.⁵³

Firstly, he established a new army which the Eskinçi Corps, created unrest among Janissaries. Then he provoked them by spreading rumours about the abolishment of the Janissary Corps which enraged them. Janissaries once again moved to remove the threat against their existence and revolted on the night of June 14, 1826. This time they were destined to fall because counter-rebel forces from other corps, members of ulema and even civilians were ready to fight against the Janissaries. Consequently, most of the rebels were eliminated and their barracks were set on fire. The very next day, the Janissary Corps was abolished on June 15-17, 1826.⁵⁴

The dramatic abolition of the Janissary Corps was recorded as an *Auspicious Incident*, which shows Mahmud II's remarkable success in removing the major obstacle before the westernization of the state. His achievement was remarkable because for centuries, Janissaries had been the main power group preventing the necessary reforms. He initially founded the new corps, The Trained Victorious Soldiers of Muhammed (*Muallem Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediyye*) in 1826. Later, he abolished the Timar system in 1831 so as to strengthen the central authority. Subsequently in 1834, he introduced the *redif* system (reserve militia) to prepare provinces to send combat-ready units as and when required.⁵⁵ In addition to all those necessary military reforms, he also carried out full-scale administrative and institutional reforms. In so doing, he established various institutions and ministries.⁵⁶ Through

50 Avigdor Levy, "The Ottoman Ulema and the Military Reforms of Sultan Mahmud II", *Asian and African Studies*, Vol.7, 1971, pp. 13-39.

51 Mehmet M. Sunar, "Cauldron of Dissent: A Study of the Janissary Corps, 1807-1826", Unpublished Thesis, State University of New York New York, 2006, p. 96-98.

52 Howard A. Reed, *The Destruction of the Janissaries by Mahmud II in June, 1826*, Princeton University, 1951, 39.

53 Sunar, 2006, p. 198.

54 Kemal Beydilli, *Yeniçeriler ve Bir Yeniçerinin Hatıratı*, Yitik Hazine Yayınları, İstanbul, 2013, p. 43.

55 Shaw-Shaw, 1977, p. 23.

56 During his reign, all the following ministries were established. The Chamber of Interpre-

such reforms, he aimed to create a new cabinet system similar to the European model. For the first time in history, the empire was inclined to adapt European state system. Those reforms were to a large extent pass down to future generations and even created a predisposition toward the adaptation of republican ideals in the future.

In conclusion, the ability of Mahmud II to carry out extensive reforms for the first time in the history of the empire was not sufficient to maintain the territorial integrity of the empire, yet those reforms contributed much to the formation of his grand strategy and allowed the empire's policy-makers to halt its decline, beginning from the end of eighteenth century. However, in the age of revolution and nationalism, the Ottomans needed more sophisticated policies like nation-building that would strengthen the sense of togetherness amongst multi-ethnic and religious groups living within the empire's domains. Therefore, Mahmud II became the first sultan inclined toward the creation of national identity.⁵⁷ However such an undertaking proved a major challenge. His visionary approach not only influenced the decisions of policy-makers after him but also initiated fundamental reforms begun during the period of Tanzimat, and within a short period of time, minorities acquired more rights and representation in the political system, through the establishment of local councils to represent them.

Nation-Making Policy: Ottomanism

During the golden age, the Ottoman Empire as a multi-ethnic, religious and -lingual empire constituted her identity based on religious-ethnic tolerance, loose integration and the millet system.⁵⁸ The empire, from its outset, placed importance on the protection of territorial and religious division. This strategic choice was employed to secure full freedom to create adequate living condition for non-Muslim subjects.⁵⁹ However, due to internal and external factors, the empire faced grave uprisings within the Balkan territories.⁶⁰ Greek and Serbian uprisings not only led to territorial losses but also presented an

tation (1821), the Ministry of Public Finance (1826), the Ministry of Public Order (1826), the Ministry of Imperial Foundation (1826), the Ministry of Mukataat (1827), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1836), the Ministry of Justice (1836), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (1836), the Ministry of Finance (1838), the Prime Ministry (1838) and the Ministry of Grain and Provisions (1839). For details see, Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire, The Sublime Porte 1789-1922*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980, pp. 133-142

57 Yelda Demirağ, "Pan-Ideologies in The Ottoman Empire Against the West: From Pan-Ottomanism to Pan-Turkism", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, No. 36, 2005, p. 139.

58 Mehmet Yetişgin, "The Ottoman Way of Governing Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious", *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, Cilt.4, No. 21, 2007, pp. 141-142.

59 Hugh Poulton, "The Muslim Experience in the Balkan States, 1919-1991", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No.1, 2000, p. 46.

60 Birol Gündoğdu, "Ottoman Constructions of the Morea Rebellion, 1770s: A Comprehensive Study of Ottoman Attitudes to the Greek Uprising", Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto, 2012, pp. 8-9.

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immediate threat to social integrity.⁶¹

The failure to suppress both uprisings constituted not only a military and security issue but also had sociological and political consequences. In order to ensure subjects' loyalty to the empire, Mahmud II devised the idea of creating unitary national identity- Ottomanism, which gained popularity during the Tanzimat period, one of the crucial components of his grand strategy.⁶² For the first time in history, a sultan acted unconventionally, taking into consideration minority rights as part of citizenship. Mahmud II focused on this creation of new collective identity right after the beginning of the Greek Revolt in 1821.⁶³ He finally adapted the idea of an Ottoman state composed of diverse nationalities religious and ethnic origins, but with equal rights.⁶⁴ While it was too late to prevent Greek and Serbian revolts, Ottomanism contributed substantially in attempts to create a new collective identity in the Tanzimat period.

As a key element of his grand strategy, Ottomanism failed longer term but it nevertheless staved off the empire's collapse by inspiring its policy-makers to pursue unitarian and egalitarian policies during the Tanzimat Period (1839-1878).⁶⁵ However, at that time, the empire needed a more articulated foreign policy in order to survive as the aggressively expanding international environment encroached on its territory. Without a halt to other powers' involvement with the empire's minority communities, the creation of a new identity was destined for failure. In particular some minorities, influenced by French Revolution ideals, were already invested in the creation of their own state. Right from the beginning, Selim III was aware of the need for a new foreign policy focused on a balance of power policy. When he succeeded to the throne, Mahmud II also embraced the balance of power policy which constituted the key part of his grand strategy.

The Balance of Power Policy

In the age of revolutionary wars in Europe Napoleon Bonaparte posed the major threat to the international order. When he was defeated at Waterloo on 18 June 1815, Britain, Austria, Russia, Prussia and Royal France decided to establish a new order based on the balance of power policy.⁶⁶ Before

- 61 Miroslav Sedivy, *Metternich, Great Powers and the Eastern Question*, Pilsen/Czech Republic, 2013, pp. 59-86.
- 62 Darin Stephanov, "Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) and the First Shift in Modern Ruler Visibility in the Ottoman Empire", *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, 2004, pp. 129-148.
- 63 Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*. Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 90.
- 64 Roderic H. Davison, "Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem and the Ottoman Response", in *Nationalism in a Non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire*, William W. Haddad-William Ochsenwald, Columbus (ed.), Ohio State University Press, Ohio, 1977, pp. 39-40.
- 65 Shaw-Shaw, 1977, p.129.
- 66 Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power Policy History and Theory*, Routledge, London, 1996, pp. 1-4.

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this came into being the Ottoman Empire already had their own balance of power policy designated by Selim III in order to prevent total collapse of the empire. He believed that participating in the European balance of power was not a choice but rather a necessity since the empire had been already part of the balance of power amongst European powers.⁶⁷ In addition, the imminent and significant threat coming from Russian Empire necessitated an alliance with Prussia and Sweden in 1790. Thereby the empire formed its first ever alliance against an enemy.⁶⁸ When the Austrian-Russian Treaty (1795) explicitly mentioned the Greek Project⁶⁹ and the Anglo-Russian Treaty became a major risk that could not be ignored, Selim III decided to shift the existing policy.⁷⁰

He joined the defensive alliance together with Spain, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Prussia that was signed with France on 24 May, 1796. However, France refused to ratify the treaty to avoid any future commitment.⁷¹ Only two years later, due to the unexpected French Invasion of Egypt in 1798, Selim III took the radical step of forming an alliance first with Russia on December 23, 1798, then with the British Empire on January 5, 1799, and finally with the Kingdom of Napoli on January 21, 1799.⁷² The empire also joined the European Alliance against Napoleon during the Second Coalition Wars (1799-1801).⁷³ In so doing, the empire, for the first time in its history, used the balance of power policy to eliminate an enemy.⁷⁴

Forming an alliance against France served its purpose, compelling France sign the treaty of Amiens with the British Empire on 27 March, 1802. By signing this treaty, France was forced to return Egypt to the Ottoman Empire. On 25 June 1802, the Treaty of Paris was signed by France and the Ottoman Empire, ending enmity between two powers. Series of treaties signed by the Ottoman Empire; Selim successfully exploited the hostility between European powers. However, the empire's decision not to join the Third Coalition Wars that waged between 1803-1806 created an opportunity for Russians to move against their arch enemy. They interpreted the neutrality decision by the Ottoman Empire as a sign of antagonism.⁷⁵ Their sustained

67 Berridge G.R. "Diplomatic Integration with Europe Before Selim III", Yurdusev A.N. (eds) *Ottoman Diplomacy Studies in Diplomacy*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014, p. 114.

68 Behice Ö. Gökakan, "The Ottoman Empire and European International Society, A Theoretical-Historical Analysis", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara, January 2010, p.317.

69 See more info about the Greek Project: Alexander Bitis, "The Russian Army and the Eastern Question", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, London, London School of Economics, 2000, p.12.

70 Kahraman Sakul, *An Ottoman Global Moment: War of the Second Coalition in the Levant*, Washington University, Washington, November 18, 2009, p. 54.

71 Sakul, 2009, p. 58.

72 Aksan, 2007, pp. 229-230.

73 Thomas Naff, "Reform and Conduct in Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III, 1789-1807", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 83, No. 33, 1963, pp. 295-315.

74 Sakul, 2009, pp. 93-95.

75 Valery Morkva, "Russia's Policy of Rapprochement with the Ottoman Empire in The

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aggressive stance toward the empire became a major point of conflict for years.

On the other hand, Mahmud II was just twenty-four years old when he came to the throne, inheriting a failing empire beset by major internal and external pressures, particularly the constant threat coming from Russia, Austria, France, Great Britain and even from Mehmed Ali Pasha's Egypt.⁷⁶ He consequently had to pursue the balance of power policy in foreign affairs to survive the relentlessly hostile international environment.⁷⁷ Like his cousin, Selim III, Mahmud II wished to exploit the competition between the great powers yet Britain, France and Russia all played a role in the Serbian and Greek uprisings and the Egypt issue. Shortly before his coronation in 1804, the Serbian Revolt broke out and needed to be addressed immediately.⁷⁸ Even though Selim III had declared the revolt an internal issue, it had already developed into an international issue by the time Mahmud II took power. The Russians had long been pressing for a new treaty as the guardian of the empire's Orthodox subjects of the empire.⁷⁹ Its alliance with France was about to collapse as France had suffered some major setbacks against the rival coalition.⁸⁰

Mahmud II attempted to halt the Serbian Revolt by declaring an amnesty for the rebels and appointed Milos Obrenovich as the new leader to bring an end to the revolt in 1813. This solution worked well initially. However, it did not prevent the unrest in Serbia finally the second revolt started in 1815, led by Obrenovich following Napoleon's defeat in 1814. In response to increased pressure from European powers, Mahmud II accepted Serbian autonomy in 1817. While had no choice to step back from Serbia, Mahmud II used both the local and international balance of power to prevent Russian and Austrian involvement in the growing problem. Despite this, the Ottoman Empire lost complete control over Serbia.⁸¹ The Serbian revolt was the first challenge to Mahmud II's balance of power policy but his failure did not deter him from pursuing the policy because it remained the pivotal element of his grand strategy.

When the Greek uprising, initiated by Hypsilanti in 1821, began, Mahmud II was unaware of the organized insurrection movements in Moldavia, Romania, Morea and Istanbul. Initially, the empire's policy-mak-

Era of The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1792-1806", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara, September 2010, pp. 316-323.

76 Hanioglu, 2008, pp. 6-8.

77 Aksan, 2007, p. 259.

78 Dusan Batakovic, "Balkan-Style French Revolution? The 1804 Serbian Revolution in European Perspective" *Balkanica*, Vol. XXXVI, 2005, p. 114.

79 Stanford Shaw, "The Ottoman Empire and the Serbian Uprising 1804-1807", W. S. Vucinich (ed.) *The First Serbian Uprising, 1804-1813*, Brooklyn College Press, New York, 1982, pp. 71-94.

80 Gökakın, 2010, pp.237-238.

81 Serap Toprak, "Osmanlı Avrupa İlişkileri Bağlamında Sırbistan'ın Bağımsızlığı", *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol 6, Issue. 28, Winter 2013, p. 351.

ers viewed the revolt as an internal affair. However, failure to anticipate the seriousness of the uprising and consequent ineffective military, political and social measures meant the Greek uprising soon became an international issue.⁸² Russian, French and British intervention constituted a military catastrophe for the Ottoman Empire. While Russians were eager to help Greeks given their status as protector of Orthodox Christians, secured by the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji in 1774, Austria and Britain were more concerned with the preservation of the European international society and order.⁸³

The Ottoman Empire was unable to exploit the discord among European powers due to a lack of diplomatic strategy and a desire to preserve international order. Preferring decisive military intervention over diplomacy, the empire lost its credibility and reinforced Greek propaganda when Kavalali İbrahim Pasha of Egypt, tried to crack down on rebels.⁸⁴ The European Concert member states, Britain, Russia and France took the radical decision to intercede in the matter. Military intervention at Navarino cost the Ottoman Empire its entire fleet. War with Russia lasted two years for which, again, the Ottoman army lost battles against Russian due to military failure Mahmud II accepted Greek independence in 1830.⁸⁵

When the balance of power policy was challenged by both Serbian and Greek uprisings, Mahmud II was also addressing administrative and military reforms and had long been attempting to reinstate central authority. Ironically, Mehmet Ali Pasha was an Ayan who enjoyed enduring good relations with Mahmud II. He was instrumental in the suppression of the Wahhabi uprising (1812-1818) and sent his son Ibrahim Pasha to Morea responding to the need for disciplined soldiers to replace the inadequate Janissaries there (1824-1827).⁸⁶ Eventually, the Greek revolt resulted in its independence. Both Mahmud II and Mehmet Ali Pasha were affected by the disastrous outcome. Their collaboration came to an end when, in return for his service in Morea, Mehmet Ali Pasha was only remunerated with the administration of Crete. As a result, he was disinclined to send aid to the central authority during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1828-1829. Consequently, Mahmud II ordered him to leave Crete as soon as possible but he refused to comply with the order and, in response to this clear disobedience, Mahmud II devised a (failed) plan with the assistance of the Pasha of Syria to oust Mehmet Ali Pasha.⁸⁷

Mehmet Ali Pasha managed to avoid assassination thanks to an insider informant. He thereafter initiated a military operation under the command of Ibrahim Pasha. The failure to remove him from office cost the empire

82 Sedivy, 2013, p. 77.

83 Ibid, p. 187.

84 Mehmet Kocaoglu, "The Revolt of Cavallan Mehmet Ali Pasha, (1831-1841)", *OTAM*, No 5, 1994, p. 213.

85 For details see, Norman Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy 1814-1914*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1992, pp.44-57.

86 Hanioglu, 2008, p. 66.

87 Kocaoglu, 1994, pp. 213-214.

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dearly since he had huge prestige as, the strongest ayan with international support in particular from France. Ibrahim Pasha together with his army reached Aksehir on November 19, 1832 with numerous victories against the Ottoman army along the way.⁸⁸ In response, Mahmud II made contact with the Concert of Europe's member countries. The Russians agreed to help the empire but their first offer of intervention was rejected. Ibrahim Pasha preferred to wait for French assistance but this was an error because France was already supporting Mehmet Ali Pasha.⁸⁹ He did not hesitate to give order to Ibrahim Pasha march towards Istanbul. The marching of Egyptian army towards Istanbul without any resistance directed Mahmud II to accept the Russians' offer on February 20, 1833.⁹⁰

Russians, in return for their military assistance, demanded a formal alliance, which resulted in the Treaty of Hunkar Iskelesi being signed between both parties on July 8, 1833.⁹¹ This treaty was a defensive alliance with a clause which closed the Dardanelles to any foreign war vessels in Russia's favour. In response, therefore, France and Britain tried to block the alliance of the two powers. British, French and even Austrian ambassadors offered mediation and devised a plan to ensure Mehmet Ali Pasha returned to Egypt without any territorial gains. Although the alliance with Russia saved the empire from the collapse, the deal brokered by the Russians did not satisfy both Mahmud II and Mehmet Ali Pasha.⁹² They thus sought opportunities to retaliate. Finally, the imperial troops and Mehmet Ali's forces fought at Nizip on June 24, 1839. The victory of Ali Pasha alarmed European Powers, in particular Britain, concerned about the status quo in Europe and the balance of power between Concert powers.⁹³

British intervention once again saved the Ottoman Empire from final disintegration. However, the balance of power policy for the sake of survival had already compelled Mahmud II to offer substantial privileges to Britain by signing the Agreement of Free Commerce on August 16, 1838.⁹⁴ Mahmud II never saw the final resolution of the Mehmet Ali Pasha issue as he died on July 1, 1839. During his thirty-one-year reign, he focused on the balance of power policy that formed the principal element of his grand strategy in foreign affairs. Although he could not halt territorial loss, he was able to stave off the empire's final disintegration His last decision to establish an alliance with the British Empire safeguarded the empire's existence within the Euro-

88 Hanioglu, 2008, p. 66.

89 Stuart T. Miller, *Mastering Modern European History*, Second Edition, Palgrave, London, 1997, p. 136.

90 Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Europe by Treaty*, Butterworths and Harrison, London, 1875, pp. 925-927.

91 J Hurewitz, "Russia and The Turkish Straits: A Revaluation of the Origin of the Problem", *World Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1962, pp. 605-632.

92 Hanioglu, 2008, pp. 66-67.

93 Gökakın, 2010, pp. 245-246.

94 Ali B. Eşiyok, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Dünya Ekonomisine Eklemlenmesinde Bir Dönüm Noktası 1838 Serbest Ticaret Anlaşması, *Mülkiye*, Vol XXXIV, No 266, 2010, p. 79.

pean balance of power for a number of years.

Conclusion

Both Selim III and Mahmud II came to the throne under the threat of existing power groups focused on mostly their interests. Even though, Selim III failed to complete his reforms due to being executed by the dissatisfied power groups, some of his ideas were embraced by Mahmud II. Both sultans without using the grand strategy term aimed to revamp the empire's grand strategy in order to save the empire from approaching total failure. Especially Mahmud II by dissolving the Janissary Corps and undermined the authority of ulema, creating a new bureaucratic structure, introducing wide ranges of reforms, strengthening the central authority and implementing balance of power policies was able to save the empire from unavoidable disintegration.

His success was not only crucial for the short-term period, it was central for the future generations. During the Tanzimat period, the empire's policy makers had adapted wider reforms to modernize institutional structures and improve societal capacity. They had tried to create a new identity and promoted Ottomanism. They also followed the balance of power policy that largely functioned during the Crimean War (1853-1856). The newly reformed grand strategy also played a crucial role in the future. After the total collapse of the empire new Turkish Republic continued use some policies of the grand strategy was introduced almost a century ago.

During the establishment period, Ottoman grand strategy offered a blueprint for the new Turkish Republic. Turkey became an independent unitary state with a new collective identity based on Turkish citizenship. Full-scale reforms in order to participate in the existing international arena were also successful. Modernizing the state allowed Turkey to catch up with the existing global order. In particular adopting the balance of power policy allowed the state survive in one of the most-deadliest war, Second World War. In our time, Turkish officials has still been using the late Ottoman grand strategy at home and abroad.

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