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Mahmud II and His Diplomats During The Mehmet Ali Problem*

Mehmet Ali Sorunu Süreci Boyunca II Mahmud ve Diplomatları

Abstract

Mehmet Ali Problem was one of the biggest problem the Ottoman Empire faced in the nineteenth century. After some military defeats against his rebel governor, the only salvation way was using diplomacy for Mahmud II and his statesmen. Thus, without examining in detail what the Ottomans did diplomatically during this devastating problem, it is impossible a proper understanding this vital period. In this article, this will be done from the point of view of Mahmud's deliberate and purposeful diplomatic manoeuvres and through these, his self-evident plan, which was to change the diplomatic atmosphere in Europe with respect to Mehmet Ali problem to one that was in favour of assisting the Ottoman Empire. This includes the efforts of his most capable diplomats' in various European cities, particularly London, to implement their sovereign's plan. This article focused this because examination of this topic with use of the original Ottoman documents, revealed that Mahmud and his diplomats made vigorous efforts to resolve their enormous problem. Thus this study is an attempt to read one part of this vital diplomatic period, particularly 1835-1836, from the much-neglected Ottoman perspective, based on the hitherto overlooked Ottoman documents.

Keywords: Mahmud II., Ottoman Diplomats, Ottoman-Europe Relations, Mehmet Ali Problem, Ottoman-England Relations

Öz

Mehmet Ali Sorunu Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun 19. Yüzyılda karşılaştığı en büyük sorunlardan bir tanesidir. Asi valisine karşı alınan birkaç mağlubiyetten sonra, II Mahmud ve devlet adamları için tek kurtuluş yolu diplomasiyi kullanmaktı. Bu yüzden Osmanlıların bu yıkıcı sorun karşısında diplomatik olarak ne yaptıklarını incelemeyen, dönemi doğru bir şekilde anlamak mümkün değildir. Bu makalede, bu inceleyiş, II. Mahmud'un önceden tasarlanmış ve planlanmış diplomatik

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manevraları perspektifinden yapılacaktır; ki II. Mahmud'un bu aşîkar planı sayesinde Avrupadaki Mehmet Ali sorunu ile ilgili diplomatik atmosfer Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun lehinde bir deęişim yaşamıştır. II Mahmud'un en yetenekli diplomatlarının, hükümdarlarının planlarını hayata geçirmek için Avrupanın farklı şehirlerinde, özellikle Londra'da, gösterdikleri çabalar da bu inceleyişe dahildir. Bu makale buna yoğunlaşmaktadır çünkü bu konuyu orjinal Osmanlı dökümanlarını kullanarak incelemek, Mahmud ve diplomatlarının bu büyük sorunu çözmek için sergiledikleri coşkun çabayı meydana çıkaracaktır. Bu sebeple bu çalışma, bu çok önemli diplomatik sürecin bir parçasını, 1835-1836, bugüne kadar ihmal edilmiş Osmanlı dökümanlarını da kullanarak, çokça ihmal edilmiş Osmanlı bakış açısından bir okuma denemesidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: II. Mahmud, Osmanlı Diplomatları, Osmanlı-Avrupa İlişkileri, Osmanlı-İngiltere İlişkileri, Mehmet Ali Sorunu

Introduction

Between 1833 and 1838 the diplomatic relationship between Britain and the Ottoman Empire underwent a radical change. The starting point for this transformation came when the army of the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II, suffered two consecutive heavy defeats at the hands of that of his rebel governor, Mehmet Ali Pasha; the first being in Syria, on 14 April 1832, and the second in Konya, on 21 December 1832. This last defeat of the Sultan rapidly escalated the matter into an international problem. All the extremely complicated diplomatic developments, which would continue right up to the Convention of London, 15 July 1840, started at the beginning of 1833.

All of these are well documented historical facts in both Turkish and English literature. However, the unknown side of the story is what role Mahmud II and his finest diplomats played in the process of resolving the Mehmet Ali problem using diplomacy. This role has been overlooked by the vast majority of scholars. This neglect ensues from a lack of knowledge of the Ottoman diplomatic effort in this process. The most obvious way to overcome this problem is to depart from the orientalist perspective, and use the Ottoman documents, which bear witness to Mahmud's instructions to his diplomats and their reports from various European capitals of their progress and observations. When examining this intensive diplomatic period from the point of view of the Ottomans, it becomes clear that in fact Mahmud was not a Sultan who merely sat back smoking his water pipe and watched incidents unfold in his Empire's lands; on the contrary, he had his own diplomatic plan, courage, motivation, resourcefulness and some capable diplomats who did their utmost to faithfully implement their sovereign's diplomatic orders. Therefore, the highest priority of this article is to reveal one part (1835-1836) of this stupendous and dramatic diplomatic struggle made by the Ottomans in this period (1833-1839).

1835-1836 developments

Since the beginning of 1835, the most prominent name in Anglo-Ottoman relations from amongst the Ottoman statesmen was that of Mustafa Resid Pasha.¹ He had taken a very active role

1 Some summary information should be given about the Pasha for a better understanding of his position in

in trying to solve the Mehmet Ali problem and because of this, he was consigned many times as an ambassador to London and Paris by Mahmud, and ultimately promoted to the rank of Foreign Minister of the Empire.² He had made great efforts towards striking an alliance with Britain against Mehmet Ali, as had his highness Mahmud. When his efforts in this direction are properly appreciated, it is clear that from Mahmud's point of view, he was just the right person, as, too, was Namık Pasha, to implement his diplomatic plan.³ In these years of intensive activity, Reshid Pasha negotiated with the most significant characters in European diplomacy, such as Palmerston and Metternich, to solve the problem using diplomatic channels.⁴ In his efforts to achieve this end, he sent many detailed reports to Mahmud and these reports are a vital part of the whole picture, for those who wish to examine the Ottoman diplomatic efforts in solving the problem in 1835 and 1836. One of his longer reports reveals very well that the supposedly close relationship with Russia in the 1833 and 1834 was only sham in order to get Britain on the Ottoman side. This hidden agenda was expounded upon after the diplomatic processes arising from Unkiar Skelessi, once Mahmud was convinced that the British had sufficiently well grasped the great importance that the Ottomans held in relation to their interests, and felt alarmed that there might be a possible danger of Russian hegemony in the Ottoman lands.⁵ At this time, he decided that it was the right moment to desist from the appearance of wishing to cooperate with the Tsar and his Empire. This was the purpose for

this period. He had played an active role in the negotiations with Mehmet Ali after his army stopped in Kutahya in 1833. He was sent to deter Mehmet Ali from his rebellion and eventually he became the head of the Ottoman Committee for the Kutahya negotiations with Ibrahim Pasha and it was he who signed the treaty of Kutahya on May 1833. Mahmud liked the flowing and elaborate style in his reports and he started to award him significant diplomatic missions after this date. Another person who was charmed by Reshid Pasha was Mehmet Ali. He offered the Pasha the job of being his second-in-command but the Pasha did not want to do the same thing as Mehmet Ali and instead rejected the post rather than betray his sovereign, Mahmud II. Reshid Pasha was to become the most significant statesman in the reform period, Tanzimat Era, according to the standard of Western, particularly British, scientific and social developments. Even better, his apprentices, Ali and Fuat Pashas, would carry on this mission in the next fifty years. The most important feature of Reshid in terms of this article was that he was the chief assistant to Mahmud in implementing his diplomatic plan, to garner cooperation with Britain against their enemies in the region. Furthermore, he was sometimes even more pro-British than Mahmud. In fact, Mahmud was most fortunate to have found a diplomat like Reshid Pasha since Reshid had been doing whatever he needed him to do in order to change the British public opinion in favour of the Ottomans. For instance he was paying some British journalists to print some articles in an attempt to defend Turkish arguments in the British newspapers. Mahmud very much approved of these efforts since his main aim since the very beginning had been to get the British public on his side. In addition to this he was the driving force in setting up the commercial treaty with Britain, Balta Limani, and the treaty was even signed at his waterside residence.

- 2 To see more information about the Pasha look at: Reşat Kaynar, *Mustafa Reşit Paşa ve Tanzimat*, (Ankara: 2010).
- 3 To see more information about Namık Pasha's diplomatic ability at the beginning of Mehmet Ali Problem look at, Serkan Demirbaş, "A Fresh Look at Mahmud II's Purpose in Calling Russian Troops to İstanbul in 1833", *Journal of History School*, Sayı XXVIII, İzmir Aralık 2016, SS. 347-378.
- 4 To see more information on Metternich's policies during the Mehmet Ali Crisis look at, Hayrettin Pınar, "Mehmed Ali Paşa İsyanı ve Metternich'in Osmanlı Siyaseti", *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 11, No. 2.
- 5 To see different approach to the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi: Serkan Demirbaş, "A New Perspective on the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi Mahmud II's Use of International Diplomacy to Resolve the Mehmet Ali Problem", *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Sayı 17(2), Eskişehir Aralık 2016, SS. 1-16.

which he sent Reshid Pasha to Europe: to examine how suitable the diplomatic environment was for his desired Anglo-Ottoman alliance. In his report,⁶ on 24 January 1836, Reshid communicated after an extensive depiction of the diplomatic atmosphere in Europe that it was quite obvious that the British were an enemy of Russia. Their attitudes and policies as they had last professed with respect to the enduring continuity of the Ottoman territorial integrity, were above any suspicion. He also stated that they totally detested Mehmet Ali under the present circumstances, and the only reason they did not want an intervention against this “uncouth” governor at that particular conjuncture was that they did not want the Ottomans to be involved in any conflict in Egypt until possible developments in Anglo-Russian rivalry were more apparent.⁷ Otherwise, according to Reshid, it was certain that the British would never abandon the Ottomans to face their problem alone once they had conciliated the British friendship. As a matter of fact, he said, the only figure that had antagonized the whole of Europe, including Austria, was that of the British. He also mentioned that the British were the enforcers of French cooperation with other European powers in terms of the Russian question. Reshid Pasha interestingly analysed France’s position in this diplomatic process in detail, which shows the Ottoman opinion about the French attitudes in the Eastern Question. From Reshid Pasha’s point of view, French statesmen were “*renegade*” and “*unreliable*” people. He did add, however, that despite the fact that it was very well understood by all European powers how much Mehmet Ali was “trickster, tyrant, and cruel” person, there were various groups of the French people who still continued to support him. Also, in some of their opinions, the Muslim people were not deemed worthy of supporting. Furthermore, these French people think that France should have sided with Russia in the region since the current problem in the region was a British problem in terms of the British interests in India. There was no profit or loss for France if they were to interfere in someone else’s problem with Britain.⁸ According to Reshid’s report, these people went so far as to declare these kinds of opinions in the French Parliament “*worthless*” and also publish their views as articles in the French newspapers. Reshid added that there was a rumour that evens the King, Charles X, was prone to be friendly with the Russians, however, as long as this dichotomy continued amongst the French public, these political groups would not be able to succeed, and on the contrary, this kind of attitude to international affairs might even cause a revolution in France.⁹

Having imparted this detailed description, Reshid Pasha then presented to the Sultan his analysis with regard to the then current situation pertaining to European diplomacy, together with his predictions about possible developments that might occur in the very near future. This analysis is vital to the understanding of the Ottoman diplomatic approach, Reshid’s considerable ability, and to appreciate how well aware, as an Ottoman diplomat, he was of the diplomatic arena in Europe at the time. He acted as Mahmud’s right hand, his ears and his eyes, helping to determine the Ottoman diplomatic policies.¹⁰ It is easier to itemise these analyses in order to see the whole

6 BOA, HAT., 1190/46885.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Every year between 1830 and 1840 in the Eastern Question is vital, since any kind of development was within the bounds of possibility in the struggle amongst the various sides. Therefore, every piece of information was extremely important for each power in the struggle in order to enable them to pre-empt any move the other states might make.

picture in a condensed form. Reshid Pasha described the following in his extensive report:

There was a serious issue in European diplomacy in the form of a reinstatement of the rights of the Polish, based on the treaty of Vienna. This issue was being discussed in the newspapers and in many other forums in Europe. It was even an issue that was raised by Charles X in his official speech. Despite all this discussion on the subject, it appears that the Russians refrained from even making a mention of the matter, perhaps due to an arrogance of character. It is a fact that this situation caused a day by day increase in tension in Europe. Within this context, there was also an on-going rumour that the Austrians were starting to keep their distance from the Russians. As a result of this, they had been making discreet and subtle diplomatic connections with the British and the French: there are many long articles to that effect on this topic in Europe.

Nor were the Prussian-Russian relationships very strong either. Although there was a strong bond between the Prussian King and the Tsar due to a longstanding close affinity, conversely, the relations between each state's military officials and civil servants were in a bad way.

The Tsar was disappointed in the Austrian Kaiser since he did not attain the results or attitude he had expected to receive from the Kaiser, who had displayed an aggressive attitude towards the Tsar in their last meeting. This animosity might be used to the advantage of the Ottoman interests, with their problem.

Britain had gained, for a while, a commitment from France to cooperate with the British so French statesmen would be unlikely to voluntarily break this alliance, and would continue to act in harmony with the British over the Eastern Question.

Another vital item on the agenda concerning the Eastern Question was in that which was mentioned above: that the latest Austrian inclination seemed to have turned in favour of the side of the British and French. In parallel with this development, and as a matter of course, Austrian attitudes and policies with respect to Ottoman affairs had substantially changed. For this reason, it was crucial that the Austrian policies related to the East should be examined closely and in meticulous detail. Austria had a military strength both at sea and on land as had Britain. Because of this, all the European powers were keeping a careful eye on Austrian policies since they knew well that whichever party could get Austria on their side would have procured a head start on this alliance.

The most significant aim in terms of the Ottoman benefits was that of gaining British support. Britain was far more important than the other powers for the Ottoman Empire and therefore it made sense to work all the harder to get the British on the Ottoman side. In order to implement this aim, Ponsonby, the British ambassador to Istanbul, and the Ottoman ambassador to London should be used. Obtainment was also important in terms of the position of the French in the Eastern Question. As mentioned above, France depended on Britain in the Eastern Question and there were many factions in France so it was impossible for all of them to unite in the same party on the side of the Ottoman Empire. However, if the Ottomans could make an alliance with Britain, in that case, France would have to agree with whatever the British determined.

Cooperation with Britain would be very useful and beneficial in solving the Mehmet Ali problem as well as the Greek Question, which would all be for the greater good of the Ottoman Empire.

As mentioned above, the Austrian policies in respect of Eastern affairs should be examined in detail to understand whether their position favoured the British and the French side or was on the Russian side as it had been in the past. However, this aim seems to be very difficult when the only conduit for this information was through the Austrian ambassador to Istanbul or the Charge D'affaires to Vienna, Mavroyani. To join these two for talks, a new Ottoman ambassador would have to be assigned to Vienna. This person must be master of Ottoman diplomacy and well versed in the matter at hand. Also he should be charismatic and persuasive, to win Metternich over completely. The importance of this mission did not depend on the course of events since, even supposing that in spite of the fact that this ambassador would have done his duty by following his official instructions precisely, if the Austrian had taken his side with Russia, this situation does not detract from the significance of his duty. The reason for this was that Vienna was the centre of the Europe, so it is possible, via the ambassador's reports, to keep abreast of all the latest developments in European affairs at that time. For instance, if the relations between the countries become more strained and there was an outbreak of war, when Austria engaged alongside of Britain and France, in this case, The Ottoman Empire would be in a position to act upon these conditions. If, On the other hand, Austria continued to act on the side of the Russians as she always had done in the past, in this case, the ambassador could inform, second by second, the major capitals of Istanbul, London, and Paris about the developments from Vienna. Lastly, if no war broke out, in this case, the ambassador could not only continue his endeavours to persuade Metternich to place his country's allegiance with the Ottoman side, but also he could examine the Austrian industrial and education system as a model in order to help guide the reforms planned for the Ottoman's industrial and education systems.¹¹

As can be seen in this long and detailed report from Reshid Pasha, Mahmud and his top diplomat Reshid decided the time was right to disassociate themselves from all connections with the Russians and reveal the true extent of Mahmud's real plan, which had been ongoing since the beginning of the Mehmet Ali problem. This report also comprehensively covers all the developments in the latest attitudes of the European powers in the Eastern Question at that time. Reshid also alerted the Sultan at the end of his report to the fact that there was an item of news it would be pertinent to convey: that, even if it had not been printed prominently in the newspapers, Britain had started swiftly and avidly to prepare her navy. Furthermore, the French shipyards were also running at full capacity, very probably in preparation for the possible event of war.

As a matter of fact, Reshid was right about his words because Nuri Effendi reported from London that the French diplomat, Monsieur Dothraki, who had previously been on duty as a French Charge D'affaires in Istanbul, was appointed to London as a special and secret official.¹² Nuri deduced that Dothraki must have had a secret mission since there was already a French Ambassador in London and there had have been a reason for his appointment there. When Nuri suspected that in all probability Dothraki's secret mission might well be pertinent to the Ottomans, he started to investigate to find out everything he could about the real aim of his mission. After a thorough investigation, he learned that Dothraki had met with Palmerston to negotiate over the Ottoman affairs.¹³ According to Nuri's informant, Dothraki had expressed to Palmerston that British support

11 BOA, HAT., 1190/46885.

12 BOA, HAT., 1190/46879.

13 Ibid.

for the Ottomans might possibly result in backfiring on the British interests in the region. The French diplomat brought forward some reasons to reinforce his opinion about this topic. In this respect he said to Palmerston that although Mahmud had given permission for the Euphrates project¹⁴, problems might well arise with respect to this privilege later on. He continued that the other thing was that since the British had favoured and supported to the Ottomans in every aspect, it was sure that this assisted power of the Ottomans was to go in the Russians' favour. Dothraki interestingly offered Palmerston the idea that if the British abandoned its discountenance of Egypt and Mehmet Ali, France could promise to support them as a friendly an allied nation which would enhance commerce with Egypt and Damascus.¹⁵ This offer discloses how Reshid Pasha was right in his determinations about the existence of the division between different parties in France with regard to Eastern affairs, since although some of them seemed like they had been acting jointly with the British in supporting the Ottomans, some of them had been still trying to mould public opinion in Europe in favour of Mehmet Ali as they had done in the first days of his rebellion. It also shows a possibility that Mehmet Ali had been endeavouring to play diplomatic games to get the British on his side as his sovereign Mahmud had been doing, and there is a distinct possibility that he might previously have made a deal with the French to induce the British to agree to this alliance against Mahmud and his government's interests and wishes.

There was somebody else, who had strong evidences and connections with regard to the newly emerging anti-Russia atmosphere in Europe, which Reshid Pasha had detected. It was Fethi Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador to Vienna. He met with the British Ambassador to Vienna. Fethi Pasha stated that he was instructed to ask the ambassador this question: whether, if Russia showed its hand and declared war against the Ottoman Empire, in this case, would Austria comply with Britain and take the Ottomans' side, or she would continue to support the Russians?¹⁶

After hearing this question, the British Ambassador responded that he had formally posed the same question to Metternich in person only two days ago. Metternich stated that from his point of view the good relations between the Ottomans and the Russians so far showed they had been acting in favour the Ottoman Empire's survival and prosperity, What is more, he also said that from that day forward, if any hostile act was perpetrated by the Russians against the Ottoman Empire, he officially promised that Austria was pledged to act jointly with Britain against Russia by sending her soldiers and maritime power in support of the Ottoman Empire. The ambassador said that he reported this answer to his government in London. In response, Fethi Pasha pressed the Ambassador to respond whether or not there was any current preparation for a possible war against Russia. The Ambassador replied that this kind of news about this topic was only fraudulent rumour concocted by the newspapers and there was certainly not any preparation for a war.¹⁷

After conveying the Ambassador's words to the Sultan, Fethi stated in his report that it was obvious that if any kind of war broke out, Britain and her allied states would send their naval

14 To see the detail information on the Euphrates Project look at: Serkan Demirbaş, *“İngiltere'nin Hindistan Rotaları Ve Bu Rotalardan Biri Olan Fırat Nehri Projesi'nin Mehmet Ali Paşa Sorunu Konteksinde Gösterdiği Gelişim”*, Osmanlı Devleti'nde Nehirler ve Göller Sempozyumu, Kayseri 2013, (Tam Metin Yayınlanma Tarihi: Kayseri 2015) pp. 805-819.

15 BOA, HAT., 1190/46879.

16 BOA, HAT., 1180/46612 Ç.

17 Ibid.

power to the Black Sea through the Baltic Sea and they would land their troops there. After that, Fethi stated the most welcome words that Mahmud could have wished to hear: that any possible damage to the Ottoman Empire's dignity and prestige would mean harm to the British policies and interests in the region. He also added that Austria was not in favour of any kind of situation like this developing either since Austria has very long borders between their country and the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸ These last diplomatic negotiations show once more the European powers' true attitudes and feelings about Russia and Mehmet Ali coming out with each passing day.

There was one person who had been acting in opposition to the Ottoman statesmen with respect to Anglo-Russian relations. It was Durham, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg between 1835 and 1837. He had been striving to persuade his government, particularly Palmerston, that the Russians did not have any plans to take over the Ottoman lands: this was in contradiction to all the Ottoman's diplomatic attempts to create an impression in London with respect to Russian expansionism. Bolsover stated about this effort of Durham's that

"Durham reported from St. Petersburg that Russia possessed neither the will nor the means to seize Constantinople"¹⁹

Nevertheless, there was an anti-Russian coalition in place, in opposition to Durham's views; it was in the form of the Ottoman diplomats' efforts in London, such as those of Namik Pasha, Mustafa Resid, Nuri Effendi, and the British diplomat's work in favour of the Ottomans, such as Urquhart and Ponsonby. Bell has expounded upon this anti-Russian coalition from the point of view of the British in reporting:

*"But the flirtation (Anglo-Russian based on Durham's attempts) had to be exceedingly discreet, for many Englishmen, and some very influential ones, were bound to be censorious. The King, for example, and Lord Ponsonby, the British ambassador at the Porte, were violent Russophobes. The Tory opposition were inclined to treat any apparent complaisance to the Tsar as compromising England's dignity: the merchants to regard it as betokening forgetfulness of their interests in the East. And, more to be considered still, there were the radicals, both in and out of parliament, with whom tsar-baiting was a favourite sport."*²⁰

All these positive developments with respect to the anti-Russian and anti-Mehmet Ali atmosphere in London were getting Mahmud and his statesmen's hopes up about the possibility of an alliance with Britain against all their enemies. In this respect, he notified the Sultan from London that when he met with Palmerston, the Minister had smothered him with kindness. Nuri added that this kindness might be an indication that his thoughts about the Ottoman Empire were becoming more positive and amenable, and because of this he would not be surprised if Palmerston assisted them with full co-operation in every aspect thereafter. Nuri Effendi also interestingly suggested that if he and his colleagues could subtly indicate their expectation from Britain of an alliance to Palmerston and his colleagues, they would be able to complete the diplomatic process which had been instigated in order to get Britain in their side. He closed his message with the suggestion that if he had a rescript which contained negative sentiments towards the Russians, this would be very

18 Ibid.

19 G.H. Bolsover, "David Urquhart and the Eastern Question, 1833-1837: A Study in Publicity and Diplomacy", Vol: VIII, The Journal of the Modern History, (1936), p. 463.

20 Herbert C. F. Bell, "Lord Palmerston", Vol: I, (London, Longmans Green, 1936), p. 280.

likely to strengthen his hand.²¹ All of these reports from various envoys show that Mahmud and his statesmen had been carrying on executing their diplomatic strategies with no small success, and Mahmud's men seemed to be as eager to play their part in the game as much as was Mahmud. At this point, it can be said that Mahmud and his diplomats' effort should have been effective on Palmerston's negative opinions with respect to Mehmet Ali. In this respect, Webster indicated that;

“But Mehemet also established many state monopolies and fixed prices so as to secure huge profit to himself. “The fact is”, wrote Palmerston in 1838, “that Mehemet Ali has divided the population of Egypt into two classes the Rich and the Poor. The rich class consists of Mehemet Ali himself singly and alone: the poor class of all the other inhabitants of Egypt.”²²

Temperley also mentioned what Palmerston felled about Mehmet Ali by giving Foreign Minister's own words:

“For my own part I hate Mehemet Ali, whom I consider as nothing but an ignorant barbarian, who by cunning and boldness and mother-wit, has been successful in rebellion; ... I look upon his boasted civilization of Egypt as the arrantest humbug; and I believe that he is as great a tyrant and oppressor as ever made a people wretched.”²³

It is interesting that Palmerston, rejected all requests of Mahmud at the beginning of the Mehmet Ali problem before the Sultan made his diplomatic moves. In the beginning, he, the leading British politician of the time then serving as Foreign Minister, was uninterested in the Ottomans.²⁴ For most British policy makers, domestic issues were more important than the Eastern Question. As Bailey has commented, Palmerston later said on 28 August 1833:

“If England had thought fit to interfere, the progress of the invading army would have been stopped, and the Russian troops would not have been called in; but although it was easy to say, after events had happened, that they were to be expected, yet certainly no one could anticipate the rapidity with which they had succeeded each other in the East.”²⁵

The Ottoman influence, under the leadership of Mahmud, was in large part a strong factor determining the alteration of the attitude of the British, particularly Palmerston about this “Eastern Empire”. This mission was not easy since this very same person, Palmerston, and the very same British politicians, had been thinking the exact opposite at the beginning of the 1830s about the Ottoman Empire to the way they now thought about the Empire in the second half of the 1830s. Charmley summarised very well the British position in 1831 with respect to the Ottomans.

“Palmerston's initial stance on the Ottoman Empire was what one might have expected from the self-proclaimed inheritor of Canning's philhellene policy; he was, initially, firmly on the side of those who believed that the Ottoman Empire was doomed. In a letter to his old friend (now

21 BOA, HAT., 1190/46879 002.

22 Sir Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston: 1830-1841*, vol.I (London: 1951), p.275.

23 H.Temperley, *England and the Near East: the Crimea*, (London: 1936), p.89.

24 F. S. Rodkey, *Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey, 1830-41*, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Dec., 1929), p.571.

25 F.E. Bailey, *The Economics of British Foreign Policy, 1825-50*, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Dec., 1940), p.47.

ambassador to France) Lord Granville, in 1831, he wrote: “The fact is that Turkey is rapidly falling the pieces. This need not imply that he, personally, wanted the Ottoman Empire to collapse, but there were certainly those in the government who did.”²⁶

As it can be seen in these words of Charmley, although Palmerston was so pessimistic about the Ottoman Empire’s survivability or even worse, some British politicians in the Cabinet even desired the disappearance of the Empire, later on, the main British policy had been to support the maintenance of the territorial integrity of this Eastern country with their all might. It is a fact that that this sea change, in the British policy respecting the Eastern affairs which came about in only a few years, would have been too great to be spontaneous.

Meanwhile, a translation of an article which had been published in a British newspaper was presented to Mahmud on 15 February 1836.²⁷ It showed that the Ottoman diplomats had been following very closely the trends of British public opinion in relation to the Eastern Question. This article is also useful to illustrate the change in the British public opinion in terms of the Ottomans after Unkiar Skelessi. It was expressed in the article that the latest news from the Ottoman lands indicated that Mehmet Ali Pasha had started to develop an intimacy with the Russians. This latest development showed that the balance of power in the region had started to shift. Nuri Effendi also reported from London on this subject that the British realised that Mehmet Ali had started gravitate towards the Russians and therefore, the British would never give any support to him upon any account.²⁸ In fact, the British had been most averse to the possibility of an alliance in the region between Russia and Mehmet Ali. Rodkey explains this situation very clearly when he says:

“Englishmen insisted that Russia was pursuing an aggressive policy in Turkey, they were apprehensive of Russia-Egyptian co-operation for the partition of the Near East, and they seriously feared the extension of Russian influence in the direction of India.”²⁹

The article also mentioned that Britain had been mistaken in the formulation and implementation of its Eastern policies. These unsuccessful policies had vitiated the penetration of Britain in the East and they had also damaged Britain’s reputation in the international arena. Therefore, the reasons that the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi had been seen to be necessary should be negotiated over with the Ottoman Empire as soon as possible. It was obvious that the errors committed on both sides would be made manifestly clear after the negotiations, and when they did, it was an obligation upon Britain that she strive to rectify these mistakes as soon as she could. The article also said that it was an absolute necessity that if Russia continued to insist on carrying out those policies in the Ottoman lands which had occurred as privileges of the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, Britain should declare war on Russia. However, according to the article, the British government had been avoiding committing itself to any real action towards effectively solving the problem and had been contenting itself with merely a set of meaningless negotiations and

26 John Charmley, *Palmerston: Artful Dodger or Babe of Grace*, in *The Makers of British Foreign Policy*, T.G. Otte (ed.), (London: 2002), p.82.

27 BOA, HAT., 677/33021 F.

28 BOA, HAT., 1190/46879 002.

29 F.S. Rodkey, “*Conversations on Anglo-Russian Relations in 1838*”, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 50, No. 197 (Jan., 1935), p.120.

ineffectual words. The article also touched upon Mehmet Ali's commercial prohibitions. From the point of view of the article, in order to re-establish the Sultan's domination and influence in Damascus and Egypt, Britain had to help the Sultan as if the Ottoman Empire was indeed the long-time friend and ally that the British statesmen had been insisting was true for such a long time. In doing so, Britain would rescue the Ottoman public from the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi which could be used by Russia for the occupation of the Ottoman lands and subsequent oppression of the Muslim people.³⁰ This article is quite interesting since it is telling the British public how Mahmud had been striving to impress his ideas upon them using his diplomatic manoeuvres. Clearly these diplomatic efforts had started to get noticed and prompt some advantageous responses.

After all the developments previously described, Eastern affairs came to be considered a much more serious topic by the British press, especially in the years that followed. In particular, some British diplomats were conducting a campaign in the press in an attempt to change public opinion to the detriment of the Russians and at the same time recommend the opportunities for Britain to build bridges with the Ottomans by supporting them against Mehmet Ali and Russia. They proposed that this course of action would bear results favourable to British interests; such as greatly improved British prestige in the East; Russian advances in the region would be thwarted and then British influence would be promoted in the Ottoman lands. As a result of these better Anglo-Ottoman relations, British merchants would be able to trade with much greater ease in the Ottoman lands than that which was now possible. It was a number of British ministers who were conducting this campaign: Lamb has indicated in his article that these people were not only ordinary people; there were also amongst them some pillars of British political life. Lamb has neatly summarised this topic in saying:

“It has long been recognized that the immense growth of hostility towards Russia displayed by the British press in the 1830s was largely the result of a deliberate campaign organized by a few ardent Russophobes. Contemporaries singled out David Urquhart as the main, if not the only, instigator, but historians have recognized that others were intimately involved; they have generally included Sir John McNeill and James Baillie Fraser as leading participants. The British ambassador at Constantinople, Viscount Ponsonby; the private secretary to the king, Sir Herbert Taylor; and the foreign secretary, Viscount Palmerston, have all been regarded as having some connection with the campaign, but there has not been agreement about the extent of their involvement”³¹

Mahmud, who saw that his plan was starting to work, on 19 May 1836 ordered his diplomats that an official notification should be made and sent via a secret letter to Ponsonby to the effect that Damascus³² should be liberated from Mehmet Ali and reverted back to the Ottoman's domination, and in order to do that, British ministers should be persuaded to act.³³ In response to this order, the Ottoman ambassador to Paris met with Palmerston. Palmerston said that he and his government were aware that Mehmet Ali had been damaging the Ottoman Empire and tyrannizing the Ottoman public in Damascus and for this reason it was an indispensable thing to disentangle Damascus from the rebel governor. The ambassador reported to Istanbul after he met with Palmerston that there

30 BOA, HAT., 677/33021 F.

31 M. Lamb, *The International History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May, 1993), p. 239.

32 To see the desire of Mehmet Ali for Syria look at, Fatih Gencer, “İbrahim Paşa'nın Anadolu'yu İstilası”, *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Vol. 9, No. 42.

33 BOA, HAT., 833/37560 G.

were some the tell-tale signs that British ministers realised Mehmet Ali had endangered the British interests in the region, and their support to the Ottoman Empire could be expected against the governor. He also stated that despite all these developments in the British public in the Ottoman's favour, he was afraid that the result may well end up consisting of only some palliative words and some empty negotiations instead of the military operation against Mehmet Ali that was needed, as had happened in the past.³⁴ Thereupon Mahmud gave orders to the ambassador that this situation should not be left in the hands of the British ministers since these days were absolutely critical to the survival of his country and last time they had done that it had damaged the Ottoman image in the eyes of the British government. Instead of this, he should watch the British ministers did very closely and when the right time came he should act according to circumstances.³⁵ Mahmud's warnings are quite interesting because he had previously not hold back from saying to the British that he wasn't here just to listen to flowery speeches from them: he needed to see some action. That same person who heard these words before was now acting very responsibly this time, and because of this the Sultan believed that he was close to obtaining his goal, and thought that nothing and nobody could have ruined his plan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is fair to say that in the light of the all mentioned developments in 1835 and 1836, these two years were the most gratifying ones for Mahmud and his statesmen in that they receive the fruits of their labour after all their diplomatic efforts to turn the British public from an anti-Ottoman attitude to a pro-Ottoman one, stemming from the time when Palmerston and his government rejected Mahmud's request for an alliance in the early months of 1833. It could be said, in the light of the conclusion of the earlier examination of this matter, that they had been successful in their quest to facilitate this alliance, particularly subsequent to the beginning of 1835. The reason for this was that the Eastern Question – the Ottomans, the Russians, and Mehmet Ali – had become a highly controversial topic on the agenda of the European Powers. The developments with respect to the problems faced by the Sultan did indeed appear to be for the good of the Ottomans, especially in Britain, Austria, and France, despite the fact that the French had been playing double game, falling in line with the policy set by the British when in fact their loyalties lay elsewhere. Above all other European powers, the majority of the British public realised the enormous danger and substantial damages, from the point of view of British interests in the region, that could potentially come from both the Russians and Mehmet Ali. Meanwhile, the negotiations about Anglo-Ottoman commercial issues had already started between both countries' diplomats. This process was to eventually give rise to the Treaty of Balta Limani, on 16 August 1838.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

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