

A New Perspective on the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi- Mahmud II's Use of International Diplomacy to Re- solve the Mehmet Ali Problem*

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Hünkar İskelesi Antlaşmasına Yeni Bir Bakış Açısı- II. Mahmud'un Mehmet Ali Paşa Sorununu Çözmek için Uluslararası Diplomasiyi Kullanımı

Özet

Bir kısım tarihçiler Hünkar İskelesi Antlaşmasını Rus Çarı I. Nikolay'ın bir diplomatik zaferi olarak görse de, diğer bir kısım tarihçiler ise aynı Antlaşmayı II. Mahmud'un asi valisi Mehmet Ali Paşa karşısındaki çaresizliğinin bir belirtisi olarak görmüşlerdir. Buna karşın, bu tarihçilerden hiçbiri, bu Antlaşmayı II. Mahmud'un Mehmet Ali Paşa Sorununu diplomasiyi kullanarak çözme noktasındaki sümekte olan mücadelesinin bir parçası olarak değerlendirmemişlerdir. Bu nedenle, bu makale hem Hünkar İskelesi Antlaşmasına yeni bir perspektiften bakmak hem de Mehmet Ali Paşa Sorunu sürecinde şimdiye kadar ihmal edilmiş olan Osmanlı diplomatik mücadelesini ortaya koymak amacıyla, uluslararası ilişkiler bağlamında çok yoğun olan bu süreci Osmanlı Arşivlerini kullanarak mercek altına almayı amaçlamaktadır

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hünkar İskelesi Antlaşması, II. Mahmud, Osmanlı Diplomasisi, Mehmet Ali Sorunu, Osmanlı-İngiliz ilişkileri

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Abstract

While some historians see the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi as a diplomatic victory for the Russian Tsar, Nicholas I, others consider the same treaty indicative of Mahmud II's desperation in the face of his rebel governor, Mehmet Ali Pasha. Nevertheless, none of them have evaluated this treaty as being part of Mahmud II's ongoing endeavour to solve the Mehmet Ali problem with diplomacy. Accordingly, this article aims to look at the Treaty of Unkiar Sklessi from a new perspective by using the Ottoman documents, and uncover some hitherto-overlooked details of the Ottoman diplomatic struggle during the Mehmet Ali Problem.

Key Words: The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, Mahmud II, Ottoman Diplomacy, Mehmet Ali Problem, Anglo-Ottoman Relations

1. Introduction

In the field of the history of diplomatic relations, very few treaties have been more hazardous, whilst at the same time so crucially important, as was the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. The reason

* This article is based on a chapter from my PhD thesis: Serkan Demirbaş, Mahmud II and Ottoman Diplomacy in the context of Mehmet Ali Problem (1832-1839): with special reference to the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia, 2015)

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for the significance of this treaty was that it had resulted from Mahmud II's secret plan to overcome his rebel governor, Mehmet Ali. When confronted with the biggest defeat that he had ever faced at the hands of this enemy, he realised that there was no alternative way to solve this politically fatal problem outside of using diplomacy. With this in mind, he sent his special official, Namık Pasha, to London to negotiate an Anglo-Ottoman military alliance against Mehmet Ali. However, at that time, the other great powers, Russia and France, had different other plans for the Ottoman lands, including occupation, as France had done in Algeria in 1830, or control of the Ottoman straits, as was Russia's ambition. The only exception amongst these powers was Britain, which had no ulterior motive in its dealings with the Ottoman lands. Consequently, this military alliance was seen by Mahmud II as a way of salvation for his Empire. This request of the Sultan's was rejected only because Lord Grey's Cabinet had an agenda replete with other foreign and domestic issues. After a few more attempts by Namık Pasha in London, Mahmud realised that he needed something to remind the British about the great importance the Ottoman lands held in terms of British interests in that area. His plan was to make an alliance with the Russians, Britain's biggest foe in the region.

As a matter of fact, at first, he simply called the Russian military power to the Bosphorus in the first months of 1833 instead of straight away making an alliance with what was historically his Empire's biggest enemy in the region. As could be guessed, this diplomatic manoeuvre came like a bombshell to the French and the British. Yet despite all the diplomatic negotiations between British and French diplomatic representatives and Mahmud II's statesmen between February and July, 1833, no worthwhile results had been achieved, from Mahmud II's point of view. The reason for the Sultan's dissatisfaction was that the Mehmet Ali Question had not yet been overcome despite a provisional agreement, the treaty of Kutahya in the May of 1833. Consequently, he decided to carry his risky plan a step further and on 8 July 1833 he negotiated an agreement with Nicholas I. Regarding this, in this article this treaty will be examined from a different perspective than that which other scholars have used so far. The Ottoman documents reveal that the Sultan did not make this treaty in a desperate mood or as a last solution with no alternative; on the contrary, he had his own diplomatic plan which was to attract British cooperation using this treaty to remind them he was an important ally. This had been his plan all along in calling the Russian Navy Power to Istanbul. With Russian guns near India, Britain's largest sphere of interest in the East, Russia had started to look like a big danger in this region. It also seemed like a potential disturbance of the European peace, which had been successfully established in 1815 with the Congress of Vienna. As a result of this peaceful environment Britain had become the most important power in Europe, and did not want to lose this status. Pertaining to this, we will examine this treaty in detail from the point of view of Mahmud II's secret plan.

1.1 Diplomatic Developments following the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi

After Mahmud's manoeuvre of calling the Russian military power to the Bosphorus, all Britain's and France's diplomatic pressures upon Mehmet Ali brought about a cease fire agreement between the Sultan and Mehmet Ali. However, neither side was happy with the articles of the agreement. The reason for this was that on the one hand, ever since the beginning of his struggle against central government Mehmet Ali had wanted to gain his independence from the Sultan. However, he had been obliged to accept Mahmud II's sovereignty with the treaty of Kutahya. On the other hand, the Sultan was unable to completely resolve the problem with the treaty and he strongly believed that Mehmet Ali would rebel again soon. (Karal, 2007, p.114; Altundağ, 1988, p. 55) When analysing Mahmud's disposition towards this treaty from the point of view of his secret plan, he clearly felt that he needed a more serious gesture to win full British support against Mehmet Ali and the other great powers, Russia and France. This gesture was to be in the form of a treaty, called the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. After many diplomatic developments over the Treaty of Kutahya, 14 May 1833, the Sultan decided to step forward diplomatically to implement his secret plan. To this end, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi was signed between the Ottomans and the Russians, at Mahmud II's own request, on 8 July 1833.¹

There is actually quite extensive literature which recounts in detail the political process before the treaty. Therefore, this process will not be examined here. Instead, Mahmud II and his statesmen's diplomatic campaign to solve the Mehmet Ali Question after the treaty will be examined properly on the basis of the Ottoman documents as a narrative of the process from the Ottoman perspective.

As could be predicted, the French and British public reaction became very strong, particularly when they learned that there was a clause detailing that in the case of war in the region, the straits would be closed to all European war ships but not Russian ones. Brown encapsulated what the treaty really meant from the British perspective when he said;

"The treaty was ostensibly a defensive one- a commitment on both sides to support the other in the event of attack- but in effect what it meant was that Russia had gained an advantage over European rivals in dealing with the future of Ottoman territory by securing control over access to the Straits. It was obvious in London that this represented a threat to British influence in the area and to Britain's access to its own empire." (Brown, 2010, p. 177)

Only a few days after the treaty, the French ambassador to İstanbul, Admiral Roussin, sent a letter to the French ambassador in Austria. He suspected that there was a highly likely possibility

¹ Başbakanlık Arsivi, (The Original Name of the Ottoman Archives which is in Istanbul and involves all the Ottoman Documents from 1299 to 1923, and the Turkish name will be used in the chapter), File No: 1045, Document No: 43183 A. The treaty has been examined as a Russians request in the English literature. For example, Rodkey mentioned that; "... Russian diplomacy had exacted from the Porte the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi..." However, the Turkish documents reveal that Mahmud wanted to make the treaty with Nicholas. This is only one of the significant facts to show that the treaty was a part of Mahmud's diplomatic plan.

that an attacking and defending treaty had just been made, or was on the point of being made, between the Sultan and the Tsar. (BOA, File No: 1045, Document No: 43183 B) He also wanted his letter to be immediately sent to Paris and stated that he was going to try to send a copy of the treaty as soon as possible. Thereupon the French ambassador in Vienna went to meet with Prince Metternich to ask for a summary of this latest news from Istanbul. At first Metternich stated that there was no such information in Vienna at that moment, thereupon the ambassador asked his opinion as to whether this kind of treaty might be made between the two Empires. In response, Metternich said that he did not suppose that the Sultan wanted an attacking treaty with the Tsar under such circumstances, however, the Ottoman statesmen might have asked the Russian ambassador Orlof whether, if as a result of the Russian army's abandonment of Istanbul a state of distress appeared again, could the Russian war ships come to Istanbul once more or not. Interestingly, Metternich added that if the ambassador's answer had been given as an official letter, from Metternich's point of view this letter might have been understood as a treaty. He also mentioned that if this was the case, Austria would support the Russian guardianship in terms of the Ottoman interests. (BOA, File No: 1045, Document No: 43183 B)

It could be said that the most prominent representative among the discontented statesmen was the British ambassador to Istanbul, Ponsonby, who began to display aggressive behaviour towards the Ottoman statesmen. In this context, his numerous protests about the treaty, particularly the article related to closure of the straits in the case of a war, came in August. (BOA, File No: 1166, Document No: 46123 A) Principally, he had been trying to find out what Mahmud II and his statesmen meant by this article and he had several times officially asked the Ottoman government about its meaning. This article set the alarm bells ringing in London with respect to a Russian danger growing every passing day, in terms of British interests in the Ottoman lands, particularly the security of the Indian route. Reflections of this British anxiety could be seen in Ponsonby's official letters, which were persistently questioning one after the other. Most galling of all for Ponsonby were the nebulous responses from the Ottoman statesmen. He would have wished to learn what was going on behind the scenes as soon as possible and then inform his government in detail. For instance, on 30 October 1833, he requested with two official letters to the Ottoman Foreign Minister an explanation of the article related to the straits. (BOA, File No: 1175, Document No: 46438 Ğ) When he did not receive a clear answer he again asked for satisfactory reply, only 22 days after the last request. This letter of Ponsonby's was very extensive this time and it was tendered to the Sultan with the comments of the Foreign Minister. (BOA, File No: 1175, Document No: 46438 H) In this letter Ponsonby asked his questions much more clearly than he had in the previous one. His inquiry was that if any European power waged war with Russia, and if the Ottoman Empire did not fight this power, what would the Ottomans choose to do according to the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi? Would they allow the Russians to pass their warships through the both straits, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, while they did not give the permission for passing to the other power's warships? Or would they obstruct the other power to pass through the straits as well as Russia? Ponsonby was not content with the responses to his questions and directly asked that if Russia fought with Britain and the Ottoman Empire was not at war with Britain, what would they do

based on the treaty? Would they permit the Russian warships to pass through the straits and at the same time disallow the British warships from passing through? At the end of all his questions Ponsonby proposed that his questions only required clear responses such as confirmation or disaffirmation. According to him any suspended or shadowy reply would lead to misinterpretation of the debated clause and break down the good and longstanding Anglo-Ottoman relations. For these reasons, he argued, to gain Britain on his side, it would be very useful and of benefit to the Sultan and his people to implement the same straits passing rules for all sides. (BOA, File No: 1175, Document No: 46438 H) At the same time, Palmerston had been trying to dissuade Mahmud II from the treaty. On this subject Bolsover commented;

“On December 6 Palmerston informed the Russian government that Great Britain would take steps to uphold the real independence of the Ottoman Empire. The same day he ordered Ponsonby to remind the Porte of the fate which Poland had suffered through dependence on Russia. He further urged Mahmud to reform the Turkish Empire by organizing his own resources for the suppression of revolt. Palmerston even promised to control Mehemet Ali if the Sultan acted as sultan and not as vassal of the tsar.” (Bolsover, 1936, p. 447)

The last comments from Ponsonby and Palmerston are very interesting since they show that the British politicians had started to play their trump card against the Ottomans, just as Mahmud II had done with his diplomatic manoeuvres against them. This could be seen by the Sultan as a positive development, because the same British politicians had previously not lifted a finger to help, apart from some placatory words and letters, when Mahmud II sent Namik Pasha to London in March 1833 to enlist British military support in the Mehmet Ali crisis. However, only eight months later, they were striving to get the Ottomans on the British side against their own Russian crisis. Mahmud was starting to gain success in external issues; likewise he was successful in the internal ones too.

1.2 Russian Response to British Pressure on the Ottoman Empire

It is also necessary to look at this period from the point of view of the Russians, and in order to do this we have obtained an official Russian letter, fully translated into Turkish, informing Mahmud II and explaining the Russian diplomatic policy and efforts after the period of the Unkiar Skelessi in detail. The main purpose of this policy was to overcome this diplomatic crisis by explaining the innocuousness of the treaty regarding the balance of European power. With this in mind, Nicholas charged the Prime Minister Nesselrode to assure the British that Russia would never do anything at the expense of European peace. Thereupon Nesselrode sent an instruction with respect to this mission to the Russian Charge d'affaires in London, Pavel Medem. (BOA, File No: 1040, Document No: 43061) The instruction arrived in London on 26 December 1834. When it arrived, the new British cabinet, Sir Robert Peel's first government, had been just established that same month and the new Foreign Minister was Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. Nesselrode started to carry out his instructions by pointing out that one of the last operations of the former Foreign Minister Palmerston was to attempt to change, through Ponsonby, the article of the treaty related to the closing of the straits in the case of a war in the region. According to the Russian minister a question

related to this article was asked ten months ago and therefore its repetition upset the Tsar and his servants. In fact, as mentioned above, the Ottoman statesmen had explained several times to Britain and France what they aimed to achieve with the treaty and Nesselrode began his message with these Ottoman explanations. He stated that the Ottoman diplomats had answered the question very well in the February of 1834, that the mentioned article had not brought any difference to the current rules about using the straits, which had been accepted by all European powers since time immemorial, and these rules were a sign of the Sultan's domination in his lands and very beneficial and useful for the Ottoman public interests. In this regard, according to this Ottoman perspective the treaty did not grant any privileges to any European power. Nesselrode added that they were expecting that it would be enough for the British to see there was no secret agenda between the Ottomans and the Russians. However, he stated that they were disappointed in Ponsonby's reaction since he had re-questioned them on the same issue ten months later. In his opinion, although it was an undeniable fact that the Ottomans had the right to avoid having to re-explain the situation since they had already clarified the issue extensively and transparently, they had still issued a new official letter (examined in detail below) to Ponsonby because they cared about European peace. He continued saying that despite the Ottoman diplomats having clarified the article in detail in the last letter, Ponsonby seemed to be discontent again, since he clearly did not regard waiting his government's further instructions as necessary, having asked for a wider explanation about the article. (BOA, File No: 1040, Document No: 43061) In fact, the ambassador had made this second request on 4 December, only twenty two days after his first. Istanbul had not answered this second request of the ambassador because of the extensive reply given to the first one. Nesselrode stated that the new British cabinet and its ministers had raised obstacles to continuing good Anglo-Russian relations. Nesselrode also congratulated himself and the Russians since they had been mediating between Britain and the Ottomans to solve the last problems arising from the treaty. (BOA, File No: 1040, Document No: 43061)

This Russian perspective is quite salient since Nesselrode must have been aware of the strong British reaction and the panic in London due to Unkiar Skelessi and its secret article. What could his motivation have been to say these words while London was on red alert about a Russian danger at British cost in the region? It could be said that in the light of Nesselrode's instruction, he probably wanted to reassure the new Foreign Minister, Wellington, that the article did not contain any hazard for European peace. The reason to believe this was his aim is that he had asked Medem to forward the summary of their explanations, to the new Foreign Minister. Nesselrode also ordered that Medem should submit the previous instruction as well, the one which was given to the former Russian ambassador to London, Prince Christopher von Lieven. According to Nesselrode this instruction would be enough to convince Wellington, since it was a very clear explanation that Russia had never asserted, either before the treaty or after it, any privilege for right of passage through the straits if the Ottoman Empire closes them. He even took his daring words a step further and stated that the treaty was an official guarantee of this longstanding rule. He asserted that all these assurances would reassure Wellington about Russian policies and the treaty. (BOA, File No: 1040, Document No: 43061) Nesselrode wanted Medem to include a previous instruction,

one which had been sent to the former ambassador Prince Lieven under the direction of the Tsar on 22 June 1834, to his communication for when he met with the Duke of Wellington. This instruction offered to the former minister Palmerston the opportunity to have these mentioned assurances about equality with other European Powers pertaining to the use of the straits (which had only been made verbally up to then) put into an official document. Nesselrode believed there could not be a more serious offer than this to show their sincerity over this issue. He further reported that they were unsure whether their offer had had an impact upon the former minister, as Ponsonby's last acts in İstanbul had created room for doubt. However, he strongly believed that Wellington would be convinced about Russia's amicable policy with regard to the straits after meeting and listening to Medem. From Nesselrode's point of view, Medem's mission was crucial because it would produce two important results. (BOA, File No: 1040, Document No: 43061) The first anticipated one was that there were many false reports from the former Whig Government and its ministers about Russia's objective with the treaty, and Medem would eliminate those prejudices and persuade the new government and its ministers about the innocent nature of the treaty. The second anticipated result of Medem's mission was that explaining all the aforementioned Russian arguments to the new government would probably put an end to British pressures on the Sultan and his ministers in İstanbul. Nesselrode concluded his instruction saying that all of these diplomatic efforts would show the British ministers that the problems in the East could be resolved with solidarity between Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Britain. (BOA, File No: 1040, Document No: 43061)

1.3. Ottoman Diplomatic Opposition to Pressure from European Powers

At this stage, it is vital to examine the Ottoman diplomatic responses against external reactions in order to look at the story from the point of view of the Ottomans. To better facilitate viewing the whole Ottoman diplomatic attitude, it is hereafter expressed in itemised responses.

The Sultan and his statesmen stated in their replies:

- a) *The British and French ambassadors have much misinformation about the treaty and its debated clause and therefore suffer many misapprehensions relating to its real purport.* (BOA, File No: 1166, Document No: 46123)
- b) *This treaty is absolutely not an offensive treaty; on the contrary, it is a defensive treaty concerning the security of the Ottoman lands.* (BOA, File No: 1169, Document No: 46234 B)
- c) *The longstanding rules related to both the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus would continue to remain in force for all the states, Russia no exception.* (BOA, File No: 1175, Document No: 46438 Ğ)
- d) *Nevertheless every independent country has the right to make any treaty with respect to its own issues as long as it does not encroach upon another country's rights.* (BOA, File No: 1166, Document No: 46123 J)

- e) *If the British and French ambassadors continue to propound their idle allegations about this clause after this explanation, this redundant insistence would impinge upon not only the Sultan's right to determine his country's internal policies but also his sovereignty in his own lands. (BOA, File No: 1175, Document No: 46438 H)*
- f) *Since these matters have been repeatedly expounded in great detail to the British and French ambassadors, no further explanations will be forthcoming. (BOA, File No: 1169, Document No: 46234 B)*

While all these dialogues were being exchanged, an important development occurred in terms of Mahmud's secret diplomatic plan. Mahmud II sent Namik Pasha; the same emissary who had gone to London to make the Anglo-Ottoman military alliance before the treaty, to London to negotiate the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi and its results for the Anglo-Ottoman relationship. This assignment is quite interesting as it shows Mahmud's real intent through the instructions he gave to the Pasha. Furthermore, Namik Pasha sent very extensive reports with regard to his negotiations in London and these fully reveal the Sultan's real objective within his latest diplomatic manoeuvres. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01-06)

Namik Pasha arrived in London on Sunday, 17 October 1834. He had three letters with him. The first one was for Palmerston from the Ottoman Foreign Minister, the second one was for the Prime Minister from the Ottoman Grand Vizier and the third one was for the King from the Sultan. These letters were crucially important since they were a testament to the Sultan's strong desire for an Anglo-Ottoman alliance to solve all the problems. The Pasha met with Palmerston the day after his arrival; 18 October 1834. He was warmly welcomed by Palmerston, and after asking after each other and handing the letter from the Ottoman Foreign Minister to Palmerston, he stated to Palmerston that he would like to deliver the Sultan's letter to the King. Palmerston answered that the King was not in London at that moment, but he would inform the King of the situation and then let the Pasha know what he said. After this, Palmerston asked the Pasha the purpose of his visit in London. Namik interestingly answered that he would have thought Palmerston knew his mission's purpose in London since before his departure from Istanbul the exact copy of his instruction for this mission in London had been given Ponsonby in Istanbul. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01)

A rebellion against Mehmet Ali had occurred in Damascus just before the Namik's departure from Istanbul, by objectors to the treaty of Kutahya. In fact one of Namik's missions was to discuss this rebellion. Mahmud II was supporting the rebels since he was hoping to restart the conflict with the Pasha and win this time by taking advantage of the Damascus rebellion. Namik Pasha declared this as the Sultan's intention and added that because of this internal conflict the Ottoman Army had started to make war preparations. Namik Pasha informed Mahmud II in his report that Palmerston spoke briefly on this issue and although these words at first seemed to Pasha to be in Mehmet Ali's favour, soon afterwards and for the rest of his negotiations in London this meaning changed. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01) However, Palmerston's only concern was to prevent any possible pretext Russia could have to intervene in Istanbul using her right

stemming from Unkiar Skelessi. He was meticulously anticipating every possibility in order to prevent it happening. Rodkey expressed extensively Palmerston's this attitude that

"Undoubtedly throughout the period from 1833 to 1839 Palmerston believed that peace must be preserved in the Near East if such a policy as he favoured for the rejuvenation of Turkey was to succeed. In 1834, when the first the reis effendi (Turkish minister of foreign affairs), and later Vogorides revealed that the Sultan resolved to encounter all the risks of a new struggle with Mehmet Ali in order to remove the sword of the Pasha, "hanging always threatening over his head," Ponsonby exerted his influence at the Turkish capital against a renewal of hostilities. Palmerston entirely approved the course followed by the ambassador on this occasion and directed the admiralty to have Vice-Admiral Rowley, the British naval commander in the Levant, maintain a watch for the Ottoman fleet in the neighbourhood of the Archipelago. If it appeared in those waters the British admiral was to get in touch with Turkish commander, to urge him to suspend any orders he might have to undertake hostile operations against the Egyptian fleet" (Rodkey, 1929, p. 575)

This order shows that as Mahmud had expected, Palmerston started to approach the Eastern Question much more seriously after Unkiar Skelessi. After his meeting with Palmerston, Namik sent a message to the Prime Minister, Lord Grey, asking for a meeting and got a quick reply, on the same day, before they met on Tuesday, 19 October 1833. The Pasha submitted to him the letter from the Ottoman Grand Vizier. Namik explained the Sultan's opinion about the Damascus rebels and the preparation for armed conflict to the Prime Minister as well. Grey did not say much about this in the meeting but he did say that whenever the Pasha needed help during his mission in London, he was at his service. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01)

At last Namik Pasha was to meet with the King: on Wednesday, 20 October 1833. This was a private meeting and there were only three people present; the Pasha, the Foreign Minister and the King. The most important feature of Namik's report for us is that it contains his full explanation to the King with respect to the real aim of his mission in London.

First, he submitted the Sultan's letter to the King, and then he conveyed the real meaning of his mission. He stated that it was quite obvious that the Ottoman Empire had had close ties and a long lasting friendship with Britain for centuries. Because of this, his illustrious highness had sent him to London to cement this sincere friendship between the two countries and there was no other aim of his mission except this noble duty. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01) It seems that after his two big diplomatic manoeuvres based on Russian military strength, (i.e. calling Russians to the Bosphorus and the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi) Mahmud decided that now it was the right time to persuade the King and Palmerston to join in an Anglo-Ottoman alliance against all enemies of both powers in the region. He was right, because William stated that he and his people were very well aware that the Turks were faithful to their word, people of -wise and virtuous character, and there were even some adages about that in England. He continued that when Namik Pasha came to England for this alliance they were unable to help the Sultan and his people, despite really wanting to, because of some serious problems which Britain was encountering at the

time. He also mentioned that he knew very well that their unpardonable neglect had obligated the Sultan first to call the Russian army to the Bosphorus and eventually to make the treaty. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01) Mahmud II should have been satisfied to hear these words of William's because they showed that his plan was working.

The King continued his words in the same direction and stated that despite Russia's domination in the Ottoman lands as a result of the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi due to their disregard of the Sultan's desire, he and his people really stood for the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and continuity the Sultan's sovereignty in his own lands. He also mentioned that they wanted this not only for the Ottoman interests but also by virtue of the belief that a strong Ottoman Empire would be most beneficial in terms of the British interests in the region. Interestingly, the king also stated that these opinions and British political strategies were not only the result of the strong fellowship between both countries, but also based upon sound political wisdom. According to the King, this British support was not a transient state of affairs and the Sultan could trust the King and his government. William, not content even with these words, added that the Sultan should not doubt that they truly and wholeheartedly desired for the Ottoman Empire to maintain her existence as a strong and prosperous country and support of this was one of their state policies. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 01)

Namık Pasha described in his report how William repeatedly emphasized to him that a strong Ottoman Empire would be very beneficial for British interests in the region. The words of King William recorded in Namık's report indicated Mahmud's secret plan turned out to be successful in reminding the British of the political and strategic importance of the Ottoman Empire to their interests, especially India. Namık also stated in his report that he reported the King's words verbatim: neither more nor less. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 02)

Namık met with Palmerston again and discussed William's words. It seems that Namık praised Palmerston in this meeting of William's words. The first thing he mentioned was that the King had stated in the last meeting that he knew Muslims to be people who remain true to their word. And then Namık said to Palmerston that he could not understand the underlying meaning of these words because when he heard them he wondered what the King meant. He had a suspicion that he saw this as a flaw in the Muslims. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 03) In the light of Namık's words he seems to be extremely sensitive to nuance; he was suspicious of any negative attitude from the King and his government towards the Anglo-Ottoman alliance against Mehmet Ali. Therefore he had been careful to note each one of their words. Palmerston immediately responded that the King only meant that he wanted to praise Muslims' upright character and to express that the enduring fellowship between both countries, which had been declared several times by the Sultan through Namık Pasha, would be enough assurance from King William's point of view. After this response Namık pressed further to understand the true opinion of the British on this subject and criticized them that although they were always saying that they really wanted the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity, at the same time they still recognized Mehmet Ali as a political actor despite his rebellion against his sovereign and clearly did not want the Ottomans to fight

Mehmet Ali by taking advantage of the Damascus rebellion. He even interestingly gave a metaphor of this - that this contradictory attitude resembled someone who was expected to wrestle with two people at the same time despite being tied hand and foot. In response Palmerston said that he acknowledged the truth of Namık Pasha's reproach and he wanted to explain in detail what was their latest and fundamental policy relating to the Mehmet Ali Question. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 03)

Palmerston began by explaining his and his government's opinion about Mehmet Ali. He stated that they understood of what kind of character Mehmet Ali was, so the Sultan could be sure that they certainly did not support him. However they did not support the Ottoman intervention in Damascus either because of potential Russian involvement. If such a conflict did not go well, the Tsar would send in his army using her right arising from the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. In such an eventuality, as might be expected, Britain would intervene in the matter in order to defend her benefits in the region and this situation could easily lead to war. Apart from this, of course they desired an Ottoman victory against Mehmet Ali Pasha, but as he explained, the situation had the potential to backfire. Palmerston went on to say that in his view Mehmet Ali Pasha was an old man, and after his death, his son Ibrahim Pasha did not have the calibre to maintain the situation he would inherit from his father, so the Sultan would be able to assign a new governor in his stead. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D) Another interesting dialogue that occurred between Palmerston and Namık in that meeting was that Palmerston intimated that he could not understand why the Sultan could not use Mehmet Ali for the Ottoman benefit. Namık replied that Mehmet Ali had not paid tax to the central government for two years and was also gradually taking over Rakka, an Ottoman City under the Sultan's control, and had been plotting mischief for three years, so how could they possibly use him for the benefit of central government? (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D)

In addition, as Mahmud had expected, Palmerston led up to the treaty and Ottoman-Russian alliance resulting from Unkiar Skelessi. He began with a reproach about the treaty asking what possible reason was there to make this treaty with Russia? Of course the British were not suggesting that the Sultan and his statesmen quarrel with Russia, but the only unacceptable article in the treaty was concerning the shutdown of the straits to all powers aside from Russian warships in the case of a war in Europe. He added that of course the Ottomans could make a friend of whomsoever they wished but this ally should be turned into a unilateral one, whereas this situation gave the Russians an unfair superiority in Istanbul. Palmerston fully believed that although the Tsar and his statesmen gave the appearance of those who had good intentions towards the Ottomans, they were in fact secretly trying to set a trap for the Ottomans whilst appearing benign. In this context, he stated that if there was a salutary thing in the interest of the Sultan and his people, the Tsar would prevent it and the Sultan could be sure that the British could not tolerate this. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 04)

Everything in London was working out as Mahmud II planned with his diplomatic manoeuvres of calling Russians to the Bosphorus and signing the treaty with the Russians. As a matter of fact, in his report, Namık was pointing out this change in political atmosphere in London by comparing

with his last fruitless visit to London, in December 1832. He reported that previously, the British ambassadors to Istanbul, especially Canning, had been prejudicing British public opinion against the Ottoman Empire with their biased reports. He continued his descriptions of the new political atmosphere in London related to the Ottomans and stated that he found it quite different being in London for these four days and people's perspectives in England were very much more positive this time. (BOA, File No: 1173, Document No: 46414 D 04) Mahmud should have been delighted when he read these words from his emissary.

In this connection, it should be mentioned again that it is not enough to examine the Mehmet Ali Question based only on the diplomatic reports since, as Namik Pasha pointed out, ambassadors' accounts might well include some prejudice and bias. Rodkey expressed this change in British policy towards the Ottomans very well in his extensive article;

"Obviously, before the close of 1833 the moment of hesitation in British policy for the preservation of the Ottoman Empire had passed. Palmerston was resolved to revive and to extend the traditional policy of Great Britain in the Levant and was determined to defeat at all cost any attempt which Russia might make to intervene independently in the internal affairs of Turkey under the terms of the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi." (Rodkey, 1929, p. 573)

Although Rodkey recounts the change in Britain towards the Ottoman Empire very well, something has been neglected in his account, as other foreign scholars have so far done. This is to show to what extent Mahmud II had a role in this radical change in Palmerston's policies. It is clear that without examining this role, the narration of the period would only be based on the other powers' perspectives which would inevitably create a one sided narrative.

Despite all these efforts by Mahmud II and his statesmen, especially that of his official emissary Namik, Ponsonby had been insisting upon his request for an extensive explanation about the debated clause being answered again. He asked about this matter once more, via his translator Pizani, putting this enquiry to the Ottoman Foreign Minister as he had done previously;

"If I accept the official explanation of the Foreign Minister, it would mean disobedience of the exact instructions given by my government to me. The reason for this is that the clause was incongruent to the Anglo-Ottoman contract, which had been a law in force for a long time, and I have articulated this fact several times in my official letters given to the Minister. I wanted the Minister to inform the Sultan about his official letter and to warn the Minister that if the Sultan's answer was not satisfactory, he would ask the same questions again and again." (BOA, File No: 1181, Document No: 46653)

As a matter of fact Ponsonby's threats started to push the limits of diplomatic usage. This was a matter of complaint that was reflected in many Ottoman documents. The reason behind this overreaction was his abhorrence of Russia and her designs on the region. Webster analysed this characteristic very well when he said;

“More serious are the charges against him of excessive hostility to Russia, and his desire to use force against her. It is true that Ponsonby became convinced that Russia was planning the disruption or at least control of the Ottoman Empire, and that he made it his principal object to defeat her. He certainly stated as facts what could only be conjectures and he wished Britain to display her maritime power to counteract the military position of Russia whose armies were in the Principalities. Above all he wished to convince both Russia and the Sultan that Britain would never again shew the same weakness she had displayed in 1832-1833.” (Webster, 1951, p. 302)

Ponsonby had given as evidence to his words in one of his letters to the Foreign Minister about the debated clause of the Unkiar Skelessi that according to the eleventh clause of the treaty signed in 1809 between the Ottoman Empire and Britain, access by the other states' warships to both the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus was prohibited. (BOA, File No: 1175, Document No: 46438 Ğ)

Nevertheless, there were some exceptions among British diplomats who thought about the treaty in a different way than that which was the general tendency in London at the time; such as Percy Clinton Sydney Smyth, who was the predecessor of the ambassador to Russia. He declared that he recognised that the Sultan was right to cooperate with Russia to solve the problem. He also commented that he believed the Sultan would find an opportunity to regenerate his Empire only when he solved the Mehmet Ali Question. In his opinion, therefore, the Sultan was right to look for another country's support in dealing with the problem. (BOA, File No: 1168, Document No: 46223)

Mahmud II would have liked this strong interest in the Ottoman Empire from all the British politicians that they showed ever since he declared a rescript and explained his real aims and underlying motives in forging a military alliance with Britain. This document is really vital to properly understand his secret plan. He itemised his orders in the rescript:

- a) *If friendship was made with Britain, the economic and social problems could be solved, customs tariffs could be collected easily, the country would quickly prosper, and, as a result of all these improvements, the population would increase.*
- b) *If the Ottomans were able to promote good relations with the British, the French would have to copy the British attitude and thereby the Ottomans would be able to rid themselves of French animosity.*
- c) *If the British gave orders to Mehmet Ali, he would have to renounce the lands he had acquired after his rebellion and give up his insurrection and start to support central government with his army.*
- d) *If Mehmet Ali saw an Anglo-Ottoman alliance, he would have to return his warships to central government. Consequently the Egyptian public would come to think that Mehmet*

Ali was an ordinary governor of the Sultan, not a successor to him. (BOA, File No: 2, Document No: 47)

There was another British statesman who held the same opinion as Mahmud II. This was David Urquhart. He was present in the Ottoman lands in the 1830s. He wrote a book for the King about the resources of the Ottoman Empire. He presented in this book several potential advantages in favour of British interests to be gained by supporting the Sultan and his Empire against their enemies. On this topic Bolsover stated that;

“In it Urquhart argued that the destruction of the Janissaries had removed the chief source of decay from the Turkish administration and that the Ottoman Empire could now be made strong and vigorous by developing the principles of local self-government inherent in its institutions.” (Bolsover, 1936, p. 445)

Mahmud II had British friends who supported him; however his aim was to get wholehearted backing from the British government and the King William IV with the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. Every passing day his plan was becoming a reality, since Palmerston had recently sent an instruction to the British naval commander to tell him to support the Ottomans against both Russia and Mehmet Ali. Baker spoke of this instruction saying:

“The Russian danger appeared so great at the time that Vice-Admiral Sir Josiah Rowley was secretly instructed on 31 January 1834 to sail up the Straits in order to assist in defending Constantinople against a Russian attack, if the Turkish government should request such aid through the ambassador, Lord Ponsonby. Yet Mehemet Ali, who was most likely to cause the Russians to return, was to be dissuaded from renewing the conflict by the remonstrances of Great Britain and France.” (Baker, 1928, p. 84)

1.4 Conclusion

Despite all these diplomatic developments in the Anglo-Ottoman relationship, the Sultan's direct military support from Britain would be a few more years in coming. In this waiting period, Mahmud II did not slacken in the implementation of his plan and made some more diplomatic manoeuvres in the following years with the aim of making an Anglo-Ottoman alliance against the other powers possible. These manoeuvres, in order, were that in 1835, Mahmud using Britain's request for use of the Euphrates route to reach India since it was the shortest and easiest route to further benefit his plan, in 1837-1838, Mahmud's use of Palmerston and his diplomats' attempts to use the Ottoman economic resources in favour of British interests to solve the Mehmet Ali problem. As it happened, in the Euphrates negotiations, and as a result of this process of economic negotiations, the Treaty of Balta Limani came about in 1838. Because of all of these ventures, not only Mahmud II, but also his successor Abdülmecid, and Mahmud's best statesman, Mustafa Reşid Pasha, would draw advantages from British support and guidance, to reclaim the Empire economically, administratively, socially, and militarily from 1835 onwards. In fact, as mentioned

above, both Mahmud II and Palmerston had a strong desire for this cooperation to be beneficial for the prosperity of the Ottoman Empire, each of them seeking to better their own interests.

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² The File number and document of each document used in the article. Those who wish to refer to these Otoman Documents may find them in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi in İstanbul.

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