

THE OTTOMANS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: THE RUSSIAN
ANNEXATION OF THE CRIMEAN KHANATE IN 1783 IN THE
LIGHT OF THE DOCUMENTS FROM THE OTTOMAN ARCHIVES

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Abstract

The Russian annexation of the Crimean Khanate was a severe blow to the Ottomans, since the empire was forced to accept the annexation of an independent polity populated by Muslims without a shot being fired, and against the stipulations of past treaties. While the Crimean population sent delegations to the imperial capital and asked for help, the Ottomans also feared the harm the annexation would inflict on their legitimacy; however, they were aware of their military and financial weakness in the face of the Austro-Russian alliance and could not risk a multi-front war. To handle this difficult situation, the Ottoman government resorted to two strategies: first, it sought an intra-bureaucratic consensus by employing the consultation principle of Islamic governance to allow bureaucratic participation in the decision-making process with unanimous decisions to avoid any criticisms that would trigger a popular backlash and, secondly, legitimizing the government policy by benefiting from the principles of Islamic law and portraying the current situation as a temporary one which would be corrected once the empire gained enough military strength. This article will use primary and secondary sources to show how the Ottoman government navigated this diplomatic crisis while aiming to legitimize its decisions by creatively adapting the principles of Islamic international law (siyar). It will emphasize the interaction between political authority, legitimacy, and Islamic law by discussing how the Otto-

mans interpreted Islamic law with respect to the termination of treaties and to power asymmetry in war decisions when the empire faced a multi-front war with Russia and Austria.

Keywords: international law, Islamic law, diplomatic history, treaties, eighteenth century, Ottoman empire, legitimacy, Crimea, Russia.

INTRODUCTION

Once an Ottoman tributary state, the Crimean Khanate became an independent polity with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), even though Ottoman sultans retained some symbolic powers. Yet, in 1782, using the uprising against its ruler, Şahin Giray, as a pretext, Russia intervened militarily and installed the deposed khan on the throne again. Later on, Russia declared its annexation of this polity in 1783. Benefiting from its alliance with Austria, Russia demanded a *de jure* recognition of the annexation in the form of a protocol (*sened*) that would modify the stipulations of the past treaties and threatened war if its demand was rejected. This fait accompli created great difficulties for the Ottomans; while facing the risk of a multi-front war with Austria and Russia, the Ottomans were uneasy about duly accepting the incorporation of the Crimean Khanate into the Russian Empire because, first, it violated the stipulations of the peace treaty that granted independence to the khanate, and, second, the Muslim population of the khanate, who were already pleading for help by sending delegations to the imperial capital, would come under Russian rule.

The Ottoman statesmen were aware of the empire's military and fiscal weakness. They wanted to avoid a war which could lead to further territorial losses, despite the difficulty of accepting the Russian demands. In addition, they had to consider the domestic political repercussions of their decision. This posed another dilemma: accepting the Russian annexation and leaving a large Muslim community under the rule of a Christian power could lead to a popular revolt. On the other hand, rejecting the Russian demands and starting hostilities with Russia and Austria, in addition to the risk of losing more territory as a result of military

weakness, could disrupt the imperial capital's food supply, because the empire lacked the naval might to protect these routes. In turn, this disruption could lead to scarcity and price increases, triggering riots and political turmoil, putting the Ottoman bureaucrats' careers and existence at risk. Navigating through this difficult period, the Ottoman statesmen sought legitimacy for their decisions through two strategies. First, ad hoc consultation councils that included the larger bureaucracy were employed to discuss the issues, reach decisions unanimously, share responsibility, and avoid future criticism through an intra-bureaucratic consensus. As a second strategy to legitimize this unpopular decision, the Ottoman government invoked the principles of Islamic law with regards to the impact of power asymmetry on war decisions and termination of treaties, and tried to present the annexation as a temporary situation which was imposed by conditions, yet would be abolished once the empire reached sufficient capabilities when compared with its enemies.

The next section will provide insight into Islamic law principles regarding war decisions and treaties, the Ottoman understanding and interpretation of these principles, and the Ottomans' changing views on peace and war as the empire faced defeats on the battlefield. Then, the following section will offer a historical backdrop for the emergence and development of the crisis and use this context to build a narrative. For this purpose, documents from the Ottoman Archives section within the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye's Directorate of State Archives (formerly *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*, hereafter referred to as the State Archives of Türkiye/SAT) will be used.¹ In addition to the archive documents, the accounts provided by the official

¹ Working with the Ottoman archival documents presents many challenges. Documents such as reports penned by grand viziers to sultans (*telhis*) often do not include information about the date (*datum*). Sometimes, it is possible to deduce information about their day and month. The information provided by the catalog can sometimes be misleading because that information is based on the date that the document arrived at the chancellery for safekeeping. For this reason, a document from 1782 may be dated to 1788 in the catalog. In order to clarify that I used relevant documents about the case here, I will try to benefit from other hints mentioned in the document's text and the information provided in the official histories of the era. About the dates of Ottoman documents see: MÜBAHAT KÜTÜKOĞLU, *OSMANLI BELGELERİNİN DİLİ (DİPLOMATİK)* 181–83 (2013).

historians of the Ottoman Empire, Sadullah Enverî and Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi, as well as secondary sources, will be employed to create a more accurate chronology of events and build a narrative.² The fourth section will underline the power asymmetry and the Ottoman statesmen's views about the empire's weakness. The last section will focus on the final phases of the crisis and the Ottoman efforts to legitimize the decision based on the power asymmetry. There will be a more detailed discussion about the two documents due to their importance in showcasing the bureaucratic decision-making processes in the Ottoman Empire, military and fiscal weakness, the need for legitimacy, the Ottoman understanding of international law, and threat perceptions. Also, their Turkish transcription will be provided at the end of the article.³

This study is intended to contribute to the literature in foreign policy analysis, diplomatic history, and international law by bringing an early modern Muslim power into the spotlight.

WAR AND TREATIES IN ISLAMIC LAW AND THE OTTOMAN PRACTICE

Siyar is the specific branch of Islamic law that can be defined as the Islamic law of nations.⁴ The Ottomans followed the Ḥanafî school of Islamic law founded by Abū Ḥanîfa (d. 150/767) and

2 The critical edition of Ahmed Vâsîf's history covering this period has been published by Mücteba İlgürel, and I will use this edition throughout this study: AHMED VÂSIF EFENDI, MEHÂSİNÜ'L-ÂSÂR VE HAKAİKÜ'L-AHBÂR (Mücteba İlgürel ed., 1994). While these official historical accounts may serve these purposes and provide valuable information, they must be considered cautiously because of their authors' biases and factional loyalties. For example, Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi was also a bureaucrat and member of the reformist coalition led by his patron, Halil Hâmid Pasha, and spoke for that faction. ETHAN L. MENCHINGER, THE FIRST OF THE MODERN OTTOMANS, THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF AHMED VASIF 10 (2017).

3 Arabic names, terms, and concepts will be transliterated. However, for Turkish names, official titles, words, and transcription of documents, I will use a style closer to modern Turkish orthography while trying to retain the authentic style of the era. Anglicized versions of some widely used Turkish words, such as grand vizier or pasha, will also be used.

4 MAJID KHADDURI, THE ISLAMIC LAW OF NATIONS: SHAYBĀNĪ'S SIYAR 3 (1966).

his disciples in the eighth century.⁵ With the failure of the Islamic wave of expansion to encompass the globe through *jihād*, the realities of life required the establishment of peaceful relations with other societies, even if temporary in theory. Parallel to these developments, *siyar* also changed. For example, Abū Ḥanīfa's school is the only one that recognized the territoriality of law, recognizing the existence of non-Islamic legal systems outside the Islamic realm.⁶ In this respect, Abū Ḥanīfa and his disciples Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm (d. 182//798) and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) served as important sources for the Ottoman understanding of the law of nations, and their books were also translated into Turkish.⁷

Unless the Muslim community were to become the target of a sudden attack, Islamic jurists considered *jihād* as *fard al-kifāya* which makes it a collective, not individual, obligation. If some members of the community fulfill the obligation, it ceases to be obligatory for the rest of the community. However, if no community member performs the duty, the community falls into error.⁸ This aspect of *jihād* makes it a state instrument, since its employment depends on the state's decision.⁹ Though it is a permanent state of war, this does not mean continuous fighting. Some jurists even regarded preparations for the *jihād* as fulfilling the obligation.¹⁰ There are also considerations about the balance of power. Though many jurists ignored the possibility of an unsuccessful war, according to Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), the leader of the Muslim community (*imām*) could make peace with the enemy if a catastrophe had befallen the Muslims, on the grounds of force majeure, yet, the period of peace could not exceed the terms of the Ḥudaybiya treaty (ten years). After the treaty's expiration, the leader may decide to renew it for a similar period if he believes that the Muslims are not powerful enough to fight. Otherwise, he may resume the war. In this

5 COLIN IMBER, *EBU'S-SUUD: THE ISLAMIC LEGAL TRADITION* 24 (2009).

6 KHADDURI, *supra* note 4, at 3–5.

7 VIOREL PANAITI, *OTTOMAN LAW OF WAR AND PEACE: THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND ITS TRIBUTE-PAYERS FROM THE NORTH OF THE DANUBE* 9–10 (2019).

8 MAJID KHADDURI, *WAR AND PEACE IN THE LAW OF ISLAM* 60 (2010).

9 *Id.* at 61.

10 *Id.* at 64–65.

respect, other jurists such as Shaybānī and Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083) argued that the Muslims would be relieved of the duty to fight if their number was less than half of the enemy.¹¹ There is a consensus among jurists that approves concluding a peace treaty (*sulh*) with non-Muslims when Muslims are weak. Yet, when Muslims gain power, fighting should resume.¹² Viorel Panaite rightly put forward that jurists like Abū Yūsuf and Shaybānī emphasized the importance of power equilibrium and the concept of emergency and even legitimized a temporary peace that required Muslims to pay an annual tribute to the enemy for peace due to a situation of weakness, a view adopted by Ottoman jurists too.¹³

The respect of treaties emerges as an important pillar of Islamic Law. The Qur'ān commands Muslims to obey and honor contractual obligations since it demonstrates qualities and attributes of ideal believers' conduct. At the same time, it warns against betrayal of contracts, breaking or violating contracts, breach of trust, and lack of observance.¹⁴ The Ottomans, too, adhered to the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*.¹⁵ Hence, observance of treaties and fulfillment of treaty obligations are required as long as the treaty remains in force and valid:

Once concluded, the treaty must be observed by the Muslims to the end of the specified period unless the other party violates it. The Imām may terminate the treaty, but a notice to the enemy demanding denunciation of it must first be sent, together with the reason for it. The principle of *rebus sic stantibus* seems to be applied here; otherwise, the Imām must abide by the treaty on the strength of the principle *pacta sunt servanda*.¹⁶

Treaties can be terminated. Termination on the basis of the text involves the violation (*naqd*) of any of the treaty's

11 *Id.* at 134–35.

12 LABEEB AHMED BSOU, INTERNATIONAL TREATIES (MU'AHADĀT) IN ISLAM (2008).

13 PANAITÉ, *supra* note 7, at 87–89.

14 BSOU, *supra* note 12, at 127.

15 Harriet Rudolph, *The Ottoman Empire and the Institutionalization of European Diplomacy, 1500–1700*, in (ed.) ISLAM AND INTERNATIONAL LAW: ENGAGING SELF-CENTRICISM FROM A PLURALITY OF PERSPECTIVES 169 (Marie-Luisa Frick and Andreas Th. Müller eds., 2013).

16 KHADDURI, ISLAMIC, *supra* note 4, at 55.

conditions agreed upon by both parties. Yet, the violation must be evident to both parties.¹⁷ If non-Muslims violate the treaty by committing treachery, it cannot be violated after that, and Muslims are required to terminate the contractual obligation and can retaliate without any notification.¹⁸

Adherence to Islamic law and defense of the Islamic faith served as the basis of Ottoman claims to legitimacy; in the sixteenth century, Shaykh al-Islam Ebüssuûd Efendi (in office 1545–74) formulated the legitimacy of sultanic authority in its most elegant form.¹⁹ However, this legitimacy and sultanic authority were not absolute; they were contingent on meeting the objectives of the *sharī'a*.²⁰

For this purpose, legal opinions (*fetva*) penned by the ulama were used. They were not limited to the areas of criminal law and taxes; they could cover other state affairs, such as war and peace. Sultans, grand viziers, and other high-ranking government officials could request a legal opinion.²¹ Also, many anti-piracy legal opinions were issued upon the requests of the Venetian and French diplomats to solve piracy-related cases and to enforce treaties.²²

These documents were used in difficult government decisions for legitimacy.²³ They provided legal justification for imperial orders, such as waging war against Christian powers or Muslim heretics.²⁴ The Ottoman government benefited from the prestige and moral authority of the shaykh al-Islam's office to bolster its foreign policy and ensure compliance from

17 BSOU, *supra* note 12, at 132.

18 *Id.* at 134.

19 IMBER, *supra* note 5, at 5.

20 SAMY A. AYOUB, *LAW, EMPIRE, AND THE SULTAN: OTTOMAN IMPERIAL AUTHORITY AND LATE HANAFI JURISPRUDENCE* 3 (2000).

21 Usually, the text of legal opinions was prepared by a clerk, but almost always, the reply was handwritten by the *muftī* himself. Legal opinions in which both the text and reply were handwritten by the shaykh al-Islam were rare since these were issued upon the sultan's query on important government affairs. Uriel Heyd, *Some Aspects of the Ottoman Fetvā*, 32 *THE BULLETIN OF THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES* 42, 55 (1969).

22 JOSHUA M. WHITE, *PIRACY AND LAW IN THE OTTOMAN MEDITERRANEAN* 213 (2018).

23 IMBER, *supra* note 5, at 7.

24 PANAITTE, *supra* note 7, at 13.

its subjects. The shaykh al-Islam considered political necessities and policy as well as jurisprudence, handled difficult cases, and produced applicable rulings by resorting to legal arguments for flexibility.²⁵ Since waging war against other Muslim powers posed problems, the Ottomans obtained legal opinions from the Egyptian ulama before declaring war against the Karamanids in the fifteenth century.²⁶ In the sixteenth century, the legal opinion of Shaykh al-Islam Kemal Paşazâde (in office 1526–34) was obtained to legitimize the war against the Safavids.²⁷ Also known as the mufti of Istanbul, shaykh al-Islam served as the head of the spiritual authority in the Ottoman Empire. They commanded enormous authority even if they were not a member of the Imperial Council or they were appointed and could be removed from their post by sultans.²⁸ Their influence increased, and starting with the seventeenth century, their opinion was asked in important state affairs; from the eighteenth century on, war and peace decisions required their approval. They were also the authority that sanctioned the dethronement of sultans with their legal opinions.²⁹

In practice, just like other political entities, the Ottomans, too, considered political and military circumstances in foreign affairs and aimed to protect the interests of “faith and state.” For example, Ibrahim al-Halebi (d. 1549) pointed out that a “useful/profitable” peace could be made with non-Muslims, otherwise there would be no peace.³⁰ Regarding the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, the Ottoman practice has generally been consistent. On the other hand, there are cases of violation of treaties because of the principle of *necessitas non habet legem*. For breaking a treaty without violating the principle of

25 WHITE, *supra* note 22, at 184.

26 Ramazan Boyacıoğlu, *Osmanoğullarının Karamanoğlu İbrahim Bey Aleyhine Aldığı Fetvalar*, 4 CUMHURİYET ÜNİVERSİTESİ İLAHIYAT FAKÜLTESİ DERGİSİ 65 (2000).

27 Halil İbrahim Bulut, *Osmanlı-Safevî Mücadelesinde Ulemanın Rolü Kemal Paşazâde Örneği*, 7 DİNİ ARAŞTIRMALAR 187 (2005).

28 R. C. REPP, THE MÜFTI OF ISTANBUL: A STUDY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OTTOMAN LEARNED HIERARCHY 301 (1986).

29 İSMAIL HAKKI UZUNÇARŞILI, OSMANLI DEVLETİNİN İLMIYE TEŞKİLÂTI 188–89 (1988).

30 PANAITE, *supra* note 7, at 86–89.

pacta sunt servanda, a legitimate cause was invoked: violation of the treaty by non-Muslims, protection of the interests of the Muslim community, and the invalidity of certain stipulations or an entire agreement.³¹ There are many examples of treaty termination in Ottoman history upon violation by non-Muslims or based on their possible betrayal. On the other hand, the null causes and agreements provide another set of legitimate causes. If a treaty left Muslims under non-Muslims' rule or led to a territorial expansion against the Abode of Islam, no matter when that took place, termination is justified. For example, in 1570, when Sultan Selim II expressed his intention to break the treaty with Venice and conquer Cyprus, Shaykh al-Islam Ebüssüüd Efendi justified the termination based on the fact that Cyprus was conquered by Muslims eight centuries ago.³² As a result of the changing power balance in the sixteenth century and external and internal developments, Ottoman intellectuals of the seventeenth century, such as Koçi Bey, started to produce literary works that addressed the empire's decline and offered remedies for returning to the glory of the Ottoman "Golden Age."³³ Unsurprisingly, these new perspectives emerged with the Ottoman–Austrian War of 1593–1606, also known as the "Long War." Some contemporary Ottoman scholars like Hasan Kâfi Akhisarî promoted the idea of peace and opposed war.³⁴ Yet, a more cataclysmic event was on the horizon: the Great Turkish War (1683–99) between the Ottomans and the Holy League. The war ended with the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, culminating in the loss of large tracts of territory for the Ottomans. This unprecedented defeat had repercussions not only for the Ottoman elites but also for the broader Islamic world. Intellectuals of the era faced new challenges and sought to develop creative solutions.³⁵ A contemporary historian and bureaucrat, Musta-

31 *Id.* at 211.

32 *Id.* at 210–16.

33 MARINOS SARIYANNIS, *A HISTORY OF OTTOMAN POLITICAL THOUGHT UP TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY 188–209* (2019).

34 PANAITTE, *supra* note 7, at 89.

35 Ethan L. Menchinger, *Intellectual Creativity in a Time of Turmoil and Transition*, in *THE WILEY BLACKWELL HISTORY OF ISLAM 459–60* (Armando Salvatore ed., 2018).

fa Naïmâ, argued in favor of peace as a strategy to avoid the Ottoman decline. While defending his patron, Hüseyin Pasha, who negotiated the Treaty of Karlowitz, he came up with ideas about the benefits of peace, which would allow gaining time and resources and lead to a future victory. He used the Prophet's practices, especially the Treaty of Hüdaiyya, to support his stance.³⁶ Other intellectuals of the eighteenth century tried to address the internal and external crises the Ottoman order faced while arguing for reforming the empire. They borrowed concepts and ideas from the Islamic heritage to add legitimacy to their arguments and reused and readapted them.³⁷ Parallel to these developments, the Ottoman approach to foreign policy and international law started to change. For example, they started to make treaties with the Habsburgs lasting twenty years, such as the Treaty of Zsitvatorok (1606), surpassing the ten-year period set by the example of the Treaty of Hüdaiyya. The Treaty of Belgrade (1739) was signed for a period of twenty-seven years.³⁸ In addition, even though it was legitimized by supposedly being based on *siyar*, the Ottomans and their rivals in the eighteenth century, especially Russia, abolished slavery and ransom practices and introduced a prisoner-of-war regime for captives through treaties and customs.³⁹

The interaction and mutually reinforcing relationship between the judicial establishment and the Ottoman sultanic authority, on the one hand, and the flexibility in the interpretation of legal concepts pertaining to foreign policy and international law enabled the Ottoman jurists and scholars to maintain and reinforce the sultanic authority and its legitimacy when the empire started to suffer defeats and crises.

In the next section, a detailed account of the 1783 crisis will be provided, aiming to present a context and show how the Ottomans interpreted and applied these principles of Islamic law.

36 SARIYANNIS, *supra* note 33, at 313–14.

37 Menchinger, *supra* note 35, at 476.

38 PANAITÉ, *supra* note 7, at 181.

39 WILL SMILEY, FROM SLAVES TO PRISONERS OF WAR: THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, RUSSIA, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW 233 (2018).

**THE RUSSIAN ANNEXATION OF THE CRIMEAN
KHANATE AND THE OTTOMAN POLICY**

Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96) succeeded Peter III, her husband, after a successful military coup in the summer of 1762.⁴⁰ The strategic aims of Russian foreign policy in this era, directed mostly by the able diplomat Nikita Panin, were reunification with the Ukrainian and Byelorussian lands still under Polish rule, consolidation of Russia's position in the Baltic, and advancement to the Black Sea.⁴¹ Upon the internal disturbances following the emergence of the Confederation of Bar, Russia deployed forces in Poland, and a group of Russian forces violated the Ottoman territory near the city of Balta, east of the Bug River. The Ottomans declared war on September 30, 1768.⁴² Before the war, the Ottomans enjoyed an era of relative peace, starting with the Treaty of Belgrade (1739). They also missed the new developments in military science by remaining outside the Seven Years' War battlefields, which introduced new tactics and methods. In addition, in this period, the Ottomans replaced most of their professional army with a militia-based army. Under these circumstances, the Ottoman forces suffered defeats in the face of better-trained and disciplined Russian troops, the supply system of the Ottoman army collapsed, and strategic fortresses such as Hotin, İsmail, Kilya, and Bender were lost.⁴³ To the surprise of the Ottomans, the Russian Baltic Fleet under Admiral Alexis Grigori Orlov's command succeeded in inflicting a sudden attack on the Ottoman Navy at the Çeşme Bay on 5 July 1770 while in June 1771, Russian forces invaded Crimea, facing little resistance.⁴⁴

40 NICHOLAS. V. RIASANOVSKY AND MARK. D. STEINBERG, *A HISTORY OF RUSSIA* 237 (2005).

41 Sergei V. Bakhrushin and Sergei. D. Skazkin, *Diplomacy, in CATHERINE THE GREAT: A PROFILE* 185 (Marc Raefl ed., 1972).

42 ÉDOUARD DRIAULT, *LA QUESTION D'ORIENT, DEPUIS SES ORIGINES JUSQU'A NOS JOURS* (1912).

43 VIRGINIA H. AKSAN, *OTTOMAN WARS 1700–1923: AN EMPIRE BESIEGED* 60–64 (2022).

44 DAVID R. STONE, *A MILITARY HISTORY OF RUSSIA: FROM IVAN THE TERRIBLE TO THE WAR IN CHECHNYA* 81 (2006).

Sultan Abdülhamid I (r. 1774–89) rose to the throne on January 21, 1774, at a very chaotic time due to the ongoing war. With the internal problems caused by the Pugachev rebellion (1773–75) in Russia and the growing burden of the war for both sides, the parties decided to negotiate a peace treaty. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, signed by the Ottoman and Russian delegates on July 21, 1774, ended the war.⁴⁵ The treaty dramatically changed the administration of the Crimean Khanate, which had been an Ottoman vassal state since 1475, where the rulers (khans) were appointed directly by the Ottoman sultans. With the treaty, it was to become an independent state. It was stipulated in the treaty that the khan would be elected by the Crimean Tatars (nobility), contrary to the Ottoman practice of being appointed by the sultan, and neither the Ottoman Empire nor Russia would interfere with its domestic affairs. Still, the status of the Ottoman sultan as the caliph of Muslims was accepted in the treaty, and sultans were to approve the election of a new khan by providing an imperial patent (*menşur*) and symbols of sovereignty (*teşrifât*). The Ottomans surrendered the strategic strongholds of Kilburun, Kerç, and Yenikale to the Russians and recognized Russian sovereignty over the Kabartais.⁴⁶ The loss of the first Muslim-inhabited territory seriously affected the Ottomans' prestige.⁴⁷

Rather than providing unity and stability, the independence fuelled the nobility's internal rivalries and power struggles in Crimea. Due to internal pressures, Sahib Giray was replaced by Devlet Giray in 1775.⁴⁸ This was not the last instance of internal unrest in Crimea, however. Losing his popular support and facing a candidate supported by Russia for the throne, Devlet Giray had to flee Crimea, and Şahin Giray was elected as khan in April 1777. At first, the Ottomans did not recognize the election and started preparations for war against Russia. The French Ambassador in Istanbul, François-Emmanuel Guignard de

45 For its clauses see JACQUES DROZ, *HISTOIRE DIPLOMATIQUE DE 1648 À 1919*, 144–45 (1952); DRIAULT, *supra* note 42, at 54–55; AKSAN, *supra* note 43, at 66.

46 For the khanate's history under the Ottoman hegemony especially see: ALAN W. FISHER, *THE CRIMEAN TATARS* (1978).

47 AKSAN, *supra* note 43, at 66.

48 HÂLİM GIRAY, *GÜLBÜN-İ HÂNÂN* 116 (1332/1913–14).

Saint-Priest (1768–85), offered mediation and negotiated with the Russian Ambassador Alexander Stakiev. With the War of the Bavarian Succession going on, Russia wanted to avoid another war and accepted the French mediation offer.⁴⁹ The Ottomans had to accept this *fait accompli* with the Aynalıkavak Convention (*Tenkihnâme*) on March 21, 1779 (Rabīʿ al-Awwal 3, 1193).⁵⁰ Having spent his youth in St. Petersburg, Şahin Giray was considered a snob in the conservative Crimean and Ottoman circles, and he was known to be pro-Russian. However, with the convention, he was appointed as khan in a lifetime position. His policies, such as suppressing his rivals, abolishing the privileges of the pious foundations, imposing new taxes, and forming a new army clad in Western-style uniforms, further alienated the public.⁵¹

In April 1782, an uprising led by Şahin Giray's brother, Bahadır Giray, erupted against his rule. In the following days, two men, the representatives of the Taman residents, arrived in Istanbul. They brought with them the petitions and grievances of the population. On May 25, 1782, they presented a verbal report, and officials who interviewed them prepared a written report (*takrir*). They aired their complaints about Şahin Giray and his oppressive rule. The representatives expressed the wish of the residents of Taman: either the Ottoman sultan would designate a province for them in the Ottoman territory to which they could emigrate, or, as in the past, Taman must be placed under Ottoman rule. They also added that they came to Istanbul hoping for salvation, and that unless the Ottoman government protected them, the residents of Taman would perish. The report also provided information about the uprising led by Bahadır Giray and Arslan Giray, their popularity, and the flight of Şahin Giray toward Russian territory.⁵²

The Crimean Crisis occurred during the American War of Independence (1775–83). In 1778, France joined the war against

49 For the details of the negotiations, see his memoirs: FRANÇOIS EMMANUEL GUIGNARD DE SAINT-PRIEST, *1 MÉMOIRES: RÉGNES DE LOUIS XV ET DE LOUIS XVI 170–73* (1929).

50 For the original text see SAT., TS. MA. d/9923.

51 VÂSIF, *supra* note 2, at 11.

52 SAT., AE., SABHI., 115/7758, 12/6/1196.

Britain.⁵³ Finally, Britain and the United States started negotiations and signed their preliminary peace agreement in November 1782. The defeat the British fleet inflicted on the French fleet at the Battle of the Saintes (Îles des Saintes in the West Indies) on April 12, 1782, and the unsuccessful attack on Gibraltar by the joint French and Spanish fleets in September 1782, convinced the parties to sue for peace. The preliminaries were signed on January 20, 1783. The war was to end with a series of treaties signed at Versailles on September 3, 1783.⁵⁴ In this period, given the need to form an alliance to balance France in Europe, British foreign minister Charles Fox favored the idea of appeasing and forming an alliance with Russia.⁵⁵ This diplomatic situation created favorable conditions for Russia's expansion against the Ottoman Empire and neither France nor Britain was in a position to diplomatically or militarily support the Ottomans.

Russia strengthened its position even more by forming an alliance with Austria, the long term rival of the Ottomans. Russian foreign policy went through a modification in the 1780s. Nikita Panin built the Northern System/Alliance (an alliance with Prussia), which increased Russian influence and prestige in Europe.⁵⁶ However, Panin, seen as pro-Prussian, lost his influence and was replaced by Alexander Bezborodko in May 1781, whom Prince Grigorii Potemkin supported. This change was the expected result of abandoning the Prussian alliance and pursuing a more ambitious expansion plan toward the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁷ This objective, the so-called Greek project that envisaged the partition of the Ottoman Empire between Austria and Russia, was to be based on the secret Austro-Russian Treaty of 1781 (May–June). In January 1781, a draft treaty was penned. However, the issue of which monarch would take precedence in signing the treaty stalled the negotiations. In a letter written to

53 PAUL W. SCHROEDER, *THE TRANSFORMATION OF EUROPEAN POLITICS, 1763–1848*, 38 (1994).

54 DROZ, *supra* note 45, at 156–58; ANDREW STOCKLEY, *THE EUROPEAN POWERS AND THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS OF 1782–1783*, 177–83 (2001).

55 Schroeder, *supra* note 53, at 46.

56 Hugh Ragsdale, *Russian Foreign Policy, 1725–1815*, in 2 *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF RUSSIA* 512 (Dominic Lieven ed., 2015).

57 *Id.*

Potemkin in April, Catherine mentioned a solution to overcome the precedence problem: rather than a formal treaty, the two monarchs would exchange letters signed individually by each.⁵⁸ The treaty came in the form of an exchange of letters written by the respective hands of the two monarchs, and its existence was revealed only in June 1783.⁵⁹ According to the treaty, among other obligations, Emperor Joseph of Austria undertook to declare war or make a diversion with forces equal to those used by Russia against the Ottoman Empire if the latter failed to fulfill its obligations. The plan of operation and “equivalents,” the Ottoman possessions that Austria would gain, were to be discussed in advance. In addition, he undertook to defend Russia with all his forces if Russia was attacked by another power while at war with the Ottoman Empire. The treaty was to last eight years.⁶⁰ In this period, Russia and the Ottoman Empire negotiated two major issues: a trade treaty, and taxes in Wallachia and Moldavia. The uprising and upheaval in the Crimean Khanate added another major issue to the agenda. Even though the empire had its sui generis patrimonialist structure of authority and decision-making processes (in Weberian terms, “sultanism”), it is possible to observe that the civilian bureaucracy (*kalemiyye*) started to grow and gain power after the sixteenth century.⁶¹ Sultan Abdülhamid resorted to the method of consultation councils to reach unanimous decisions with the participation of the larger bureaucracy to ensure the legitimacy of the decisions made in the face of difficult negotiations with Russia.⁶²

58 These letters are dated in Julian, also known as the Old Style, and throughout this paper, I will convert them to Gregorian. The letters contain valuable information about state affairs and have been translated into English from their Russian originals. DOUGLAS SMITH, *LOVE & CONQUEST: PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT AND PRINCE GRIGORY POTEMKIN* 112–13 (2005).

59 Isabel de Madariaga, *The Secret Austro-Russian Treaty of 1781*, 38 *THE SLAVONIC AND EAST EUROPEAN REVIEW* 114 (1959).

60 *Id.* at 124–25.

61 Halil İnalçık, *Decision Making in the Ottoman State*, in *DECISION MAKING AND CHANGE IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE* 13 (Caesar E. Farah ed., 1993).

62 Neumann pointed out the deficiencies of these councils since their decisions “stayed within the narrow bounds of a given, formulated policy and consisted ultimately in gaining time, waiting, and delaying.” Christoph K. Neumann, *Decision Making without Decision Makers: Ottoman Foreign Policy circa 1780*, in *DECISION MAKING AND CHANGE IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE* 31 (Caesar E. Farah ed., 1993).

In the first week of July 1782, another delegation from Crimea arrived in Istanbul. They, too, were supporters of Bahadır Giray. An undated report (*telhis*) by the grand vizier (*sadrızam*) provided information to the sultan about the situation in Crimea. The document provides information about the interregnum period in Crimea, which started with Şahin Giray's flight to Kerch (Kerç) for Russian protection and Bahadır Giray's political activities. It mentions that a delegation from Crimea arrived the day before, bringing with them the petitions of the residents of Crimea and a letter from Arslan Giray. In addition, Zahid Efendi, *qāḍī* of Caffa (Kefe), who headed the delegation, presented a report. All these documents were handed to the chief of scribes (*reisülküttâb*) and shaykh al-Islam, and they were all read aloud. According to the grand vizier, as the petition for Bahadır Giray's election had not arrived, it was wise to wait until its arrival. Then, the Ottoman government would inform the Russian ambassador in Istanbul and tell him that since the Tatars elected a new khan, based on the traditions and clauses of the treaties between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the Ottoman government would approve the election. The grand vizier reported that he also had informed the other senior bureaucrats through his chief assistant (*sadâret kethüdâsı*) and a consultation council (*meşveret meclisi*) with the participation of senior bureaucrats would take place to discuss the issue. Then, on the top margin of the same document, the Sultan summed up his thoughts. In his view, Russia would not give up its support of Şahin Giray. What would happen if Russia insisted on installing Şahin Giray back on the throne again and breached the treaty? When the election petition arrived, it would be necessary, with extreme diligence, to discuss and solve the issue with the Russian ambassador in the framework provided by the treaty.⁶³

Another report penned by the grand vizier is connected with the previous document, and it mentions that the Sultan had requested a consultation council to discuss the petitions of the residents of Crimea brought by Zahid Efendi three days prior and also the minutes of the meeting with the delegation and to decide for the Porte what course to follow. It was convened on

63 SAT., AE., SABHL.,16/1455, 10/07/1203.

July 7, 1782.⁶⁴ The participants decided it would be best to wait until the arrival of the petition confirming the election of the new khan. However, in the meantime, to show Russia that the Porte adhered to its treaty obligations, the petitions of Crimean residents were to be shown to the Russian ambassador.⁶⁵ One of the participants, Ahmed Resmî Efendi, born in 1700, was 82 years old at that time and had no senior position in the bureaucracy; in modern terms, he was retired from government service. However, thanks to his vast experience in diplomacy, he was invited to the meeting (he died on August 31, 1783).⁶⁶ Aware of the Russian support for Şahin Giray, despite the dislike of him on the Ottoman side, the Porte did not hastily side with Bahadır Giray. The Ottomans felt responsible for protecting the Muslim population of Crimea: it was hard to ignore their pleas for help. The Crimean delegation had an audience with the grand vizier on July 27, 1782 (Shaʿbān 16, 1196), asking for assistance.⁶⁷

As the upheaval in Crimea continued, France, a long-time ally of the Ottoman Empire, felt it necessary to warn the Porte. The chief translator stated that he was instructed by his

64 The document does not provide any information about its year but clearly states that the meeting occurred on Rajab 26. However, a clue helps us to date its year as 1196 AH. So, the date of the document would be July 7, 1782. The document provides the list of participants and mentions the director of the Imperial Arsenal, Halil Hamid Efendi, as one of the participants. As one of the leading statesmen of the period, he served in various posts. He was appointed as the director of the Imperial Arsenal on September 23, 1781 (Shawwāl 4, 1195), and he served in this post until August 24, 1782 (Ramaḍān 15, 1196), when he was appointed chief assistant for the second time. This information helps us to confirm the date of the aforementioned report. Also, based on the phrase “three days prior,” it is possible to deduce that the audience with the second Crimean delegation took place on July 4, 1782. In the zeyl written by Ahmed Cavid, which is also known as *verd-i mutarrâ*, to Ahmed Taib’s work on the biographies of the Ottoman grand viziers, more information about Halil Hamid Pasha’s life and career is provided, see: OSMANZÂDE AHMED TAIB, HÂDİKATÜ’L VÜZERÂ 34–36 (1274/1857–58). See also MEHMED SÜREYYA, 2 SİCİL-İ OSMANİ YAHÜD TEZKİRE-İ MEŞÂHİR-İ OSMANİYE 299 (1308/1890–91); İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Sadrızam Halil Hamid Paşa*, 5 TÜRKİYAT MECMUASI 216 (1935).

65 SAT., AE. SABHI., 10/893, 10/07/1203.

66 On his life and role in the Ottoman bureaucracy, see an excellent study by Virginia H. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War & Peace*, Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700–1783 (1995). Grand Vizier Halil Hamid Pasha, when in office, provided him with an honorary post in the government. *Id.* at 179, 184.

67 SÂDULLAH ENVERİ. 2 TARİH-İ ENVERİ f. 266/A (İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi, No. T. 2437).

ambassador to suggest the Porte act cautiously regarding the approval of the new khan. Three months prior, the king of France ordered his chancellor to pen a letter, which instructed the French ambassador to have a careful eye on the foreign affairs of the Ottoman Empire so that it would not open a campaign for minor matters but rather follow a cautious foreign policy because it was not the right time to start a war. It was suggested that the Porte send the imperial patent only after informing and discussing the issue with the Russian ambassador. In reply, the chief of scribes denied the intention to approve the elections and stated that the Ottoman Empire respected its treaty obligations and would continue to do so. On the top margin of this report, the sultan wrote his opinion. According to him, if Şahin Giray fell out of favor in the eyes of the Tatar nation, they would naturally elect someone else, and as the Russian ambassador would be informed afterward, why should it violate the treaty stipulations?⁶⁸

The election of Bahadır Giray further complicated Ottoman–Russian relations. Bahadır Giray then sent a delegation to Istanbul to present the election petition and demand official documents for his enthronement. Ahmed Vâsîf does not provide the exact date of this new delegation; however, thanks to a report, it is possible to determine its date.⁶⁹ In this difficult situation, a consultation council was convened, and the abovementioned report informed the sultan about its decision. The text clearly states the meeting date is Sha‘bân 21. Though it does not provide information about the year, as Halil Hamid Efendi is listed among the participants as the director of the Imperial Arsenal, it is safe to date it for the year 1196. Thus, the meeting date is August 1, 1782 (Sha‘bân 21, 1196). The stipulations of the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty and Aynalıkavak Protocol about the status of the Crimean Khanate and the petitions of the Crimean population were read aloud; then it was asked what the best course of action would be. Since Bahadır Giray was elected as khan, should the documents approving his election be dispatched immediately, or were the two states bound to discuss the issue first? Then, the participants discussed the issue and decided to inform

68 SAT., AE., SABHI., 15/1349.

69 VÂSİF, *supra* note 2, at 12.

the Russian ambassador as stipulated in the treaties. In his written opinion on the document, the sultan stated that he found the council's decision logical and ordered the grand vizier to inform him about the forthcoming interview with the ambassador. However, if the ambassador wanted to communicate with his sovereign or totally refused the new elections and Şahin Giray rose to the throne again, it would mean destruction for the Crimean people. As a result, the Porte would be held responsible for it, and it would cause popular discontent. According to the sultan, establishing Bahadır Giray on the throne was the better option, and he wanted the grand vizier to focus on the issue.⁷⁰

The last week of August 1782 witnessed important changes in the Ottoman administration. A large fire that started on August 22 and lasted about three days destroyed many neighborhoods of Istanbul, and the Janissaries' inefficiency and lack of discipline in putting out the fire led to the dismissal of Grand Vizier Mehmed İzzet Pasha. He was dismissed on August 25, 1782 (Ramaḍān 16, 1196), and Yeğen Mehmed Pasha succeeded him. In addition, Ömer Vahid Efendi, the chief assistant, was replaced by Halil Hamid Efendi.⁷¹ With the increasing problems in foreign policy, the sultan probably wanted a more dynamic administration. A few weeks later, Shaykh al-Islam Mehmed Şerif Efendi was removed from his post, and Seyyid İbrahim Efendi, the then chief of the descendants of the Prophet, succeeded him on September 13, 1782 (Shawwāl 5, 1196).

These developments later evolved into a diplomatic crisis, resulting in a series of meetings between Ottoman government members and lengthy diplomatic negotiations with Russian ambassador Bulgakov, as Russia insisted that Şahin Giray was the legitimate ruler and backed him. In a letter dated June

70 SAT., HAT., 1429/58520, 29/12/1196. I could not find any document clearly mentioning sending the imperial patent for the approval of Bahadır Giray's election, yet this document shows the sultan's willingness to support his claim to the throne. Enverî is silent on the issue and claims that the Ottomans waited for the Russian ambassador's reply before issuing the patent: ENVERİ, *supra* note 67, at ff. 267/B–267/A. Fisher suggests that the Ottoman government approved the elections and issued the patent, and at the end of May 1782, the Tatar delegation returned to Crimea with the patent. ALAN W. FISHER, *THE RUSSIAN ANNEXATION OF THE CRIMEA, 1772–1783*, 123 (1970).

71 ENVERİ, *supra* note 67, at f. 270/A.

16, 1782, Catherine informed Potemkin about the uprising in Crimea and asked Potemkin to go to Crimea to support the khan.⁷² However, Şahin Giray used his loyal military forces in Crimea and Russian support to cruelly suppress his rivals and the people, ultimately alienating even Catherine, as his behavior could easily trigger another uprising. In a letter dated September 23, 1782, Catherine reminded Emperor Joseph about the secret clauses of their alliance and a possible partition scheme of the Ottoman Empire.⁷³ Joseph replied by listing the Ottoman territories he was interested in as part of the partition scheme, yet also mentioning the diplomatic and military difficulties that the opposition of France and Prussia could cause for Austria. France's passivity was vital; maybe it could be convinced with a share of the partition, such as Egypt.⁷⁴

Potemkin returned to St. Petersburg in October 1782, and in a long letter, probably written before Catherine's secret order (December 25, 1782) authorizing him to annex the Crimean Khanate, he urged Catherine to annex the khanate immediately. He was probably pointing out the ongoing Anglo–French War when he emphasized the urgency of the annexation. Then, he listed the advantages of annexation from political, security, and economic viewpoints.⁷⁵ Catherine signed a written order on December 25, 1782, that authorized the annexation of the khanate when

⁷² Smith, *supra* note 58, at 120–22.

⁷³ Alfred von Arneth published this letter in his book. Even though the book is in German, he published this and other letters between Catherine and Joseph in their original language, French. For the full text, see: ALFRED VON ARNETH, JOSEPH II UND KATHARINA VON RUSSLAND: IHR BRIEFWECHSEL 143–57 (1869). In this long letter, Catherine evaluated the situation of other monarchies of Europe and the weak state of the Ottoman Empire to convince Joseph that a war against the Ottoman Empire would be easy and would not create much diplomatic difficulty with France and Prussia. She also stated that Russia could demand only the Ottoman city of Özi and its environs between the Bug and Dniester rivers (“*la ville d’Oczakof avec son district entre les rivières du Bog and et du Dniester*”) and one or two islands in the Aegean Sea to improve her subjects’ trade and security (“*une ou deux îles dans l’Archipel pour sûreté et la facilité du commerce ses sujets*”) for the purpose of equality of acquisitions.

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 169–75.

⁷⁵ He wrote: “If you do not seize right now, there will come a time when everything we might now receive for free, we shall obtain for a high price.” SMITH, *supra* note 58, at 123–25.

certain conditions emerged.⁷⁶ Nolde has published this order in his book: Catherine mentioned the endless instability and the influence the Ottoman Empire had over the Crimean population, uprisings in the Crimean Khanate after becoming independent, and the high cost of suppressing them for Russia as the excuse for annexation. Still, the idea appears hypothetical as a plan to implement in case of a war with the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁷

In the fall of 1782, Russian forces entered Crimea and completed the conquest in October, installing Şahin Giray on the throne.⁷⁸ The Ottoman government protested against this intervention. Yet, in the first half of December, due to the alliance between Russia and Austria, their ambassadors presented ultimatums to the chief of scribes, Mehmed Hayrî Efendi. The Russian ultimatum included three demands. The first demand was for the right to trade and navigation in the Ottoman Empire. The second article was on Crimea. It urged the Porte to refrain from interfering either openly or covertly in the affairs related to the khanate. The Porte was reminded that the khan was an independent ruler and was not under the Porte's tutelage. The third demand was about the *jizya* tax to be paid by the autonomous principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.⁷⁹ The Austrian ultimatum warned that as Russia was its loyal ally, due to this firm alliance and the proximity of common borders between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the Emperor would not be a neutral observer about the mentioned disputes, and it included the same demands in the Russian note. Both ambassadors requested an urgent reply to their notes.⁸⁰

These ultimatums led the Ottoman government officials to convene a consultation council on December 14, 1782 (Muḥarram 8, 1197). In the view of the Ottoman statesmen, Austria and

76 De Madariaga, *supra* note 59, at 135.

77 BORIS NOLDE, 2 LA FORMATION DE L'EMPIRE RUSSE: ÉTUDES, NOTES ET DOCUMENTS 162–63 (1953).

78 FISHER, RUSSIAN, *supra* note 70, at 130.

79 VÂSIF, *supra* note 2, at 12.

80 *Id.* at 13. At this point, it must be added that the references to the alliance relationship in the ultimatums could be understood as a reference to Austria's accession to the League of Armed Neutrality in October 1781. However, as De Madariaga underlined, “. . . it should have been obvious that the alliance referred to in the ultimatums presented to the Porte could not have been the League of Armed Neutrality.” De Madariaga, *supra* note 59, at 134.

Russia had already deployed troops on the borders and were ready to attack anytime, while the Ottoman borders lacked such preparation. As a result, they decided to gain time for military preparations in case a war became inevitable and inform the ambassadors that the Ottoman government would continue to respect its treaty obligations.⁸¹

As the crisis escalated, on December 31, 1782 (Muḥarram 25, 1197), Mehmed Pasha was dismissed, and Halil Hamid Pasha succeeded him as grand vizier. Mustafa Efendi became his chief assistant.⁸² Thanks to his skills, Halil Hamid Pasha rose to that position at the age of forty-eight, a relatively young age compared to his predecessors; according to Bouquet's calculation, the average age of his predecessors was fifty-seven.⁸³ As the prospect of a war with Russia loomed over the horizon, this energetic and able grand vizier tried to reform the Ottoman military, especially the Janissary Corps, to maintain discipline and organize the deployment of troops and storage of food supplies and ammunition in strategic garrisons which his predecessors had mostly ignored.⁸⁴

Around the same time, the princes of the Ottoman autonomous principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia, who served as the intelligence gathering centers, started sending detailed intelligence reports. In his report dated December 30, 1782 (Muḥarram 24, 1197), Nikola (Prince of Wallachia, *Eflâk Voyvodası*) informed the Porte about the preparations of Austria and Russia: Russia was preparing its Baltic Fleet to deploy it in Italy.⁸⁵ In a report dated December 31, 1782 (Muḥarram 25, 1197), Aleksandr (Prince of Moldavia, *Boğdan Voyvodası*), also provided alarming information. According to his report, Russia had built three warships in Kherson, and despite the orders of the Tsarina to complete the building of three similar ships there by May, sixteen

81 VĀSİF, *supra* note 2, at 12–15.

82 AHMED TAIB, *supra* note 64, at 35; SÜREYYA, *supra* note 64, at 2:299; Uzunçarşılı, *supra* note 64, at 217; ENVERİ, *supra* note 67, at f. 284/A.

83 OLIVIER BOUQUET, VIE ET MORT D'UN GRAND VIZIR, HALIL HAMID PACHA (1736–1785) 135 (2022).

84 Uzunçarşılı, *supra* note 64, at 222–23.

85 SAT., C., HR., 72/3557, 24/01/1197.

workers had died of the plague, and the construction stopped.⁸⁶ Russia had twelve divisions alongside the Polish border, and generals like “Repnin” (Nikolai Repnin) and “Soltıkof” (Ivan Saltykov) were ready in their positions. The Russian generals waited for the Ottoman government’s reply to the ultimatums. Austria had issued sleighs for a quick deployment and winter clothing with sheepskin lining to its soldiers.⁸⁷ Nikola sent another alarming report on January 27, 1782 (Şafar 22, 1197). Austria was stepping up its military preparations, transporting arms and ammunition, and taking out large loans from the lenders in Brussels and Vienna. Like Russia, Austria awaited the Ottoman reply to the ultimatums. Austria was reinforcing its Danube Fleet, and 80,000 Austrian soldiers were deployed along the Ottoman border. A French source from Vienna provided the information that the emperor had a long interview with the French ambassador. Due to its relationship with Austria, France could not be of much help to the Ottoman Empire, and it could not oppose the Russian right to navigation. The same source stated that the rumors about an alliance between Austria and Russia were heard in Vienna, too, but he did not find that information reliable.⁸⁸ Another report by Nikola, dated February 8, 1783 (Rabī‘ al-Awwal 5, 1197), provided more information on Austria’s military preparations. Emperor Joseph inquired if Prussia would attack Austria in case of a war with the Ottoman Empire and received assurances. The workshops were preparing for war production, even on Sundays, considered holy by the Austrians. Russia’s Black Sea Fleet consisted of six large and fifteen medium- and small-sized ships. More importantly, due to the rumors in Vienna that France would take part in a war against Austria, the French ambassador, on various occasions, had made it clear that France would not intervene in the affairs concerning the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁶ Arriving in Kherson and writing to Catherine on May 24, 1783 (May 11, 1783, O.S.) Potemkin was very disappointed with the progress the Admiralty at Kherson had made regarding shipbuilding in Kherson. It had been decided to build seven ships in 1783, though, upon his return, he found that there was not enough wood and the existing wood had rotted. He immediately started to organize and establish a special commission. SMITH, *supra* note 58, at 132.

⁸⁷ SAT., HAT., 12/439, 25/01/1197.

⁸⁸ SAT., C., MTZ., 16/800, 23/02/1197.

⁸⁹ SAT., C., MTZ., 18/856, 05/11/1197.

intelligence reports showed the Ottomans the readiness levels of Austria and Russia to start a war even during winter, and they could clearly not rely on France for their cause.

In a letter dated January 17, 1783, Catherine invited Joseph to start formal negotiations with her regarding the partition of the Ottoman Empire and joint military planning.⁹⁰ Still, Joseph was hesitant in his response. In his letter to Catherine dated February 25, 1783, he was satisfied with the Porte's acceptance of the ultimatums and was very happy about the success of their joint *démarches*. Regarding Catherine's last letter, which invited him to start formal negotiations for partition and war planning, Joseph replied that "*le grand objet*" (the partition scheme) was for a situation in which the Ottoman Empire declared war and as this was not the case, he had no reason to attack.⁹¹ Catherine tried to convince Joseph in another letter, but Joseph argued that the Porte fulfilled its obligations.⁹²

Finally, Catherine shared the idea of annexing Crimea in her letter dated April 18, 1783. According to her, despite the promises they made in the face of the joint ultimatums, the Porte had sent an officer with a detachment to Taman to take Taman into the sultan's possession and exercise his sovereignty. After the Crimean Khan sent one of his officials as an envoy, the Turkish commander beheaded him publicly. She was now forced to bring about "a new situation" between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and she hoped that the Porte would prefer peace to war. If not, her forces were ready to enter the war and repel an attack.⁹³ In his reply, dated May 19, 1793, Joseph mentioned receiving the manifesto attached to her letter. However, there were differences between his and her positions about executing the goals. A quick look at his topographic and political situation would convince her. In addition, Russia's annexation of Crimea, Taman, and Kuban differed from the stipulations of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca and its following conventions.⁹⁴ Emperor Joseph did not want to be dragged into a war, given the difficult

90 VON ARNETH, *supra* note 73, at 182–88.

91 *Id.* at 188–91.

92 *Id.* at 191–95.

93 *Id.* at 193–95.

94 *Id.* at 202–4.

position of his empire. Yet, since it was his duty to convince France, he used this opportunity to finally inform France about the “defensive treaty” between Russia and Austria. If Austria did not want to lose Russia to an alliance with Prussia, then Austria had no choice but to support her, a fact that France could understand since its policy also aimed at containing Prussia. Still, Austria would obtain Moldavia and Wallachia from the Ottoman Empire if a war erupted.⁹⁵

Thanks to the new intelligence reports, the Ottomans started to receive more information about the situation in the khanate. Aleksandr, the Prince of Moldavia, sent a report dated April 20, 1783 (Jumādā al-Awwal 17, 1197). According to his sources Şahin Giray, with the aid of 26,000 Russian soldiers, had gained control over the khanate, and got twenty nobles killed while imprisoning his brother, who revolted against him. Austria and Russia wanted Wallachia and Moldavia to become independent. Austria was also interested in territories in Bosnia and the city of Belgrade. Venice had completed the construction of seven warships and started constructing three galleons and six frigates. It dispatched a flotilla consisting of eight galleons to the island of Corfu, along with orders to be ready.⁹⁶ This news indicated Venice’s possible intentions to attack the Ottoman possessions in the Mediterranean in cooperation with Russia.

Catherine was anxious to complete the annexation by publicly announcing the annexation manifesto as soon as possible since Britain and France signed the preliminaries in January 1783, and France could turn its attention to the east and start supporting the Ottoman position. However, there were delays. In his letter dated June 10, 1783, Potemkin replied to her criticisms about the delay and complained about the khan.⁹⁷ Finally, on July 23, 1783, Potemkin informed Catherine that the Crimean elites had taken the oath of allegiance.⁹⁸ A document in the SAT confirms this chronology. It is a letter that was sent

95 De Madariaga, *supra* note 59, at 138.

96 SAT., TSMA., E., 731/1, 17/05/1197.

97 He wrote: “At present the Khan has still not departed, which prevents me from publishing the manifestoes. The Tatars will not be free to act till he leaves the Crimea.” SMITH, *supra* note 58, at 134.

98 *Id.* at 142.

to the garrison commander of Hocabey (modern-day Odesa) by a resident of Crimea. The document states that Russians came to Karasu with their soldiers and set up a big tent. Their leader, named Kotamke and Grap (“*Kotamke ve Grap dimekle mâruf*,” referring to Prince Potemkin and his title in German, “*Graf*”), gathered all the leading people of the Crimea to that tent and read aloud the sublime edict of his monarch on July 21, 1783 (Sha‘bân 20, 1197).⁹⁹

Based on an Ottoman document, it is safe to assume that the Ottomans did not know about the annexation or the manifesto as of mid-June. However, they had suspicions about Russia’s intentions. A consultation council was convened on June 15, 1783 (Rajab 14, 1197). A report about Russia’s intention to annex the Crimean Khanate sent by the French ambassador through the chief translator of the Swedish embassy was read aloud.¹⁰⁰ The military situation and preparations were discussed. In addition, it was mentioned that Russia had about ten ships in Alikurna (Livorno in Italy) and was about to send twelve more ships. The movement of the Russian fleet from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean was seen as part of a plan to attack the Ottomans.¹⁰¹ The participants agreed to postpone the war decision to the following spring with the condition that preparations continue.¹⁰²

It seems the Ottomans learned about the annexation sometime in late October. Vâsîf provides a translation of the Russian annexation manifesto, which the Porte received. In addition, according to his account, the Ottoman statesmen discussed issuing a counter-declaration against the Russian manifesto since it blamed the Ottoman Empire for the chaos in the khanate. However, they decided that without completing the military preparations, issuing a declaration would invite the enemy to start hostilities, so they decided to postpone issuing

99 SAT., HAT., 23/1108, 29/12/1197.

100 It is possible that since France was an Austrian ally, the French ambassador did not want to convey that information officially and instead chose unofficial channels.

101 To my knowledge, the Russian Baltic Fleet was not deployed in the Mediterranean. It seems Potemkin suggested this move initially, but Catherine refused. In a letter dated May 3, 1783, he wrote, “Time will prove to you how wisely you acted in not sending the fleet.” SMITH, *supra* note 58, at 130.

102 SAT., HAT., 1415/57856, 14/07/1197.

it.¹⁰³ According to a report located in the SAT, the grand vizier informed the sultan about this council and its decision. The document does not contain any information on its date; however, it is possible to infer that it was written sometime in October as it mentions military preparations during the approaching winter. It clearly mentions the draft counter-declaration and the participants' decision to postpone issuing it. The participants believed that issuing it before the military preparations were completed would only serve to provoke the enemy and decided that the preparations must be completed by the spring and only after that the counter-declaration be issued. However, the sultan was not very happy with that decision. He penned his opinion and criticized the bureaucrats for postponing everything to the following spring.¹⁰⁴

The chief of scribes met the British ambassador on October 23, 1783 (Dhū 'l-Qa' da 26, 1197). Given how well-prepared Russia and Austria were, the ambassador warned against a possible war and shared Britain's intention to offer its good offices in the crisis. The chief of scribes insisted on France's involvement in the initiative. Shortly after, another consultation council convened, and after reading the intelligence reports, Ottoman officials discussed the possibility of a military attack by Russia and Austria during the winter months. They also discussed the precautions for ensuring discipline in the military.¹⁰⁵ An important topic on the agenda was whether to issue a declaration concerning the Russian violation of the peace treaty. The fleet admiral favored issuing it, and he argued that postponing it so long was inappropriate. Then, the grand vizier argued that the idea behind postponing it was to gain time until the spring since issuing it would mean declaring war, and because the preparations were not completed yet, it would lead to an enemy attack on the Ottoman territory. He also reminded the admiral that the previous consultation council decided to postpone its declaration unanimously. The admiral replied that the Russians might interpret postponing it further as a sign that the Ottoman Empire

103 VĀSIF, *supra* note 2, at 25–29.

104 SAT., HAT., 1451-80, 10/07/1203.

105 VĀSIF, *supra* note 2, at 32–33.

accepted this fait accompli in Crimea. Grand Vizier Halil Hamid Pasha and Fleet Admiral Hasan Pasha did not get along well; the latter was greatly respected and influenced Sultan Abdülhâmid, undermining the grand vizier's authority; they were heads of rival factions within the bureaucracy.¹⁰⁶ The fleet admiral supported a more aggressive policy against Russia. Shaykh al-Islam Mehmet Atâullah Efendi joined him this time and supported issuing the counter-declaration.¹⁰⁷ The participants were asked to vote, and it seems the opposition led by Hasan Pasha changed their minds, and they unanimously voted to issue it without further delay. It appears that since his influence over the sultan was known, Hasan Pasha's criticisms might have been regarded as the sultan's opinion, and by appealing to the participants' emotions, he could change their position on issuing the counter-declaration. However, according to Vâsîf, it was postponed again upon warnings by "the well-wishers" of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁸ At this point, one may argue that the grand vizier may have convinced the sultan.

The Ottomans regarded this annexation as a clear breach of the peace treaty of 1774, which had provided independence to the Crimean Khanate. The military preparations under the leadership of the new grand vizier continued, but there were many problems in equipping and deploying troops. The Ottoman statesmen tried to gain time through negotiations until the spring of 1784 and to involve Britain and France as mediators. However, sometime in early November, the Russian ambassador, Yakov Bulgakov, demanded an official document (*sened*) from the Ottoman government to modify the past treaties' clauses on the Crimean Khanate and to provide a de jure recognition of the Russian annexation of Crimea, Taman, and Kuban. He gave a translated text of the document to the chief of scribes and warned that it was impossible to modify even one letter of that document.¹⁰⁹

106 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Paşa'ya Dair*, 7–8 TÜRKİYAT MECMUASI 21 (1942); BOUQUET, *supra* note 83, at 305.

107 He was appointed to this post on May 20, 1783 (Cemaziyelahir 17, 1197), see: SÜREYYA, *supra* note 64, at 3:476.

108 VÂSİF, *supra* note 2, at 34.

109 *Id.* at 58–59.

While Austria and Russia gradually increased diplomatic and military pressure on the Porte, their alliance created suspicions in France and Prussia. It was shocking for France, technically speaking, an Austrian ally. It was especially alarming for Prussia as Russia and Austria could now deal a serious blow to Prussia in the event of war. This development led to some rapprochement between France and Prussia. However, despite his chancellor, Count Kaunitz-Rietberg, who strongly wished to obtain an equivalent from the Ottoman Empire to compensate for the Russian gains, Joseph hesitated and was unwilling to continue with the partition scheme. First, as he rightly observed, Russia had already gained what it wanted, but to get her gains, Austria would probably fight the whole Ottoman army in the Balkans while Russia would remain as “*inattaquables spectateurs*” in Crimea. In addition, Austria’s gains could provoke Prussia and expose Austria’s northern frontiers when Austria was fighting the Ottomans.¹¹⁰ It is possible that Frederick II managed to obtain the text of the secret Russian–Austrian alliance.¹¹¹ Joseph, at least, was sure of it or pretended to be sure to point out his difficult situation to Catherine as he wrote to her in his letter dated October 6, 1782.¹¹²

Though far from proving Joseph’s suspicions, probably sometime in January or February 1783, the Prussian chargé d’affaires warned the Ottomans that Austria and Russia formed an alliance and Russia would invade Crimea and Özi while Austria would invade Bosnian and Serbian provinces.¹¹³ Probably in the summer or autumn of 1783, Frederick sent a letter to his chargé d’affaires at the Porte, who then sent the translator to read the translation of this letter to the chief of scribes. According to Frederick, if the Ottomans tolerated and accepted the Crimean situation, the independent (actually autonomous) lands of Wallachia and Moldavia would share the same fate. Then, the Austrian

110 M. S. Anderson, *The Great Powers and the Russian Annexation of Crimea, 1783–4*, 37 *THE SLAVONIC AND EAST EUROPEAN REVIEW* 29 (1958).

111 De Madariaga, *supra* note 59, at 143.

112 Joseph wrote: “Je suis bien sûr que le Roi de Prussie est enformé avec détail de tout ce qui se traite entre nous deux, même dans le correspondance autographe.” VON ARNETH, *supra* note 73, at 162.

113 SAT., HAT., 18/799, 29/12/1197.

emperor would act similarly and conquer Belgrade, Serbia, and Karabuda provinces. However, if the Ottomans rejected the Russian demands, European circles believed that Austria's attitude would change.¹¹⁴

Sometime in fall 1783 (Dhū 'l-Qa' da 1197, September 28–October 27, 1783), Chief Assistant Mustafa Efendi was dismissed from his post, and Mehmed Hayrî, the chief of scribes, succeeded him. According to Enverî, Mustafa Efendi disagreed with the grand vizier on foreign policy; he argued that the grand vizier's war preparations were a waste of resources and that Russia did not intend to act against the Ottoman Empire. Upon this appointment, Mustafa Efendi, who served at that time as affixer of the sultan's monographic signature (*tevki'*), came to the post of chief of scribes.¹¹⁵

After these developments, on November 29, 1783 (Muḥarram 4, 1198), Ottoman bureaucrats convened to discuss the situation. Documents related to the Russian demand for the *sened* and King Frederick's letter were read to the participants. Then, the grand vizier reminded them that they were all beneficiaries of the empire. To fulfill their responsibility to the state that provides for them, they were required to share their views freely on the issue. After ordering the documents to be read aloud again, he addressed the participants and asked their opinions. There was silence. As a result, he suggested that the participants read the relevant documents in their residences and share their opinions later. He stated that he aimed to gain time with negotiations, at least until the following spring.¹¹⁶ After he gave his views about the military situation and the possibility of a multi-front war, the answer to be given to the Russian ambassador was read aloud, and the grand vizier claimed that he would try to ensure the appointment of a khan, rather than direct Russian rule, and also, gain time. The participants wanted

114 SAT., HAT., 22/1068, 29/12/1198. About this letter, see: VĀSIF, *supra* note 2, at 59–60.

115 ENVERÎ, *supra* note 67, at f. 316/B. Mehmed Süreyya only gives the year (1197/1783) for Mehmed Hayrî's appointment to this position and gives his name as Hayrî Mehmed. He was a poet and had a divân. He used Hayrî as his pseudonym, see SÜREYYA, *supra* note 67, at 2:320.

116 VĀSIF, *supra* note 2, at 63.

the government to continue preparations as if there would be a war.¹¹⁷

The fleet admiral met the British ambassador in December 1783. The ambassador advised avoiding a war given the military situation and assured the admiral that his government would see that no new demands would emerge from Russia and Austria.¹¹⁸ Sometime after this meeting, on December 15, 1783 (Muḥarram 20, 1198), the Ottoman delegation met the Russian ambassador and informed him that the British and French ambassadors had written to their governments for mediation, and until they received a reply from their governments, the Ottoman government must postpone giving an answer to the Russian demands. The delegation also implied their willingness to involve Britain and France as guarantors in the negotiations. The ambassador rejected any mediation and stated that his instructions required him to obtain a “yes-or-no answer” on issuing the *sened* by the Ottoman Empire. His fear was that thirty days had passed since he shared his government’s demands, and as deploying troops on the borders was costly, one day, his government could decide not to wait any longer and, instead, recall him.¹¹⁹

The next section will show how Ottoman statesmen evaluated the empire’s military and fiscal weakness and power asymmetry in the face of a war against Russia and Austria. Given the situation, the Ottoman statesmen regarded peace as necessary. This understanding of the situation would form the basis of their legitimizing efforts.

ACCEPTING THE EMPIRE’S MILITARY AND FISCAL WEAKNESS AND THE NECESSITY OF PEACE

Given the fact that Crimean khans were the successors of the Cinghisid dynasty, and their vassal status contributed greatly to the Ottoman claims of imperial leadership and legitimacy, the independence of the Crimean Khanate was already a great blow to their status. Still, the Ottoman sultans maintained their

117 *Id.* at 64–69.

118 *Id.* at 78–79.

119 *Id.* at 79–81.

right to exert influence, at least in the religious sphere, with the 1774 treaty. The Russian annexation of Crimea, Taman, and Kuban was a worse situation for the Ottomans as Muslims mostly populated these areas. The residents of these areas had sent many delegations to the Ottoman capital throughout the crisis, and their demands increased the psychological pressure on the Ottoman decision-makers as with the annexation, these people had to come under the rule of a Christian monarch. The gravity of the situation and the consequences of a possible decision made reaching a decision very difficult. Suggesting the acceptance of Russian demands was in conflict with all the values Ottoman statesmen stood for and could lead to loss of prestige and legitimacy, yet suggesting the other option, war, could lead to disastrous results and loss of even more territory and population.

The first of the documents transcribed at the end of this article can be classified as meeting minutes (*mazbata*).¹²⁰ It is written on an oversized (*battal*) paper.¹²¹ It is an important document as it shows the officials' names and titles, allowing us to understand their views on the empire's military and fiscal weakness and power asymmetry. It also provides an insight into their concerns about the domestic consequences of their decisions. Though its text does not contain any information about its date, it is dated December 18, 1783 (Muḥarram 23, 1198) in the catalog. As mentioned in the previous section, in the consultation council that gathered on November 29, 1783 (Muḥarram 4, 1198), when asked about their opinion, most government officials had chosen to remain silent given the gravity of the issue at stake. Grand Vizier Halil Hâmid Pasha realized this situation and tried to eliminate the potential impact of group pressure by asking the bureaucrats to share their views privately with the chief assistant. It is also possible that the sultan previously demanded it from the grand vizier to find out what his bureaucrats thought about the situation when freed from the risk of disagreeing with the grand vizier publicly. Due to the location of

120 SAT., TSMA., E., 705/29, 23/01/1198.

121 On the characteristics of Ottoman documents and different types of papers used, see: KÜTÜKOĞLU, *supra* note 1, at 24–70.

this document (the Topkapı Palace Fond), it is possible to argue that the sultan may have seen it. The bureaucrats visited Chief Assistant Mehmed Hayrî in his office, and the minutes of Fleet Admiral Hasan Pasha's interview with the British ambassador were read to them. Then, they stated their views on the Russian demand, and their opinions were recorded in this document.

It is safe to argue that Ahmed Vâsîf had access to this document as he included it almost verbatim in his account. The document has a page number on the top right margin, and it seems it is the ninth and last page, as the text only covers half of the paper. The names and titles of the officials were written in red ink, which has now partly faded away. When compared to the account provided by Ahmed Vâsîf, we can see that he started with the views of Süleyman Feyzi, the chief accountant, and followed the same order, yet, in the document, Süleyman Feyzi's first few sentences are missing as they were probably on the previous page.¹²² It is possible that the previous pages included the minutes of the interview between Fleet Admiral Hasan Pasha and Sir Robert Ainslie, the British ambassador. The document does not include any information as to its date. Still, from the date of the dispatch that Ainslie wrote to Fox in London about his meeting with the fleet admiral, this document can be dated a few days after December 6, 1783.¹²³

A total of five Ottoman statesmen visited the chief assistant in his office to share their views: Süleyman Feyzi (chief accountant),¹²⁴ Ahmed Nâzîf (director of the registry of landed

122 VÂSİF, *supra* note 2, at 82–87.

123 Ainslie to Fox, Foreign Office 78/4, no. 27, 10 December 1783, quoted in ALI İ. BAĞIŞ, *BRITAIN AND THE STRUGGLE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: SIR ROBERT AINSLIE'S EMBASSY TO ISTANBUL, 1776–1794*, 16 (1984).

124 As mentioned above, even though his name is not listed on the document, the document starts with his views (continuing from the absent previous page), and through a comparison with Vâsîf's account, it is possible to infer that it was Süleyman Feyzi. He was appointed to that post in November 1783. In 1777, he was appointed to the post of chief assistant to the grand vizier, and the next year, he was removed from that post to serve as superintendent of the Imperial Arsenal. In 1779, he became chief of scribes, though he was removed from the post in 1781. In 1786, he was again appointed to the post of chief assistant to the grand vizier, a post he served about five months before his removal. He died in 1794, see, SÜREYYA, *supra* note 64, at 3:90.

property),¹²⁵ Çelebi Mehmed (*tevkî'*),¹²⁶ Ebubekir Paşazâde Süleyman Beyefendi (*rûznamçe-i evvel*),¹²⁷ and Süleyman Penâh (director of the Imperial Kitchen).¹²⁸ Lâlelili Mustafa (former chief assistant)¹²⁹ chose to send a written document instead.

Süleyman Feyzi pointed out the disturbing fact that Russia had a fleet in the Black Sea of 150 pieces. It could also obtain naval support and ships from its allies in the Mediterranean, and Russian and Austrian troops were ready to attack alongside the borders. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire lacked the military capacity to stop them.¹³⁰ Though it was difficult to accept their demands, waiting longer to discuss the issue could lead to war. He suggested giving the reply decided at the consultation council (to convince the Russian ambassador to wait for a reply from the British and French governments). If he did not accept it and insisted on returning to his country, then the chief of scribes must tell him that they did not know he was determined to return to his country and ask for some more time so that the Ottoman government would reach an answer. Then, by convening the state officials, a decision must be made.

125 He is also known as Nâzif Ahmed. His father was Hacı Selim Ağa, who had close ties to Sultan Abdülhamid I. In addition to serving in other important posts, Ahmed Nâzif briefly served as chief assistant to the grand vizier in 1785. Then, he was appointed to that post again in 1788, serving for approximately one year. However, he and his brother were executed by the new sultan, Selim III, in June 1789. *Id.* at 4:562.

126 He was appointed as *tevkî'* and superintendent of the imperial mint in 1782, though he was appointed to the post of *nişancı* in October 1783. He served in other posts and died in 1800. His brother Lâlelili Mustafa also served in important government posts. *Id.* at 4:271–72.

127 His father was Ebubekir Paşa (Alâiyeli). He served in various government posts and died in 1785. *Id.* at 3:86–87.

128 He served at various posts and died in 1786. *Id.* at 3:87.

129 Also known as Lâleli Mustafa, he served in various government posts, and in 1781, he became chief assistant to the grand vizier, though he was removed from that post in January 1782. He served in other positions and died in 1798. *Id.* at 4:454–55.

130 This figure seems very much exaggerated. The Black Sea Fleet consisted of fifteen ships of the line and twenty frigates at that time. For the development of the Black Sea Fleet see John P. LeDonne, *Geopolitics, Logistics, and Grain: Russia's Ambitions in the Black Sea Basin, 1737–1834*, 28 THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORY REVIEW 28 (2006). The intelligence report sent by Nikola, prince of Wallachia, in February 1783 gave the number of fifteen ships of various sizes. Süleyman Feyzi's figure, 150, may also include merchant ships that could be equipped with guns.

Ahmed Nâzîf argued that the decision made at the consultation council was to convince the ambassador to wait a bit more until a reply came from Britain and France. However, after reading the minutes of the interview between the British ambassador and the fleet admiral, there was no doubt that the former would inform the Russian ambassador about the details of his interview. As a result, he would not accept the Ottoman demand and would insist on leaving for his country. The chief of scribes must still give the decided reply. If the ambassador made it clear that he would leave for his country, he must convince the ambassador to postpone the issue to another meeting. During this time, the Ottoman government would convene and discuss the issue. According to him, despite the difficulty of accepting the Russian demands on Crimea, it was known by all that the Ottoman Empire lacked the naval forces to protect its shores on the Black Sea and the army to protect its borders. If the ambassador left for his country, it would mean war, and it was known that Russian and Austrian forces were ready to march towards the Ottoman border.

Çelebi Mehmed mentioned that it was evident that the Russian ambassador would not accept waiting for a reply regarding English and French mediation. It was also evident that if a negative reply was given to him, being ready, Russian and Austrian troops would march to the Ottoman borders during winter, and Russian naval forces would attack the Ottoman Black Sea coast. The Ottoman Empire lacked the troops to defend its borders, and deploying troops would be difficult under winter conditions. In addition, the letter previously sent by Süleyman Pasha, Governor of the Çıldır Province, through himself, informed the government that Prince Heraclius of Tbilisi accepted Russian suzerainty and Russian forces entered the area and opened new roads in Georgia through the Ananur route suitable for carts. If the gates of war opened, Heraclius, in cooperation with the Russian forces, would attack Çıldır and Kars, and another Georgian prince, Solomon, would attack Çıldır, Faş, and Anakra. It had been just two months since the men who were sent to repair the Çıldır fortress arrived at their destination, and artillery pieces and ammunition intended for Çıldır could not be transported and were still in Trabzon. If war started, that front, too, would need

commanders, soldiers, large amounts of ammunition, food supplies, and money. The enemy would launch attacks on all fronts to create panic and diversion. These issues must be thoroughly taken into account, and for these reasons, in his opinion, rather than giving the ambassador a final answer, the chief of scribes must do his best to postpone the issue until another meeting when the government officials must come together to discuss the issue again. It was imperative to consider the situation of the Ottoman Empire and its enemies.

Ebubekir Paşazâde Süleyman (*rûznamçe-i evvel*) mentioned that due to his responsibilities with the Imperial Arsenal, the fleet admiral shared the interview with the British ambassador with him. The ambassador had assured the admiral that the Crimean problem would be solved without issuing any official document about the Russian annexation, and Austria would not come up with demands. In his view, if these guarantees were given, as the empire had preferred to remain silent in the last eight or nine years, continuing the same policy for a few years more was the better choice. According to him, the moment the gates of war opened, initially, thirty thousand purses would be needed. In addition, it would require the obedience and perseverance of the soldiers and sufficient preparations to resist two enemies on land and at sea. Given the lack of discipline among the soldiers, if the enemies were to launch their attacks from different directions, God forbid, with their lack of obedience to the senior commanders and officers, the result would be disastrous. This could be inferred from the incident in Sofia and the failure of the efforts to reinforce the border garrisons, such as Ismail, Silistre, and Sofia, and especially Adakale, which was directly facing the enemy, with five to six thousand janissaries even though in the last six to seven months, day and night, many orders were issued and officials were appointed for that purpose.¹³¹ He argued that power

131 He was probably referring to the riot against Eğribozlu Mehmed Paşa, the Governor of Rumeli Province, who was appointed to that post due to the possibility of war with Russia. He resided in Sofia, but his cruelties and corruption ignited a riot. The residents of Sofia and the soldiers deployed there forced him to flee after laying siege to his palace, causing a fight, and even launching cannon fire on his palace. He was deposed, and on December 1, 1783, Abdi Pasha was appointed to that post. VÂSİF, *supra* note 2, at 54–57.

and strength belong to God, and there is no doubt that God will help the weak and oppressed. However, even though only God can know the results of future developments, launching a war with two such powerful enemies for an uncertain victory despite the visible weakness was like drinking poison and hoping that the antidote would work. God forbid, if devastation occurred, it would be unfortunate for the Ottoman Empire. According to him, if the ambassador insisted on returning to his country, the chief of scribes must postpone the final answer to another meeting, and this issue must be discussed again.

Süleyman Penâh, director of the Imperial Kitchen, said the current campaign could not be compared to the past campaigns as Russia controlled the coasts of the Black Sea, and as was heard, it had a fleet consisting of 150 small and big ships deployed in the Azov Sea, around Yenikale (Kerch), Kerch Strait, and in the Dnieper River. Its soldiers were ready at the borders, Austria was also ready for hostilities, and its battalions facing the borders were waiting for a signal. If the final reply was given to the Russian ambassador and he returned to his country, it was evident that war would start. What would the result be if the infidel ships sailed into the Black Sea and soldiers marched against the borders like invading grasshoppers? It was even possible that they would attack the ships in the Black Sea. God forbid if grain and basic supplies were not provisioned to the city for thirty or forty days, then all hell would break loose, and they (government officials) would end up seeking their survival. While, now, there was no state of war, if a few of their ships fired a few shots against the suburbs outside the Bosphorus, panic would start in Istanbul, and the people would lose their heads. He argued that a potential campaign could not be compared to others. In the last (1768–74) and past campaigns, Russia did not have a fleet in the Black Sea. For this reason, according to his limited knowledge, the preferred option must be preventing war. If the Russian ambassador did not accept the reply and insisted on returning to his country, the chief of scribes must postpone the answer to the next meeting, and then, they must convene another consultation council to decide.

Former chief assistant Mustafa sent his opinion in a letter to the chief of scribes. He suggested that during his interview with the Russian ambassador, the chief of scribes should mention that Russia violated the peace treaty despite the Ottoman Empire's loyalty to its stipulations and the Ottoman government promised the ambassadors of Britain and France that a solution to the crisis would be found within the framework of the peace treaty which they communicated to their governments. As no reply had come yet, if the Ottoman government gave a "yes-or-no" answer, this would offend them. For this reason, after their replies arrived, the issue could be negotiated again.

This document provides detailed insights into the Ottoman statesmen's perceptions of the empire's military and financial weaknesses and what factors shaped their decisions about a war over Crimea. First of all, it seems that the Ottoman statesmen were aware of the lack of discipline in the Ottoman army and military deficiencies. The problem of discipline made the deployment of troops at strategic military positions difficult. The corruption in the Ottoman army was known to the grand vizier; there was a big discrepancy between the number of payrolls and the number of available soldiers ready for a campaign. Despite being a risky task, since many people obtained salary benefits, the grand vizier still made some modest attempts to ameliorate this problem by ordering headcounts in the garrisons and canceling the payrolls of those absent.¹³²

A visible concern among the participants was the need to fight a multi-front war against Russia, Austria, and their allies in the Caucasus, the Georgian princes. From their evaluations of the situation, they expected to fight at least on three fronts, covering the Balkans and the Caucasus. In addition, they expected the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to be the naval theater of operations since they expected that Russia could deploy its Baltic Fleet and use it against the Ottoman possessions. The memories of the Battle of Çeşme (1770) were still fresh; Fleet Admiral Hasan Pasha, commanding a galleon, was a veteran of that battle.¹³³ However, another major concern was the

132 Uzunçarşılı, *Sadrâzam*, *supra* note 64, at 231–32.

133 Uzunçarşılı, *Cezayirli*, *supra* note 106, at 20.

emergence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet which posed another challenge: the provisioning of the Ottoman capital. Providing an adequate supply of grain to this population at an affordable price was a priority of the Ottomans and a source of legitimacy.¹³⁴ Due to the cost-efficient nature of maritime transportation compared to overland transportation, ports and maritime routes were vital in provisioning the capital city. In 1758, 85 percent of grain consumed in Istanbul came from areas around the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara.¹³⁵

Provisioning the imperial capital represented the sultan's power and sovereignty, and its failure could lead to riots.¹³⁶ In case of war, the flow of food supplies would be disrupted. Bureaucrats feared an uprising that would harm their careers and even cost their lives. The "mob" of Istanbul, ignited by military failures, economic hardship, and rising prices, could take to the streets and demand "justice," these social forces had proved their capacity by even dethroning sultans in past revolts.¹³⁷ Between 1603 and 1703, six out of nine sultans' reigns ended with dethronement. Tezcan showed how the new political transformations limited the sultans' absolute authority as other power centers, such as the ulama and janissaries, emerged.¹³⁸ On July 17, 1703, six hundred soldiers whose pay had been in arrears for months staged a rebellion. The Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) and the territorial losses had already harmed the sultan's legitimacy and created discontent. In addition, Shaykh al-Islam Feyzullah Efendi, the sultan's tutor, had been

134 Rhoads Murphey, *Provisioning Istanbul: The State and Subsistence in the Early Modern Middle East*, 2 FOOD AND FOODWAYS 217 (1987).

135 FARIBA ZARINEBAF, MEDITERRANEAN ENCOUNTERS: TRADE AND PLURALISM IN EARLY MODERN GALATA 154 (2018). In addition to grain, the Black Sea basin was a significant source of other food supplies such as rice, butter, meat, and cheese. For different types of food supplied to Istanbul and their geographical origins, see Table 5 in CANDAN TURKKAN, FEEDING ISTANBUL: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBAN PROVISIONING 233–34 (2021).

136 *Id.* at 49.

137 For an evaluation of the urban revolts, the motivations, and connections of the urban rebels, see Marinos Sariyannis, *Unseen Rebels: The "Mob" of Istanbul as a Constituent of Ottoman Revolt, Seventeenth to Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 10 TURKISH HISTORICAL REVIEW 155 (2019).

138 BAKI TEZCAN, THE SECOND OTTOMAN EMPIRE: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD 5–7 (2010).

granted enormous control over the sultan and government. His nepotism and other grievances brought together a coalition of factions from the ulama, military, and merchants. Shaykh al-Islam Feyzullah Efendi was killed as a result of the rebellion, and the sultan was dethroned.¹³⁹

With these concerns and the possible disastrous results of a multi-front war in mind, the Ottoman statesmen sought to legitimize their acceptance of the Russian annexation by resorting to the principles of Islamic law. They were to invoke and adapt these principles to appease the bureaucracy and maybe the Ottoman public. These efforts will be mentioned in the next section.

LEGITIMIZING THE PEACE AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE RUSSIAN ANNEXATION

The Russian demand required a consultation council with a broader participation of the bureaucratic elites. But some people invited to the council had no detailed information about the ongoing crisis. A memorandum was prepared and sent to the sultan for approval. It was to be read aloud at the beginning of the council.¹⁴⁰ Upon reading the memorandum, the sultan issued an imperial decree, requesting a unanimous decision from the grand vizier and warning him and the participants: after the council, no one should complain that they were not properly informed about the situation and criticize the decision; those who prefer silence when they were expected to air their views freely and afterward criticize the handling of the crisis would be punished.¹⁴¹

The consultation council met on December 18, 1783 (Muḥarram 23, 1198).¹⁴² The memorandum was read aloud. Then, the grand vizier addressed the participants, clarifying that there were only two options: accepting the Russian demands or declaring war on Russia. At this point, he urged the participants to air their views

139 RIFA'AT ALI ABOU-EL-HAJ, *THE 1703 REBELLION AND THE STRUCTURE OF OTTOMAN POLITICS* 9–23 (1984).

140 VĀSIF, *supra* note 2, at 89.

141 *Id.* at 89–90.

142 *Id.* at 90.

freely, without fear.¹⁴³ During these lengthy discussions, Süleyman Penâh Efendi, director of the Imperial Kitchen, said that the financial and military situation of the state had become known to all participants by the reports that were read aloud. He shared his experience of the last Ottoman–Russian War (1768–74). At that time, there was only one enemy, Russia, but now Austria was also an enemy.¹⁴⁴ At this point, the fleet admiral interrupted him and gave the bad news: there were not two enemy states; there were now three or four. Venice could join, too, and the ruler of Georgia had already submitted to the Russian authority. He went on to say, “Under these circumstances, we have four enemies that are ready to attack us on land and sea in Anatolia and Rume-
lia.” Süleyman Penâh Efendi continued his speech and brought attention to the grain provisioning of Istanbul. A few Russian warships approaching the Black Sea entrance of the Bosphorus firing a few shells could easily cut off the supply lines. He warned that even now, the quality of bread had decreased due to the rumors of war. In the event of war, in his view, all state officials would be forced to stop thinking about the conduct of war and rather concentrate all their energy on food provision problems. He suggested accepting Russia’s demands.¹⁴⁵

The grand vizier addressed the participants and mentioned his efforts to prepare the state for war despite the short time—about one year—since he came to the post. The participants all affirmed that the grand vizier had done the best he could. He continued his speech, stating it was his duty to inform all that this level of preparation was far from sufficient compared to the enemy. He urged everyone to take this fact into account.¹⁴⁶ Süleyman Feyzi (first accountant)¹⁴⁷ agreed with the grand vizier. He stated that since Islamic law was binding for the Ottoman Empire, he requested the opinion of scholars and jurists. He seemed to be trying to save the administrative and military

143 I will only include some of the comments here since the full account can be found in: *Id.* at 90–99.

144 *Id.* at 92.

145 *Id.* at 93.

146 *Id.*

147 He was appointed to that post in November 1783, see: SÜREYYA. *supra* note 64, at 3:90.

bureaucracy from any responsibility by turning it into a decision of the ulama. Naturally, this would cause opposition in their ranks. Müftîzâde Ahmed Efendi and Tevfik Efendi responded by stating that the approval for war or peace necessitates having detailed information about the weaknesses of the state. Yet, the scholars had no information on these issues.¹⁴⁸ This comment prompted the grand vizier to reply. He argued that everything was made clear by the information provided at the council about the weakness of the state. Still, as the financial situation was one of the important sources of the weakness, the chief financial administrator could provide more information about it. Then he replied shortly by putting forward that even in the absence of a military campaign, the expenditures of the state exceeded its revenues.¹⁴⁹ Other bureaucrats gave evidence of the military and financial weakness of the state to successfully wage a war.¹⁵⁰

Sırrı Selim Efendi, director of the Imperial Arsenal, mentioned the costs of naval deployments as planned by the grand vizier and emphasized that they necessitated a great amount of money. Then he asked: “Under these conditions, how would it be possible to start a campaign?” He finished his speech by emphasizing that even the fleet admiral, a usually hawkish vizier, did not favor war. The fleet admiral agreed, suggesting that given the state of weakness, war would end in disaster.¹⁵¹ The grand vizier wanted the participants to openly and freely air their views. He reminded everyone that the sultan’s edict clearly stated that those who preferred silence in the council and later talked in a way like sowing the seeds of discord would be punished heavily.¹⁵²

After other participants shared their views, the shaykh al-Islam, *nakibü’l-eşrâf*, and Müftîzâde Ahmed Efendi started to discuss among themselves. By citing the principle of choosing between bad and worse, they argued that, in the current situation, peace with Russia should be preferred to war.¹⁵³ Then, the

148 VÂSİF, *supra* note 2, at 93.

149 *Id.* at 94.

150 *Id.*

151 *Id.* at 95.

152 *Id.* at 96.

153 *Id.*

chief assistant made important comments. He stated that if the council unanimously accepted the Russian demands, by working day and night, the financial and military situation should be improved, border provinces should be reinforced militarily, and war preparations should continue. Because the enemy was aware of the Ottomans' military and financial weaknesses, it would come up with new demands soon. If it were decided to accept the Russian demands, preparing the state for a war should be added to the council decision as its condition. This peace should not be considered eternal (*sulh-i müebbed*).¹⁵⁴

Finally, the shaykh al-Islam wanted to hear the opinion of the head of the fatwa department (*fetva emini*). The latter replied, "Due to the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire and its limited military power, Islamic law approves accepting the Russian demands." Müftüzâde Efendi stated that he agreed with this view. The grand vizier and shaykh al-Islam started to address all participants, asking the majority individually if they agreed with accepting the Russian demands. They all agreed and approved.¹⁵⁵

Ahmed Vâsîf, too, portrayed this decision as a necessity. He cited the well known principles of Islamic law, choosing the lesser evil and the necessity/duress that made normally prohibited acts acceptable. He likened the situation to the amputation of one limb to save the rest of the body. He emphasized the temporary nature of the Russian annexation and peace, because once the state gained enough strength, this situation would be corrected. Menchinger pointed out how Ahmed Vâsîf's arguments were built upon the arguments that historian Mustafa Naîmâ put forward to legitimize the peace made through the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. In addition, his views showed some similarities to the contemporary bureaucrat Dürrî Mehmed's work that defended the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty (1774) and argued about the necessity of reforms after pointing out to the decaying military and fiscal system of the empire. Dürrî Mehmed underlined the necessity of peace and reform for liberating Crimea and opposed opening a premature war without sufficient preparations.

¹⁵⁴ *Id.* at 97.

¹⁵⁵ *Id.* at 98.

He used the case of Saladin to legitimize his point and explained how, after completing the preparations, he was able to take Jerusalem and Damascus back from the Crusaders in ten years.¹⁵⁶

On December 22, 1783, Austrian ambassador/nuncio Herbert presented a note to the Porte, which clarified that Austria would join and support Russia in case of war.¹⁵⁷ Another consultation council with a limited number of participants took place. Süleyman Feyzi pointed out the fact that many Muslims were living in Crimea and Kuban, and he stated his concerns about their future treatment under Russian rule. Another bureaucrat, probably the chief assistant, told him this issue had been discussed with the Russian ambassador previously, and the ambassador made it clear through his translator that no stipulation to that end could be added to the official text of the *sened* that Russia requested. Süleyman Penâh argued that if Russia refused the Ottoman demand, then it would be necessary to oppose it; but, the state lacked such power, and since *jihād* becomes an obligation only when one has the capability, given the fact that the state lacked it, then, they were exempt from this obligation.¹⁵⁸ Süleyman Feyzi replied by stating that his intention was not to insist on imposing such a solution; however, it was evident that for approving the act of leaving those Muslims under Russian rule, government officials would become “targets to the arrows of condemnation and scolding.” As a result, this issue was referred to the grand vizier. In his reply, he pointed out that, despite their calls for aid, the state was in no position to help and, in fact, needed aid, and he asked this situation to be considered.

Süleyman Feyzi pointed out another concern: since many Crimean elites and people lived in the Rumelia, they could claim that the Ottomans left their nation under infidel rule, and other Ottoman subjects could agree with this agitation and join them. To be prepared for such a situation and to protect the government officials from such criticisms, at least this

156 *Id.* at 99; MENCHINGER, *supra* note 2, at 88–89. On Dürri Mehmed and his work, *Nuhbetü'l-emel fî tenkîhi'l-fesâdi ve'l-halel*, see: Ali İbrahim Savaş, *Lâyihâ Geleneği içinde XVIII. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İslahat Projelerindeki Tespit ve Teklifler*, 9 BİLİG 92–96, 87–114 (1999).

157 Anderson, *supra* note 110, at 39.

158 VÂSİF, *supra* note 2, at 102.

issue must be demanded from the ambassador so that it would be included in the meeting's minutes and the bureaucrats would be able to say they did whatever they could, but the ambassador refused it. This necessitated a member of the ulama to be present, and Müftûzâde Ahmed was called. Süleyman Penâh¹⁵⁹ also pointed out that having sufficient strength was a condition for assisting other Muslims and gave the example of Muslim prisoners of war kept in Malta who could not be saved with a military campaign. He suggested that this issue be brought to the ambassador's consideration in a friendly manner during the negotiations. Later on, the ambassador rejected this request.¹⁶⁰ However, this last meeting clearly showed that even though the bureaucrats were concerned about the fate of the Crimeans, they were also worried about the legitimacy of such a decision and the possible blame that could bring to themselves or even trigger a rebellion. For this reason, they at least wanted the issue to be mentioned to the ambassador and, this way, to be included in the meeting's minutes. It might be argued that this evidence would be used to convince other Ottoman elites, maybe the ulama and factions within the bureaucracy who could influence public opinion, that everything possible was done to protect the Crimean Muslims.

The second document I will include in my article is a report (*telhis*) by the grand vizier presented to the sultan.¹⁶¹ It is written on a *telhis*-sized paper, and upon reading the grand vizier's report, the sultan inscribed his edict on it. It showcases the efforts to legitimize the government's decision through Islamic law and a legal opinion. From the document, we understand that when Grand Vizier Halil Hamid Pasha visited the sultan some days before, the sultan emphasized that the *sened* would be issued because of the state's weakness, and asked a question: When, with God's help, who is invincible, sufficient power to avenge the enemy is accumulated, would it be lawful to

159 Here, Vâsîf refers to him as "Morahî Süleyman Efendi" due to his birthplace and to avoid confusion with other participants.

160 *Id.* at 104.

161 SAT., HAT., 1451/77, 10/08/1203. Its text does not contain any information about its date, and the date provided in the catalog is May 6, 1789 (Sha' bân 10, 1203). Yet, due to its contents, it can be dated to December 1783 or early 1784.

terminate the treaty and declare a campaign against the enemy? Upon this question, the grand vizier continued, he had asked for a legal opinion (*fetva*), and a draft was penned and then read to the shaykh al-Islam, who issued his opinion. The grand vizier informed the sultan that to be stored, the document would be presented to him.

The sultan wrote his opinion on this document. He argued that the document that contained the legal opinion, due to its legal nature, must contain the shaykh al-Islam's signature and seal, and he approved its delivery to him for safekeeping. The sultan ended the document with a prayer showing his intention to declare war against and avenge Russia when the state accumulated enough strength for a campaign.

I could not locate in the SAT the text of the legal opinion for which the sultan asked. Yet, it is very much in accordance with Islamic law, and since, according to the Ottoman statesmen, Russia violated the treaty by annexing the independent Crimean Khanate, it made the treaty null and void, ending the state of peace between the two empires. Hence, the Ottomans, in their view, gained the right to retaliate against that violation militarily. However, due to their weakness at that time, they chose to postpone exercising that right. It seems that the sultan and grand vizier wanted to legitimize the Ottoman acceptance of the annexation by showing that it was only temporary and that this wrong would be corrected once enough strength was gained. It also can be argued that the sultan did not want to leave anything to chance and wanted the legal opinion to be binding, so he insisted on having the shaykh al-Islam's signature and seal on it. It is interesting that he wanted to keep that document, maybe to use it to legitimize his own situation in case of a future rebellion.

The Ottoman Empire officially recognized the Russian annexation of the Crimean Khanate, and the Ottoman delegates signed and presented the *sened* demanded by the Russian ambassador on January 9, 1784 (Şafar 15, 1198). Remarkably, the Ottoman delegation consisted of three delegates who represented the three branches of the Ottoman bureaucracy as if to show their unity and approval: Hasan Pasha (fleet admiral),

Müftîzâde Ahmed (former qâdî of Istanbul), and Mustafa Efendi (chief of scribes).¹⁶²

CONCLUSION

The legitimacy of the sultanic authority was a great concern for sultans in the late Ottoman Empire since defeats and territorial losses combined with other problems could provoke rebellions and result in dethronement. It was difficult for the Ottomans to accept the Russian violation of the peace treaty and remain indifferent to the Crimean Muslims' pleas for assistance as they came under the rule of a Christian power. Worse, this loss was not a result of a war; the empire faced a *fait accompli* and was forced to accept it without firing a shot. On the other hand, the Ottoman statesmen were aware of the empire's military and financial weaknesses and refrained from declaring war against Russia. Facing this situation, the sultan tried to maintain his legitimacy by using the consultation councils as a decision-making body in order to reach a bureaucratic consensus and by invoking the principles of Islamic law on power imbalance in war decisions and termination of treaties. The bureaucrats benefited from the precedents set by the Prophet and other Muslim rulers and scholarly works that favored a temporary peace forced by the conditions. At the same time, they had to consider the domestic consequences of their decision and legal/religious legitimization also served as a tool that could limit the possibility of a rebellion. This search for legitimacy in the face of crisis with the empire's more powerful enemies and popular uprisings can account for the increasing influence of the ulama in this period.

162 SAT., A., DVNS., DVE., D., 083/1, pp.158-160. The transcription of this important document, which consisted of three articles, was published, see: Osman Köse, "Osmanlı Devleti Tarafından Kırım ile İlgili Rusya'ya Verilen Resmi Belge 'Sened' (1784)," *History Studies* 2, no. 2 (2010), 353-362.

TRANSCRIPTION OF DOCUMENT I (SAT, TSMA.-E., 705/29)

1. irili ufaklı yüz elli pâre gemisi olduğundan başka, Ak Deniz’de dahi mütteliklerinden küllî donanma peydâ edeceği ve Mosku ve Nemçe’nin askerleri hudud başlarında müheyyâ oldukları ecilden,
2. def’a varacak hücumları ve serhadlerde el’ân anlara mukavemet ve müdafaaya vâfi askerimizin adem-i vücudu hatıra geldikçe ârâm ve rahatı selb ediyor. Bunların tekliflerini kabul müşkil
3. olduğu gibi, vakt-i mütâla’a ile ebvâb-ı cengin küşâdı dahi işkâl olduğu bî-iştibâhdır. Hoşimdi gayri çare nedir? Meclis-i meşveretde karar bulan cevâb bir kerre ilçiyeye virülsün, lâkin
4. kabul etmeyüb devletine avdetini metâlib ve ısrâr mefhum olduğu takdirde, re’is efendi kendüye hitâb idüb, ilçi bey, senin böyle devletime avdet iderim diyeceğin bizim ma’lûmumuz değil idi
5. çünkü me’mûriyetin böyle imiş, sûret-i hâli efendilerimize ifade edelim, ne gûne re’y buyururlar ise sana beyân ideriz kelâmını edâ ve hâkîmâne meclisi vâkt-i âhara ta’lik eylesün, yine bir yere gelünüb bir kat
6. dahi söyleşilüb zirâ avâkıb-ı kârı fikr lâzımdır makâlâtını irâd eyledi. Mükâleme-i mezbûre hâlâ Defter Emîni Nâzîf Ahmed Efendi bendelerine dahi gösterildikde, ilçiyeye irâd olunacak cevâb Kırım keyfiyeti
7. Françe ve İngiltere devletlerine ilçileri taraflarından yazıldı, anlardan ecvibe gelmedikçe Devlet-i ‘Aliyye buna lâ ve na’am diyemez kelâmından ibâret olacak idi. İşbu mükâlemenin mefhumuna göre elbette İngiltere
8. ilçisi kapudan paşa hazretleri ile mülâkâtını ve ne söz söylediğini Rusya ilçisine söylemiştir. Bu sûretde ilçiyeye mersum verilecek cevâbı ısgâ eylemeyüb İngiltere devletinin vürûd edecek haberini
9. ilçileri size ifâde itdi ve Françe devletine dahi devletimiz kat’ice mukaddem cevâb verdi makâlini dermeyân edeceği mukarrerdir. Mesfûr Rusya ilçisi işildikğine göre adem-i mümâşât sözünü

10. aldıkda avdet edecek imiş, meclis-i mülâkâtta avd ve in-sırâfını tebyin ve ısrar ve bizim taraftan dahi sen bilirsün mu'âmelesi gösterildiği gibi muhârebe kapıları açılacağı ve Nemçe ve Rusyalu
11. ikisi birden müheyya olmalarıyla serhaddâta yürüyecekleri bedhîdir. Hududlarımızda a'dâyı mukabeleye vâfi asâkir ve Karadeniz'de sevâhil-i İslamiye'yi muhâreseye kâfi ceng sefâinimiz
12. olmadığı cümleye ma'lûmdur, bu bâbda kulûba hayret ârız olacak şeydir. Kırım maddesini kabûl müşkil ve reddinde hudûs-ı ceng muhakkak ve serhaddâtın gereği gibi el virecek asâkirden
13. hulüvvu mukarrer ve zamâna muhtac idüğü ve a'dâ vakit vermeyeceği nümâyân olmağın, re'is efendi ilçî ile mülâkâtında mücâb olmayub avdet sadedinde musır olduğı hâlde, hakîmâne ne işlerse
14. işleyüb, cevâb-ı kat'îyi meclis-i âhara ta'lik eylemesi ve ba'dehû bir yere gelinüb tekrâr Bâb-ı âsaffi'de bir meşveret-i umûmîyye akd ve ilâcî müşâvere olunması münâsib mülâhaza olunur deyû takrir eyledi.
15. hâlâ Tevki'i Çelebi Mehmed Efendi dahi kapudân paşa ve İngiltere ilçisinin mükâlemelerini kırâ'ât ve kelâma ibtidâr idüb, ilçî-i mesfûr verilecek cevâbı ısga eylemeyeceği zâhîr oldu.
16. buna kat'î cevâb verildikde beher hâl muharebe avdet ve Rusyalu ve Nemçelü kış demeyüb hududlarımızda ve Moskulu sefâin-i menzûlesi Karadeniz'e hücum edecekleri bi-iştibahdır. Bu suretde
17. bizim her cânibde müdâfa'a-i a'dâya vâfiye asâkirimiz olmadığı ve eyyâm-ı şitâda askeri istediğimiz gibi ihrâc ve düşman karşusuna îsâle imkân olamayacağı (...) [vâzihâtla?] Tiflis hânı Ereklî Hân
18. didikleri mel'un Moskulu'ya teba'iyet Ananur¹⁶³ tarihiyle Moskulu Tiflis ve Gürcistan'a arabalar işler yollar açdıkları ve tabur-ı makhûrunun ucu Tiflis'e geldiği bundan akdemce Çıldır Valisi

¹⁶³ Ananuri in Georgia. It was a military stronghold on the bank of the Aragvi River.

19. Süleyman Paşa'nın benim yedimle vürûd eden tahrirâtında ve gönderdiği havâdis kağıdlarında muharrer olmağ- la, ebvâb-ı ceng açıldığı gibi, Ereklı Hân ma'iyetinde olan Mosku askeri ile
20. Çıldır eyaleti ve Kars etrâfına ve Açıkbaş Hâkimi Solomon bî-imân dahi bir taraftan Çıldır ve Faş ve Anakra'ya sû-be-sû itâle-i pâ-y-i tecâvüz idecekleri muhakkaktır. Henüz
21. Çıldır kılâ'mını tâ'mire me'mûr binâ emînleri mahalline varalı iki ay oldu ve gönderilen tob ve mühimmât Trabzon'dan nâkl olunamadı. Ol havâli dahi müte'addid seraskerlere ve külliyetlü asâkir
22. ve mühimmâta ve akçe ve zehâire muhtâcdır. Şirâze söküldüğü halde küffâr-ı hâk-sâr her cânibden bize şaşkınlık virmek için taraf taraf baş gösterecektir. Bunlar etrâflıca mûlahâza
23. olunub, Mosku ilçisine meclis-i mülâkâtda kat'î cevâb verilmekten ise, hâkîmâne meclis-i âhara ta'lik ve tekrâr bu husus cümle ile bir kât dahi müşâvere olunmasını emr-i sevâb zân iderim, zirâ avâkıb-i kârı
24. ve Devlet-i 'Aliyye'nin ahvâlini ve düşmânlarımızın hâllerini mütâla'a ve muvâzene lâzımdır deyû takrîr ider. Rûzname-i evvel Ebubekir Paşa-zâde Süleyman Beyefendi bendeleri, kapudan paşa hazretleriyle İngiltere ilçisinin
25. mükâlemesini ledelmütâla'a Tersâne-i âmireye me'mûriyetim sebebiyle bu mükâlemeyi kapudan paşa hazretleri bana tamâmca ifade etdi ve şifâhen bana söylediği kelimâtta Kırım maddesi sened virilmeksizin
26. bir sûret kabûl edeceğini ve Nemçelü tarafından bir teklif zuhur etmeyeceğini ta'ahhüd eyleyeceğini İngiltere ilçisi mecliste beyân eylediğini dahi söyledi. Müşârüni- leyh hazretlerinin dedikleri gibi İngiltere ilçisi sened i'tâ olunmaksızın Kırım hususunda devlet-i ebed-müddetin sükûtiyle işe râbîta virüb, Nemçelünün dahi bir gûne teklifleri olmayacağını tanzîm eylediği sûretde, kendü aklı- kâsırına göre sekiz-dokuz

28. senedir sükût olunduğu gibi birkaç sene dahi iğmâz mu'âmelesini tecviz ederdim, zirâ ceng kapuları açıldıkda ibtidâ otuz bin kise nakde ve asâkirin itâ'at ve sebât-larına
29. ve berren ve bahren iki düşmana mukâvemete vâfi tertibâ-ta muhtâc, askerimizin adem-i zabıtâları Rabbülâlemîn'e sığınarak a'dâ taraf taraf hücum eyledikleri hâlde vüzerâ ve zabitâna adem-i inkıyâd ile
30. perişânlık göstermeleri Sofya'da vuku' bulan hâdiseden ve altı-yedi aydır leyl-ü-nehâr bu kadar evâmîr-i ekîde ısdâr ve mübâşirler tâ'yin olunmuşiken henüz serhâdlerimizde ve İsmâ'il ve Silistre
31. ve Sofya'ya ve husûsâ düşmanın muvâcehesinde kâin Ada-kal'asına bi-ecma'îha beş-altı bin yeniçeri îsâl olunamadığından, istidlâl olunur kuvvet ve kudret Hakk'ın olub, âciz ve mazlûma
32. mu'în olacağından eğerçi şübhemiz yokdur, lâkin, âdât-ı ilâhiyye her şey'i esbâb ile halk edegeldiği dahi inkâr olunamaz. Havâdis-i âtiyennin netâyicine ilm Allah'a mahsûs olmağla, esbâb-ı zâhirede
33. min-küllî'l-vücuha fıkdan derkâr iken, nusret-i gaybiyyeye istinâden böyle kavî düşmanlar ile ebvâb-ı harbi açmak tiryâkin hâsiyyet-i mechûlesine iğtirar birle zehr-i mülhîki içmek gibidir, Hudâ göstermeye,
34. bâdî-i emirde perişânlık dahi olur ise, Devlet-i 'Aliyye'ye yazık olur. Muhassal-ı kelâm, re'is efendi ilçî ile mülâkâtta ilçî-i mesfûr mülzem olmayub, elbette devletime avdet ederim dirse, hakîmâne
35. iskât ve tekrâr bu emr-i hatîrî cümle ile bir kat dahi müşâvere için cevâb-ı kat'îyi meclis-i diğere ta'lîk eylemesi münâsib olmak gerek, yine fermân efendilerimizindir deyû takrîr ider.
36. Hâlâ Matbah-ı âmire Emîni Süleyman Penâh Efendi kulları dahi getürdilüb sâlifülbeyân mukâleme kâğıdı ira'et olundukda, kelâma ibtidâr idüb, bu sefer, evvelki seferlere kıyâs olunamaz. Karadeniz'in
37. sahilleri Moskulu'nun yed-i tasarruflarında ve işitildiğine göre yüz elli pâre kebîr ve sagir gemileri Azak

- Denizi ve Kerş ve Yenikal'a Boğazı ve Özi suyu içinde mevcut, askerleri hudud başlarında
38. amâde ve Nemçelü dahi mu'adâta müheyyâ ve tabur-ı mesfûrları serhâdler karşularında işârete muntâzır olmalarıyle, Mosku ilçisine cevâb-ı kat'î î'tâ ve devletine avdet eylediği gibi, harb-i kıyâm ideceği zâhîrdir.
39. Küffâr gemileri Bahr-i Siyâh'a ve asâkir-i menzûleleri serhâdlerimizde bir cerâd-ı munteşir gibi yürüdüklerinde hâl neye varır? Karadeniz'e çıkan gemilerinde [gemilerimize?] dahi hücum etmeleri bedihîdir. Bu şehre Hakk'a sığınarak otuz-
40. kırk gün zehâir ve levâzım-ı zârûriyye gelmese, başımızda kıyâmet kopar ve kendü derdimize düşeriz. Henüz bir gâ'ile yoğiken, ale'l-gafle a'dânın birkaç teknesi boğazdan taşralarda
41. birkaç tob atsa, İstanbul'a gulgule düşüb ahâlisi birbirine girmekle, cümlemizi şaşururlar. İşte, bu sefer evvelle kıyâs olunamaz dediğimin sırrı budur. Geçen seferde ve eslâfda Bahr-i Siyâh'da
42. Moskov'un donanması yoğidi. Benim akl-ı kâsırıma kalırsa, Allah'a sığınarak, def'aten vâhideten ceng kapuları açılmamağa sa'y olunmak vâcibdir. Hâsıl-ı kelâm, karardâde olan cevâbı Mosku ilçisi
43. ısga eylemeyüb avdet iderim cevâbında ısrar gösterdiği takdirde, re'is efendi cevâb-ı kat'îyi meclis-i âhara ta'lik ve tekrar akd-i meşveret ve bade'l-istişare ne de karâr buyurulursa, ana göre
44. 'amel olunmak lâzımdır deyû ifade eyledi. Kethüdâ-yi esbâk Lâlelili el-hâc Mustafa Efendi re'yini şifâhen söylemeksizin re'is efendi kullarına tahrîren ifâde etmekle, anın me'al-i muhassal dahi ilçiyeye Rusyalu'nun
45. âhdinde durmadıklarını ve Devlet-i 'Aliyye'nin sebât-ı kâdimine dâir ba'zı akvâl îrâd olunarak şu Kırım maddesinin âhdnâmelere tevfiik olunarak bir nizâm-ı müstahsene rabtiçün İngiltere ve Françe
46. ilçilerine söz virülüb, anlar dahi devletlerine tahrirât-larıyle henüz cevâb gelmedi, böyle iki devlet-i azîmeye

- söz verilmişiken, cevâbları kablelvürûdunda lâ ve na'am cevâbı verilmek anların
47. iğbirârlarını mucîb olur, bakalım, anlardan cevâb gelsün, sonra görüşürüz cevâbı virilmek mazmûnundan 'ibârettir.

TRANSCRIPTION OF DOCUMENT II (SAT, HAT 1451/77)

hüve

1. Şevketlû, kerâmetlû, mehâbetlû, kudretlû, velîni'metim efendim,
2. Çâkerleri huzur-u hümâyûn-u kerâmet menfurlarında iken Kırım ve Taman ve Kuban için Rusyaluya verilecek sened ber muktezâ-yı vâkt-ü-hâl
3. adem-i kudret hasebiyle 'it'â olunacaktır, 'avn-ü inâyet-i muntekim-i kakhâr ile a'dâdan ahz-ı sâr edebilecek kuvvet-ü-miknet husûle geldiği
4. vakt, nakz-ı 'ahd ile düşmân üzerine sefer etmekte cevâz-ı şer'-i şerîf ne vechile olduğu su'al-i hümâyûn buyurulmuşidi. Husûs-u mezbûrun
5. vech-i şer'îsi semâhatlû efendi dâ'îlerinden su'al ve istiftâ' için bir kıt'a fetvâ-yı şerîfe sûreti kaleme aldırılmağla manzûr-u mekârim mevfûr
6. dâverâneleri buyurulmak için merfû'-ı 'atebe-i 'ulyâyı dâverâneleri kılındığı ve ba'de efendi-i müşarünileyh dâ'îlerine irâ'et ve fetvâ-yı
7. şerîfesi ahz ve nezd-i hümâyûnlarında hıfz için huzûr-u şahânelerine 'arz ve takdîm olunacağı ve İsmâ'il'den gelen tertib-i 'asker
8. resmi tahrîrâtdan girü kalmağla hakpây-ı mülûkânelerine şimdi 'arz olduğu ma'lûm-u dâverâneleri buyurulduk da emr-ü fermân şevketlû,
9. kerâmetlû, kudretlû, hamiiyetlû, velîni'metim efendim pâdişâhım hazretlerindir.

(Hatt-ı hümâyûn)

(B)

- 1) Benim vezîrim,
- 2) Sûret-i fetva-i şerîf vech-i şer'îsi
- 3) mucîbince hâlâ mesned-i fetva
- 4) olan semâhatlü efendi dâ'imizin
- 5) fetva-i şerîfesi imzâ ve mühriyle
- 6) alınub taraf-ı hümâyûnumuza hıfz olmak
- 7) içün irsâli münâsibdir.

(A)

- 1) İsmâ'il'den gelen tertib-i 'asker resmi
- 2) mânzurum ve ma'lûmum olmuştur
- 3) Cenâb-ı hâzret-i müntekim-ül-kahhâr olan Allâh azze şânühü (...) ¹⁶⁴
- 4) ittifâk ve gönül birliği ile bu dinsize (...)
- 5) ahz-i intikâm müyesser eyleye. Amin
- 6) yâ hayrül-nâsîrîn.

Reverse page ¹⁶⁵

1. Sâdr-ı fetva semahâtlü efendimiz tarafına virilmek için nezd-i sâdr-ı 'âzâmîye (...)
2. şahsa virile. ¹⁶⁶

164 This sentence in the document is difficult to read so it is with great caution that I have interpreted it as shown in the transcription.

165 Reverse pages of documents were used for writing instructions on the next process or the authority the document would go through.

166 This inscription is located on the bottom right of the page, written in the opposite direction. There is another inscription near the top left margin of the document but due to ink smudges, I could not read it.