

## 2

# The Circle of Justice and the Napoleonic Wars

What implications did the French expedition to Egypt in 1798 have for the wider Ottoman world? In the rich literature on the history of Bonaparte's enterprise, this question has usually received little attention.<sup>1</sup> This is unfortunate, because taking into account how Sultan Selim III and his ministers perceived and reacted to the French venture enables us to see the limits of the French imperial vision and knowledge of the 'Orient' as well as the workings of the diverse relational dynamics that constituted the unfolding Eastern Question.

We discussed in Chapter 1 the eighteenth-century inter-imperial dynamics among the European Powers to some extent, as well as the intra-elite debates in France with respect to how to deal with the alleged febleness of the Ottoman Empire. Here we will switch our focus to the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul. After the humiliating defeats at the hands of Romanovs and Habsburgs since the late seventeenth century, and the mounting domestic unrest in different areas of their empire, the Ottoman sultans and their ministers and advisers also came to believe that their empire was decadent. How to deal with her alleged febleness was first and foremost an Ottoman question.

The Ottoman response to this was an attempt to revive their empire by means of reforms that would ensure the efficacy of her guiding principle, the 'circle of justice' (*dair-i adalet*). The ruling elites in Istanbul differed among themselves as to how to do this. Yet by the 1790s they realized that the success of domestic reform required redefining the position of their empire in the world, warranting her standing among the major European Powers, and reconstructing her identity as an eternal polity—not one doomed to fall.

Consequently, Ottoman ministers altered both the tone and nature of their diplomacy with their European neighbours. The sultan's empire sprang up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries not only as a stationary object, as traditional, Europe-centric analyses of the unfolding Eastern Question would have

<sup>1</sup> The few exceptions are Enver Z. Karal, *Fransa-Mısır ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu (1797-1802)* (Istanbul: Milli Mecmua Basımevi, 1938); Faruk Bilici, *L'expédition d'Égypte, Alexandrie et les Ottomans. L'Autre Histoire* (Paris: Boccard, 2017); T. Y. Kobishanov, 'Dzhihad-Neveryushhim, Soyuz-Neverynym. Vysokaya Porta v Pervye Mesyacy Posle Francuzskogo Vtorzheniya v Egipet', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta Vostokovedenie* 13(2) (2010): 1-19; Şakul, 'Global'.

us believe.<sup>2</sup> The Porte actively sought to define the empire's standing in the global imperial (dis)order of the time while at the same time looking to regenerate her by means of an ambitious reform programme. Yet realization of one was dependent on the attainment of the other. The years surrounding the French expedition to Egypt in 1798, its run-up and aftermath, were a vivid testament to this.

### The Circle of Justice

Nine years before France's venture in Egypt began, a new sultan, Selim III (1761–1808), had ascended the throne in Istanbul in April 1789 to great expectations. Many wished that he would be the next *cihangir*, or the 'warrior-conqueror' sultan, who could finally upend the misfortunes of the 'Well-Protected Domains', as the Ottomans called their empire. As a matter of fact, Selim was different, but arguably too different to possess the qualities of a 'conqueror sultan'. His social graces, lenience, aversion to violence, and intellectualism—traits that characterized few other sultans—have led historians to describe him as an exceptional monarch, and an 'enlightened' ruler.<sup>3</sup> He was perhaps many things, but a warrior he was not.

Selim's singular features are usually attributed to his unusual upbringing as a young *şehzade* (prince). Before his birth no heir had been born for the Ottoman dynasty for 36 years. During the eighteenth century, the imperial palace had been struck by epidemic illnesses (mainly smallpox) which had claimed the life of two of his cousins. Since his childhood, he had therefore been seen by the inhabitants of the Topkapı Palace as the rescuer of the dynasty.

After his father, Mustafa III, passed away in 1774, the young *şehzade* was brought up with great care, which sometimes entailed breaches of palace customs. In Ottoman political culture, *şehzades* remained in seclusion in their room in the imperial palace until their rise to power, in order to preclude any dynasty conflicts. However, his uncle Sultan Abdülhamid I, who had himself been locked in for 40 years, permitted Selim a degree of freedom, letting the *şehzade* spend time outside his room. Moreover, contrary to the customary practices, his mother, Mihrişah Sultan, was allowed to remain with him in the Topkapı Palace after his father died.

These not only provided Selim with emotional support and a fine education but also let him be in touch with prominent Ottoman bureaucrats and men of letters of his time who informed him about the politics of the empire as well as the wider world. He found the opportunity to nurture interest in poetry (writing poems under the pseudonym *İlhâmi*), and in oriental and western music, as well as in the Islamic arts of *hat* and *ta'lik*. He attended parties with European diplomats in

<sup>2</sup> See the Introduction for a discussion of the literature.

<sup>3</sup> Beydilli, 'III. Selim', 27. See also Aysel Yıldız, "'Louis the XVI of the Turks': The Character of a Sultan", *Middle Eastern Studies* 50(2) (2014): 272–90.



Figure 1. Selim III's childhood. Topkapı Palace Museum, 17/117

Pera and the Belgrade forests, a practice he continued after ascending to the throne. His time of liberty came to an abrupt end in 1785, when his name was implicated in a conspiracy against his uncle and he was consequently placed in confinement. But he was given limited freedom again once his innocence was proven the following year.<sup>4</sup>

As of 1786, with the help of the French ambassador Marie-Gabriel-Florent-August de Choiseul-Gouffier (1752–1817), the seasoned Ottoman statesman

<sup>4</sup> Beydilli, 'III. Selim', 29; see also *Ahmed Cevdet Paşa Tarihi*, vol. 4 (İstanbul 1309 [1891]), 270–71.

Ebübekir Râtib Efendi (1750–99), and his butler, Ishak Efendi, Selim began to exchange letters with the French King Louis XVI on statecraft, the arts of war, and social and political institutions.<sup>5</sup> His chief aim in these exchanges was to acquire for his empire in the long run a reliable ally in her rivalry against Russia, which he hinted at many times.<sup>6</sup> He once told Choiseul-Gouffier, perhaps with great naivety, that in face of an enemy such as Russia, he would ‘always be friendly to [his] friends and even-handed with [his] enemies, and with the help of God the Exalted, [he] would conform all [his] acts to this principle.’<sup>7</sup> Yet his correspondence with the French king became as much a source of frustration as inspiration for the *şehzade*. He was offended when he sensed a patronizing tone in the king’s letters. He begrudged the lack of any mention of a potential alliance between the Porte and Paris. He was even more resentful against Louis XVI’s obvious advice to wage war against Russia only if and after he reformed his empire and especially improved his military.<sup>8</sup> The *şehzade* drafted a reply that showed his discontent: ‘Do you think I am a child . . . a blindfolded falcon in a cage?’ alluding to his life of seclusion.<sup>9</sup>

This exchange of letters had no considerable adverse effect on his admiration for Louis XVI though. It instead increased his willingness to ascend the throne at once. By the time he was crowned, Selim had become most eager to reform his military, form alliances against his Habsburg and Romanov rivals, and reconquer the territories that the Porte had lost during the eighteenth century, especially the Crimea.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in 1789, he had to make a choice first: would he end the ongoing war with Russian and Austria and start the reforms he wanted to undertake? Or would he just continue the war?

The loss of the Crimea was vital for the defence of Istanbul and the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire, as it signified the fall of an important buffer region between Russia and the imperial capital. And since in Ottoman political tradition, as well as in Qur’anic teaching, Muslims were not to abandon their territorial possessions to the ‘infidels’, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the fighting continued. In 1790, Selim wrote to his commanders that until the capture of the Crimea, no true peace was to be concluded with Russia.<sup>11</sup> But his military power would not suffice for this, and he would in the end surrender more lands. Embittered by losing the Crimea and further posts along the Black Sea shores,

<sup>5</sup> Kemal Beydilli, ‘Şehzade Elçisi Safiye Sultanzade İshak Bey’, *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3 (1999): 73–81; Salih Münir Paşa, *Louis XVI et Sultan Selim III* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1912); Yıldız, ‘The Character’, 277; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, ‘Selim III’un Veliâht İken Fransa Kralı Lui XVI ile Muhabereleri’, *Belleterin* 2(5–6) (1938): 191–2.

<sup>6</sup> Yıldız, ‘The Character’, 280.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Beydilli, ‘III. Selim’, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Yıldız, ‘The Character’, 281.

<sup>10</sup> From Choiseul-Gouffier to Vergennes, 10 July 1786, AMAE CP Turquie 174; cf. Yıldız, ‘The Character’, 272; Şakul, ‘Global’, 9–10. Ali Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Enver Ziya Karal, *Selim III’ün Hat-ti Hümayunları, Nizam-ı Cedid, 1789–1807* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988), 43.

Selim dedicated his 18-year reign to ensuring the ‘security’ (*emniyet*) of his empire against the Russian threat in the Black Sea.<sup>12</sup> It was this quest for security that would cost him first his throne, and then his life.

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In the end the utmost duty of an Ottoman sultan was to maintain domestic order and tranquillity, and shield his empire from external threats. Since the founding decades of their five-centuries-old imperial system, the Ottoman elites had considered the ‘Well-Protected Domains’ as ‘a walled fortress giving protection from [alien] attack’ and bringing security (*hifz-u hirâset*) to lands and seas as well as to the variety of subjects with an ‘ever-victorious army’ in the timeless struggle between *dâr-ul harb* (the territories of war) and *dâr-ul Islam* (the territories of Islam).<sup>13</sup>

In late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century parlance, besides *emniyet*, the terms *asayiş* (order, public tranquillity, repose), *te'min* (protection), and *nizam* (order) were used interchangeably to refer to the maintenance of state and public security within the walls of the ‘Well-Protected Domains’.<sup>14</sup> These could be obtained by way of the enforcement of law which was based on a dual system that harmonized the sultanic laws (*kanun*) with the Islamic law (*shari'a*, according to the Hanafi school of law) and the operations of social control that were directed at the identification and neutralization of perceived threats (such as dissent and revolts) and their suppression.<sup>15</sup> For all these purposes the Porte, like other states, utilized police and counterintelligence operations.<sup>16</sup> In the imperial capital and major

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 36–7.

<sup>13</sup> My heartfelt thanks to Colin Imber, who drew my attention to the notion of *hifz-u hirâset* as a premodern counterpart of ‘security’ in Ottoman political thought: Colin Imber to Ozan Ozavci, e-mail correspondence dated 9 Nov. 2017. There is considerable need for a study on early Islamic as well as early Ottoman conceptions of security, which is beyond our scope here. A quick catalogue search in the Ottoman imperial and the Topkapı Palace archives suggests that the word *emniyet*, the contemporary counterpart of security, freedom from fear, safety, or the police in the Turkish language, appears in archival documents in as early as the 1550s. It appears usually within the phrase ‘*emniyet ve selamet*’ (security and peace).

<sup>14</sup> Maurus Reinkowski, ‘The State’s Security and the Subject’s Prosperity: Notions of Order in Ottoman Bureaucratic Correspondence (19th Century)’, in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 200. See also Engin Akarlı, ‘*Maslaha* from “Common Good” to “Raison d’État” in the Experience of Istanbul Artisans, 1730–1840’ in *Hoca Allame puits de science: Essays in Honour of Kemal H. Karpat*, ed. Kaan Durukan, Robert Zens, and Akile Durukan Zorlu (Istanbul: Isis, 2010), 63–79.

<sup>15</sup> While the sultanic laws were generated through legislation issued by the sultans, the Islamic laws ‘served as the sole base for adjudicating issues concerning individual rights, family law, inheritance, commerce, and the rights of foreign subjects’. The highest judiciary authorities issued *fatwas* that invested the sultans ‘with authority to legislate based on the principle of protecting the public interest’. See Colin Imber, *Ebu’s-Su’ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 622; M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Short History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Karen Barkey, ‘In Different Times: Scheduling and Social Control in the Ottoman Empire, 1550 to 1650’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38(3) (1996): 460–83; Dejanirah Couto, ‘Spying in the Ottoman Empire: Sixteenth-Century Encrypted Correspondence’, in *Cultural Exchange in Early*

towns, the Janissaries—an army unit that originated from a small section of war captives in the fourteenth century and then gradually became the backbone of the Ottoman military—served as ‘guardians of the city, responsible for . . . policing order’ along with other units in the imperial army such as the navy, *cebeciler* (armourers), and *topçular* (gunners).<sup>17</sup> In the countryside, imperial order was usually entrusted to beneficiary office-holders, who were responsible for collecting taxes from administrative units assigned to them (*timar* or *zeamet*), though, paradoxically enough, bandits were sometimes also used as intermediaries to supply imperial security.<sup>18</sup> Here there was limited policing, with the exception of the immediate surroundings of *sipahi* cavalries and military garrisons.<sup>19</sup> Local *kadis* appointed by the ulema (Islamic clerics) were in charge of judicial affairs. *Zimmîs* (non-Muslim believers of the Book) were placed under imperial protection with special contracts (*zimmet* and *aman*).

In the event that the *zimmîs* violated the *zimmî* pact by rebelling against the sultans, they were declared *harbîs* (enemies) that waged (at least in theory) an attack on the imperial state.<sup>20</sup> The *zimmîs* were accommodated by imperial decrees on taxation and criminal law, which formed the basis of its *millet* system—a system of self-management for *zimmîs* by their own religious authorities who undertook the tasks, amidst others, of education, religious justice, and social security.<sup>21</sup> The rights of foreign residents or travellers (*müstemins*) were secured through capitulations, which, as of the sixteenth century, granted them *aman* (safe conduct), *ahdnames*, and *berats*, i.e. ‘privileges of residence on or safe passage through Ottoman territory, made immune from the jurisdiction of

*Modern Europe*, vol. 3: *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 274–312; Francis Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services: The Ancient Near East, Persia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab Muslim Empires, the Mongol Empire, China, Muscovy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974); Fatih Yeşil, ‘The Transformation of the Ottoman Diplomatic Mind: The Emergence of the Licences Espionage’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 101 (2011): 467–79; Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden, Boston: E. J. Brill, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Kim var imiş biz burada yog iken* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2009), 29–37; Gülay Yılmaz, ‘Blurred Boundaries Between Soldiers and Civilians: Artisan Janissaries in Seventeenth Century Istanbul’, in *Bread from the Lion’s Mouth: Artisans Struggling for a Livelihood in Ottoman Cities*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 175–93; cf. Ali Yaycıoğlu, ‘Guarding Traditions and Laws—Disciplining Bodies and Souls: Tradition, Religion and Science in the Age of Ottoman Reform’, *Modern Asian Studies* 52(5) (Sept. 2018): 1549; see also Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare 1500–1700* (London: University College London Press, 1999), 16–17. On the military units that were in charge of the public order and policing until the 1820s, see Ramazan Fındıklı, ‘Osmanlı Devleti’nde Güvenlik ve Polis’, in *Osmanlı*, vol. 6, ed. Güler Eren, Kemal Çiçek, and Cem Oğuz (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), 295–300.

<sup>18</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 25. For an inspiring study, see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralisation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Douglas A. Howard, *A History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 59–60.

<sup>20</sup> Virginia H. Aksent, *Ottoman Wars 1700–1870: An Empire Besieged* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), 299.

<sup>21</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 24–5.

Islamic courts, and provided with the benefit of tax exemptions and low customs duties'.<sup>22</sup>

In a similar vein to earlier Islamic empires, the guiding principle (or the standard doctrine) of Ottoman imperial governance was 'the circle of justice'.<sup>23</sup> This was 'an ancient concept of justice in which the [ruler] at the top of society was seen as dependent on the peasants at the bottom; they could only provide him revenue if he provided them justice.' It was portrayed in eight sentences that cyclically lead to one another, and are found in the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Sirr al-Asrār* or *Secretum Secretorum* (The Secret of Secrets), which was reproduced by the Arab scholar Abu Yahya Ibn al'Batriq in the tenth century:

The world is a garden for the state to master  
 The state is power supported by the law  
 The law is policy administered by the king  
 The king is a shepherd supported by the army  
 The army are assistants provided for by taxation  
 Taxation is sustenance gathered by subjects  
 Subjects are slaves provided for by justice  
 Justice is that by which the rectitude of the world subsists.<sup>24</sup>

In Ibn al'Batriq's edition, these sentences are used repeatedly in different variations and attributed not only to Aristotle but also to the Sassanid ruler Ardashir, the Persian king Anushirvan, the fourth caliph, 'Ali ibn Ali Talib, and the Muslim conqueror of Egypt 'Amr ibn al-Al, which suggests that a variety of earlier sources referred to the circle of justice.<sup>25</sup> The concept evolved through a fusion of ancient Persian, Greek, Roman, Indian, and Islamic readings over centuries, and became a fundamental element of Ottoman political thought well into the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Nasim Sousa, *The Capitulatory Regime of Turkey: Its History, Origin, and Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1933), 70–86; Özsu, 'Ottoman Empire', 431, 446; Yurdusev, 'The Middle East', 74.

<sup>23</sup> Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı'da Devlet, Adalet ve Hukuk* (Istanbul: Eren Yayınları, 2005); Linda T. Darling, 'Islamic Empires, the Ottoman Empire and the Circle of Justice', in *Constitutional Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Oxford: Hart, 2008), 12–32.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Linda T. Darling, 'Medieval Egyptian Society and the Concept of the Circle of Justice', *Mamluk Studies Review* 10(2) (2006): 2. For more on *Sirr al-Asrār*, see Mahmoud Manzalaoui, 'The Pseudo-Aristotelian "Kitab *Sirr al-Asrār*": Facts and Problems', *Oriens* 23/24 (1974): 147–257.

<sup>26</sup> For historical analyses of the term, see Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2013), and 'Islamic Empires'; Jennifer A. London, 'The Circle of Justice', *History of Political Thought* 32(3) (autumn 2011): 425–47. For the different uses of the 'circle of justice' in Ottoman political thought, see Marinos Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought Up to the Tanzimat: A Concise History* (Rethymno: Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas, Institute for Mediterranean Studies, 2015), 32, 39 n. 27, 40, 41, 55, 139, 178.

The ‘circle of justice’ emphasized the interdependence of ruler and subjects, drawing an undeviating link between security, legitimacy, and prosperity.<sup>27</sup> Justice, in this sense, referred not only to lawfulness but also to ‘peace, protection, good organization and a functional infrastructure’. It meant harmony between the different spheres of society: the rulers, the army, the treasury, and peasants, artisans, and merchants. It also formed the basis of Ottoman security culture, the underlying philosophy of which was the fact that security could be obtained most effectively through the path of *nizam* (harmonious order) and *maslaha*, i.e. maintaining order by means of negotiations, accommodating demands, and collective engagement between the diverse components of the empire.<sup>28</sup>

Prosperity (*rahat, istirahat, refah*) was considered to be the ‘immediate outcome and positive product’ of security. When this ideal order of ‘security *cum* prosperity’ was upset by ‘the negative events’ or ‘evildoers’, *nizâm-ı memleket* (the order of the country), *temin-i asayiş* (the maintenance of security), or *temin-i ibadullah* (the protection of the servants of God) were to be obtained first by *istimalet* (persuasion, coaxing) or—when it suited better the interests of the state—by the principle of oblivion (*ma madaa* or ‘let bygones be bygones’). The last resort was to *tehdid* (threat), *terhib* (intimidation), or *kuvve-i cebriyye* (compulsory force).<sup>29</sup> As Abou el-Haj summarizes, ‘the proper order of the [Ottoman] world is predicated upon all knowing their place and function and remaining in it, exhibiting no further ambition or aspiration for social mobility.’<sup>30</sup>

During the era of Selim III, imperial decrees were replete with the notions of maintaining security and order (*nizâm-ı memleket, temin-i asayiş*), protecting the servants of God (*temin-i ibadullah*), and purging (*tathir*) the empire of mischief and deceitful behaviour (*fesad, fitna, tezvirat*). This was partly because Selim’s ascendancy to the throne in 1789 overlapped with a period of increasing

<sup>27</sup> As an 11th-c. author wrote about Fatimi rule in Egypt, ‘The people are so secure under the Sultan’s reign that no one fears his agents, and they rely on him neither to inflict injustice nor to have designs on anyone’s property... The security and welfare of the people of Egypt have reached a point that the drapers, moneychangers, and jewelers do not even lock their shops—they only lower a net across the front, and no one tampers with anything.’ Nasir-i Khusraw, *Naser-e Khosraw’s Book of Travels (safaratnama)*, trans. W. M. Thackston Jr (New York: SUNY University Press, 1986), 55–57; cf. Darling, ‘The Circle of Justice’, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Darling, ‘Islamic Empires’, 19. In the writings of such writers as Ahmedi (c.1334–1413), Kinalzade Ali Çelebi (c.1510–72), and Koçi Bey (d. 1650), and the latter two’s *nasihatsnames* (advice literature) that idealized the ancient order, the ‘circle of justice’ became a tool to pinpoint the weak chains of governance. Anne F. Broadbridge, ‘Royal Authority, Justice, and Order in Society: The Influence of Ibn Khaldun on the Writings of al-Maqr|z| and Ibn Taghr|bird|’, *Mamluk Studies Review* 7(2) (2003): 231–45, at 233; Cornell H. Fleischer, ‘Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism and “Ibn Khaldûnism” in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 198–219. On the notion of *maslaha*, see Engin D. Akarlı, ‘The Ruler and Law Making in the Ottoman Empire’, in *Law and Empire: Ideas, Practices, Actors*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Jill D. Harries, Caroline Humfressand, and Hurvitz Nimrod (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 87–109.

<sup>29</sup> Maurus Reinkowski, ‘“Let Bygones Be Bygones”: An Ottoman Order to Forget’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 93 (2003): 191–209.

<sup>30</sup> Rifaat Abou-el-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, 16th to 18th Centuries* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 32.



domestic social and fiscal crises.<sup>31</sup> His empire was still enduring the devastating consequences of the 1768–74 wars. The heavy military defeats suffered on the front, the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, and the large debt incurred due to war indemnity had increasingly weakened social stability by the 1790s.

In the major Ottoman towns, including the imperial capital, the worrisome ‘food shortages, unemployment, increasing prices and psychological costs of relentless wars, fires and epidemics and unprecedented urban uprisings’ were jeopardizing imperial political legitimacy. In order to dissolve the domestic threats to the ‘Well-Protected Domains’ and ‘exert direct control over the inhabitants’, Selim III took authoritarian measures for social regulation, control, and surveillance.<sup>32</sup> A new language of ‘disciplining society’ (*terbiye*) came to be employed by the Ottoman bureaucrats.<sup>33</sup>

The central chains of the ‘circle of justice’ and the main instrument for internal and external security in the Ottoman Empire were the army and taxation. Selim III well knew that the undisciplined behaviour of the Janissary forces, which formed the backbone both of the army and police and of the corps of firemen, was also the vulnerable point of his Well-Protected Domains. The Ottoman army had suffered excruciating setbacks at the hands of outnumbered enemy armies in the last wars with Austria and Russia in the 1790s, when the Janissary forces had refused to join the expeditions, fled the army even before reaching the battlefield, or gone on strike during the fighting.<sup>34</sup>

Historians have shown that due to the uncontrolled inflation in the number of residual soldiers after the wars with Austria, Spain, and Venice in the west, and with Persia in the east, and the fiscal crises these had brought about since the seventeenth century, the Janissaries had gradually been incorporated into ‘the general urban public and artisanal organizations’ besides their main profession as soldiers. By virtue of their connections with the Islamic Bektaşî religious orders, they had developed an immense social base by the late eighteenth century and had gained an unwavering social prestige. More than once in the past they had prevented reformist statesmen ‘from openly articulating the possible abolition of the corps’ and the establishment of more advanced army units within the Ottoman military.<sup>35</sup> When necessary, they had violently overthrown the sultans.

<sup>31</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Başaran, *Social Control*, 4; see also Tülay Artan, ‘From Charismatic Leadership to Collective Rule: Gender Problems of Legalism and Political Legitimation in the Ottoman Empire’, in *Histoire économique et sociale de l’empire ottoman et de la Turquie (1326–1960). Actes du sixième congrès international tenu à Aix-en-Provence du 1er au 4 juillet 1992* (Paris: Peeters, 1995), 572; H. T. Karateke, ‘Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate: A Framework for Historical Analysis’, in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. H. T. Karateke and M. Reinkowski (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 13–52.

<sup>33</sup> Başaran, *Social Control*, 218. <sup>34</sup> Ágoston, ‘The Ottoman Empire’, 630.

<sup>35</sup> Yaycıoğlu, ‘Guarding Traditions’, 1567; Frederic Hitzel, ‘Une voie de pénétration des idées révolutionnaires. Les militaires français, Istanbul’, in *Mélanges offerts à Louis Bazin par ses disciples, collègues et amis*, ed. Jean-Louis Bacque-Grammont and Louis Bazin (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), 88.

As Ali Yaycıoğlu tells us, despite their role as ‘the guardians of the city... some young commoners who claimed Janissary status gathered together in amorphous paramilitary groups and unruly gangs and were often viewed as rowdy riffraff by other city dwellers’.<sup>36</sup>

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Against this precarious backdrop, Selim III initiated an ambitious agenda of military and bureaucratic reform in the 1790s.<sup>37</sup> At his enthronement, the sultan gathered a grand *şura* (a consultative assembly) to deliberate on a new reform programme.<sup>38</sup> He then asked 22 of the ulema and scribal corps in the Sublime Porte, as well as two foreign advisers, to pen *layihas* (pamphlets) for him on how to undertake new reforms.<sup>39</sup> Some of these recommended actions that no other sultan before him had dared to take. In the end, Selim III’s became the last yet most comprehensive of a series of reform attempts made in the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

Here I must underscore again: Ottoman statesmen and writers also believed that their empire was in decline, lacking the moral and institutional strength of her heyday in previous centuries. Ensuring the circle of justice and reforming their military were therefore of paramount importance to prevent one or another major European Power of the time, and particularly Russia, from embarrassing the Porte, and, worse, existentially threatening the Ottoman Empire and ending her existence. For them, and for a few other statesmen in Europe such as Vergennes, the alleged frailty of the Ottoman Empire prompted but one question: how to revive her?<sup>41</sup>

Past experience with military transformation was worrisome. For example, after the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, the military reform programme that Selim’s uncle, Sultan Abdülhamid I, and Grand Vizier Halil Hamid Paşa had initiated was actively opposed by the Janissaries.<sup>42</sup> It was eventually dropped by the half-hearted sultan.<sup>43</sup> In his *layiha* to Selim, the prominent Ottoman Armenian Catholic dragoman, Ignatius Mouradgea d’Ohsson (Muradcan Tosunyan) (1740–1807), therefore advised that once the sultan and his entourage entered

<sup>36</sup> Kafadar, *Kim var*, 29–37; Yaycıoğlu, ‘Guarding Traditions’, 1549.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 87. <sup>38</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Ethan L. Menchinger, *The First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vasıf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 165; Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 72–4.

<sup>40</sup> Mehmed Mert Sunar, ‘Ocak-ı Amire’den Ocak-ı Mülğâ’ya Doğru. Nizam-ı Cedid Reformları Karşısında Yeniçeriler’, in *Nizam-ı Kadim’den Nizam-ı Cedid’e III. Selim ve Dönemi*, ed. Seyfi Kenan (Istanbul: ISAM Yayınları, 2010), 498.

<sup>41</sup> For an insightful analysis of the Eastern Question as an attempt ‘to recover’ the Ottoman Empire, see Malcolm E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East* (London: Longman, 1987), Ch. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Avigdor Levy, ‘Military Reform and the Problem of Centralization in the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1982): 227–49, at 239.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Caff, ‘Reform and the Conduct of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Reign of Selim III, 1789–1807’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83(3) (Aug.–Sept. 1963): 295.

into the path of reform there could be no room for hesitancy: the process of innovation and reform would have to be irreversible.<sup>44</sup> As was the case with most other pamphlets, his also proposed inviting European military officers to establish new military schools and train Ottoman units. Other writers such as Mehmed Hakkı (1747–1811) called for the training of pious soldiers, of good morals, educated and armed with a sound knowledge of their religion, all in accordance with the science of war.<sup>45</sup> Mehmed Emin Behiç (d. 1809) viewed society as an integral part of the reform programme, and suggested the establishment of tighter social controls with regular censuses, passport controls, and the dispatch of spies to monitor, control, and discipline the urban space.<sup>46</sup>

Almost all advisers to the sultan considered the new armies in Europe (often referring to the Russian example) as a model, and admitted that imitating the victorious infidels—their new equipment, discipline, and training—while simultaneously restoring ancient laws, revised as necessary, and adhering to the shari'a, was the way to survive.<sup>47</sup> The Ottoman reform programme thus simultaneously looked to past experience that had once ensured the glory of the empire *and* to the future with a new understanding of irreversible temporality. In line with the 'circle of justice', Selim III believed that the path of reform had to be an all-inclusive one; governmental affairs were interlinked like 'the wheels of a watch', and in order for the reforms to be successful they had to involve a wide range of social, political, and economic affairs.<sup>48</sup> Elaborated under his rule from the early 1790s and through until the 1800s, his reform scheme brought about the establishment of new military, fiscal, and administrative institutions that trained and staffed military units, created funds for these by means of taxation of a large amount of goods, and operated these funds within state bureaucracy that was established concurrently.

These at once incited public opposition, especially from the Janissaries. Such opposition was countered, at least at first, by an alliance, albeit loose, of dynastic and military/bureaucratic elites. They involved Selim's childhood friend and brother-in-law Grand Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Paşa and his wife, Esma Sultan, who were predisposed to revolutionary France, and Selim's mother, Mihrişah Sultan (Valide Sultan), and her steward, Yusuf Agha, who was known to be pro-Russian. They received the support of the navy and some rural notables. Most importantly, they were inspired and backed by a transimperial Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi network—a Sunni–Sufi order 'organised around charismatic sheikhs, doctrines and rituals' with a wide range of followers that dispersed from 'India and

<sup>44</sup> BOA HH 13309, 9 Jan. 1793; cf. Kemal Beydilli, 'Ignatius Mouradgea d'Ohsson (Muradcan Tosunyan)', *Istanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi* 13 (1983–4): 261.

<sup>45</sup> Yayıncıoğlu, *Partners*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>47</sup> Virginia H. Aksan, 'Ottoman Political Writing, 1768–1808', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25(1) (Feb. 1993): 63.

<sup>48</sup> *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 146–8; Sunar, 'Ocak', 499.

Central Asia to the Balkans' since the early fifteenth century.<sup>49</sup> This is to say that Selim's reform programme was neither purely a westward movement nor a modernist-secular drive against conservative-Islamist resistance, as it is often portrayed. Instead, at its source was an amalgam of orthodox Islamist (Naqshbandi) ambitions and Western methods.<sup>50</sup>

Another driving force of the sultan's programme was the Imperial Academy of Naval Engineering. Established in 1776 by Abdülhamid I, it had become a contact zone for European (predominantly French) engineers sent by the French foreign minister Vergennes (see Chapter 1) and local mathematicians and engineers. Through the academy, the belief became increasingly widespread among the Ottoman *kalemiye* (bureaucratic administration) that matching the military power of the foreign neighbours entailed appropriating the sciences in military technology. Moreover, observations made during the wars against Austria and Russia, notably concerning the enemy's military discipline and war strategies, resulted in the desire to establish European-style armies. In 1793, the Naval Engineering Academy was renamed the Imperial Academy of Military Engineering. French trainers were brought in, and new military units manned by Russian renegades—later joined by Austrian war captives, Turkish peasants, and Anatolian tribesmen—were formed.<sup>51</sup> These new units were called the army of the 'New Order', or the *Nizâm-ı Cedid*, a phrase that has since been used to refer to the set of military and fiscal reforms introduced under Selim.

The New Order army was designed to differ from earlier military units as a well-drilled, morally and militarily disciplined and dynamic army that acted together 'as part of a large, impersonal war machine, rather than as individual fighters graced with valour, courage and good reputation'.<sup>52</sup> They wore European-style uniforms and used advanced equipment.<sup>53</sup> The number of men that formed these new units amounted to 2,536, with 27 officers in 1797, and some 9,263 with again 27 officers in 1801. By 1806, the numbers rose to 22,685 men and 1,590 officers.<sup>54</sup> A new engineering school was opened in 1795 and a printing house was established within its premises in 1797.

With the purpose of regulating the resources that were made available by internal borrowing and that were channelled to fund the 'New Order' army, a new treasury with new management mechanisms was created. Heavy taxes were

<sup>49</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 41–2; Yaycıoğlu, 'Guardians', 1584.

<sup>50</sup> Kahraman Şakul, 'Nizam-ı Cedid Düşüncesinde Batılılaşma ve İslami Modernleşme', *Divan* 19 (Feb. 2005): 120; Aysel Yıldız, *Crisis and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire: The Downfall of a Sultan in the Age of Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 137–42, 204–9; see also Yaycıoğlu, 'Guardians', 1589–90.

<sup>51</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, 'The Origins of Military Reform: The Nizam-ı Cedid Army of Sultan Selim III', *Journal of Modern History* 37(3) (Sept. 1965): 291–306, at 293; see also Stanford J. Shaw, 'The Nizam-ı Cedid Army under Sultan Selim III, 1789–1809', *Oriens* 18/19 (1965/6): 170.

<sup>52</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 38–9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 37, 41; Şakul, 'Global', 12; Beydilli, 'III. Selim', 38.

<sup>54</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 37.

levied on a variety of goods by the *İrade-i Cedid Hazinesi* (the New Treasury) including alcoholic beverages and grains, sparking public discontent.<sup>55</sup> And finally, an empire-wide mercantilist (economic protection) policy was enforced to upend what the Ottoman ministers believed to be European commercial ‘misdemeanours’ that led to ‘a steady fiscal haemorrhage for the Ottoman state’.<sup>56</sup>

The problem here was that protectionism and the implementation of new customs tariffs on imports and exports without the consent of the European Powers was a violation of the existing capitulatory agreements. The sultan’s ministers considered financial independence to be the ultimate means for the survival of their empire and their reform programme. This, however, went against the grain of their European interlocutors, which interlocked imperial domestic reform with defining the position of the ‘Well-Protected Domains’ in the global imperial (dis)order of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

With the new military and fiscal reforms inspired by transimperial epistemic (European/local engineers and mathematicians) and religious (Naqshbandi-Mujaddid) networks, and with the diplomatic alliances he formed (even if these did not last long due to peace obtained between Prussia and Austria, and between Sweden and Russia), Selim III began his reign with proactive and, at least initially, decisive measures. Domestically, however, his campaign did not go as smoothly. On the one hand, revolts that sprang up due to diverse aspirations of local notables in Anatolia, the Arab provinces, and the Balkans—especially the Pasvanoğlu uprising (with links to the Janissaries, who largely frowned upon the New Order)—frustrated the reform programme, diverting resources and energy.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the training of the new army without adequate instructors and funding proved much more difficult, the resulting clumsy and occasionally unsuccessful practices provoking ridicule from foreign observers.<sup>58</sup> While dealing with these, the sultan’s aim was to keep his empire away from the European wars until he rebuilt his army and navy. However, he would not be able to maintain the Porte’s neutrality. The French expedition to Egypt in 1798 unexpectedly drew the Ottoman Empire into the Napoleonic Wars.

### The Sultan’s Bafflement

Throughout the 1790s, Selim III’s agents closely monitored political developments in revolutionary France and war-torn Europe. While still at war with Austria and

<sup>55</sup> For inflation in Istanbul, see Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 446.

<sup>56</sup> Liston to Abbot, 23 July 1794, NLS MS 5579; Yayıoğlu, ‘Guarding’, 1567–8; Fatih Yeşil, ‘İstanbul’un İaşesinde Nizam-ı Cedid. Zahire Nezaretinin Kuruluşu ve İşleyişi (1793–1839)’, *Türklük Araştırmaları Dergisi* 15 (2004): 113–42.

<sup>57</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 211.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Ainslie to Foreign Office, 21 May 1794, TNA FO 78/15.

Russia, they looked to take advantage of the system of balance of power in Europe and therefore forged alliances with Protestant northern European countries that rivalled the Habsburgs and the Romanovs. It was then that Ebûbekir Râtib Efendi, Selim's mentor and the envoy to Vienna, advised expanding the 'circle of justice' with an additional sentence on inter-imperial affairs. A disciplined army, he wrote, was impossible without a fairly administered financial system. For this,

loyal ministers and responsible civil servants were indispensable. Such imperial servants could only raise large state revenues without justice if the people at large were prosperous and content. Contentment rested on the security provided by a foreign alliance and an alliance would not be available to the state unless it had a disciplined, respected army.<sup>59</sup>

Yet, when the War of the First Coalition (1792–7) broke out, the Porte was divided over which policy to follow. Francophile Grand Vizier İzzet Mehmed Paşa (r. 1794–8), Şeyhülislam Dürrî-zâde Arif Efendi, and Grand Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Paşa believed that an alliance with France could help the sultan retain the lost territories of his empire.<sup>60</sup> The anti-French and more conservative Mihrişah Sultan and her steward, Yusuf, by contrast suggested not forging alliances in order not to be sucked into European rivalries. After the failed defensive alliance talks with France in 1795–6 (see Chapter 1), the sultan preferred to wait and see, channelling his funds to the more urgent New Order programme. At the same time, under the leadership of Mehmed Raşid Efendi (1753–1798), Selim's able and experienced Reisülküttâb (or Reis Efendi, the equivalent of minister of foreign affairs in the Ottoman Empire), the foundations of a new Ottoman diplomacy were laid on realist and rationalist principles.<sup>61</sup>

The Porte put an end to its unilateralist policy and established permanent embassies in European capitals for the first time in Ottoman history—initially in London in 1793, and then in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris in 1795—to collect intelligence with respect to the European Powers' military policies and observe their administrative, political, and economic institutions.<sup>62</sup> As the chronicler

<sup>59</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 95–8; Enver Z. Karal, 'Ebu Bekir Ratib Efendi'nin 'Nizam-ı Cedid' İslahatında Rolü', in *Türk Tarih Kongresi Ankara 12–17 Nisan 1956. Kongreye sunulan tebliğler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1960), 347–55; Cunningham, *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters*, vol. 1, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Hitzel, 'Les Relations franco-turques a la veille de l'expédition', in *La Campagne d'Égypte, 1798–1801. Mythes et réalités*, ed. Paul Nirot (Paris: In Forma, 1998), 43–4.

<sup>61</sup> For account of Ottoman diplomacy prior to Selim III, see Berridge, 'Diplomatic Integration'; Güneş Işıksel, 'II. Selim'den III. Selim'e Osmanlı Diplomasisi: Birkaç Saptama', in *Nizam-ı Kadim'den Nizam-ı Cedid'e III. Selim ve Dönemi*, 43–55; Mehmed A. Yalçınkaya, 'Türk Diplomasisinin Modernleşmesinde Reisülküttâb Mehmed Raşid Efendi'nin Rolü', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 21 (2001): 115.

<sup>62</sup> Şakul, 'Global', 13, 41; Beydilli, 'III. Selim', 46. By contrast, the first residential ambassador of France had arrived in Istanbul in 1535, the British in 1583, and the Dutch in 1612: *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 88, 231, 257; see also Şakul, 'Nizam-ı Cedid', 124.

Cevdet Paşa writes, from an Ottoman perspective, European diplomacy in the times of the European wars was considered to be devoid of any ethical principles.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, in his pamphlet to the sultan, Mehmed Emin Behiç described politics (*politika*) as ‘a European term that in our times means to act through trickery and deceit...’ He contrasted Ottoman political philosophy with ‘European politicking’, concluding that while one was ‘ethical’, the other ‘no better than... [a] ruse’.<sup>64</sup>

This was perceived as a continuing threat to Istanbul. Ottoman ministers apprehensively observed the partition of Poland for the third time in 1795. In 1797 Venice, despite not being at war with France, was split between Paris and Vienna. The Porte was vexed, considering the fate of Poland and particularly Venice as a conspiracy against a neutral actor.<sup>65</sup> Questions lingered in the minds of the sultan and his ministers: would the ‘Well-Protected Domains’ be the next prey of European imperial encroachments? In 1797, the inhabitants of Topkapı Palace were on tenterhooks. With France’s annexation of the Ionian Islands, another powerful neighbour had emerged on the western coasts. Reports multiplied concerning the agitation of revolutionary ideas by French agents in the Balkan provinces and hidden support to the rebellious Pasvanoğlu family.<sup>66</sup> The belief that France was transforming from a friend to a foe steadily became prevalent in Istanbul.<sup>67</sup>

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At this moment, Selim III’s first response to the mounting threats signifies the implications of the unfolding Eastern Question to him, i.e. his empire’s precarious status vis-à-vis the other major European Powers as a polity whose identity and durability was under question. Yet, to reiterate, the Ottoman Empire was not merely a passive object here. Conscious of his empire’s insecure standing in Europe, Selim III looked to reconstruct her identity as a continuous polity—not one doomed to end in the same fashion as Poland and Venice, but one that could reverse her misfortunes with her reformed military and bureaucracy.

To this end, the sultan asked his trusted bureaucrats to pen a series of pamphlets to introduce, legitimize, and propagate his reform programme. A dozen were prepared in the late 1790s, some just before the French expedition to Egypt began. The pamphlets aimed, on the one hand, to gain domestic popular support for the sultan’s programme by explaining its rationale and underscoring its urgency, given that it was above all the people that carried the burden of the heavy taxes it occasioned. On the other hand, the pamphlets were conceived to function as a

<sup>63</sup> Şakul, ‘Global’, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Menchinger, *The First of the Modern Ottomans*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> BOA HAT 229/12769; BOA HAT 172/7388, and esp. BOA HAT 171/7310.

<sup>66</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 58–9, 63; Kobishanov, ‘Dzhihad’, 5.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. Fatih Yeşil, ‘Looking at the French Revolution through Ottoman Eyes: Ebubekir Ratib Efendi’s Observations’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70(2) (2007): 283–304.

notice to the potentially aggressive European audience, a single message that the ‘Well-Protected Domains’ were not as weak as depicted in biased European accounts and that the Ottoman imperial military was rapidly growing stronger. For example, Mahmud Raif noted in his pamphlet that ‘The current state of the Ottoman Empire’s [military] forces and its revenues is largely unknown in almost the whole of Europe; there is no work which gives a correct notion of it’, before detailing the futures of the innovations, complete with embellished (sometimes exaggerated) notes on the condition of the Ottoman military.<sup>68</sup> This was why a majority of the pamphlets were printed only in French and were allocated to European bureaucrats immediately after printing.<sup>69</sup>

The sultan thus looked to ensure, against the threats posed by Russia, Austria, and now also France, his empire’s ontological security by having her position affirmed among the militarily strong Powers of Europe.<sup>70</sup> But the plans made in Istanbul would not suffice to halt the French, nor any other aggressive power at the time.

Warnings poured into Istanbul. Seyyid Ali Efendi (1757–1809), the sultan’s ambassador in Paris from 1797, cautioned the Porte about the aims of the French revolutionaries, identifying the latter with *fesad-u fitne* (malice and sedition).<sup>71</sup> Reports from Russian agents implied that France was planning an expedition to Egypt—St Petersburg was one of the first capitals to identify the French target—though Russian agents also suspected, albeit falsely, that there might be a deal between Paris and Istanbul.<sup>72</sup> According to them, France would pay a large sum of money to the sultan, sell some islands taken from the Venetians, and there would be free export of grain from Egypt to Istanbul.<sup>73</sup> Ottoman agents in Vienna and Morea likewise sent reports of a possible French attack.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Mahmoud Rayf Efendi, *Tableau des nouveaux règlements de l’empire ottoman* (Constantinople: n.p., 1798), 4. For an analysis of the pamphlet, see Kemal Beydilli ve İlhan Şahin, *Mahmud Raif Efendi’nin Nizam-ı Cedide Dair Eseri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Eg. there was only one Turkish (original) version of Mahmud Raif Efendi’s *Nümune-i Menazım-i Cedid-i Selim Hani* (1798). It was translated into French (*Tableau des nouveaux règlements de l’empire ottoman*) immediately; 200 copies were distributed among European diplomats. Şakul, ‘Nizam-ı Cedid Düşüncesinde Batıllaşma’, 122, 125–9.

<sup>70</sup> On ontological security and its application to historical analyses, see esp. Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma’, *European Journal of International Relations* 12(3) (2006): 342–70; Ayşe Zarakol, ‘States and Ontological Security’; Martin J. Bayly, ‘Imperial Ontological (In)Security: “Buffer States”, IR, and the Case of Anglo-Afghan Relations, 1808–1878’, *European Journal of International Relations* 2(4) (2014): 816–40.

<sup>71</sup> BOA HAT 142/5882, 10 Apr. 1798; cf. Şakul, ‘Global’, 61–2.

<sup>72</sup> Report of Simolin, 13/24 Apr. 1798, AVPRI, f. 93, o. 93/6, d. 525, ll. 104–5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 21 May/1 June 1798, AVPRI, f. 93, o. 93/6, d. 525, ll. 130–31. These were indeed ideas that Talleyrand had entertained to persuade the Porte but possibly not communicated to Istanbul.

<sup>74</sup> Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi: Nizam-ı Cedid ve Tanzimat Devirleri, 1789–1856* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983), 28. Reports of nationalist and revolutionary agitation by French agents in Greece and the Balkans abounded in Istanbul: *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 280–81.



As a result, Grand Vizier İzzet Mehmed Paşa asked Seyyid Ali Efendi to make new inquiries in Paris. The latter's reports temporarily mitigated Ottoman anxieties, as he summarized all the rumours in France and concluded in April 1798, with reservations, that the French activity in Toulon was aimed at an expedition to Britain, not to the Ottoman territories.<sup>75</sup> The grand vizier nonetheless noted on the margins of one of these reports that the Porte had to remain alert and act with caution.<sup>76</sup>

Seyyid Ali Efendi was perplexed in late April when the French press claimed that the destination of the expedition would be Egypt. At the Grand Vizier's orders, he immediately asked Talleyrand to share with him, not the exact 'secret' destination of the expedition as such, but just whether it was in Ottoman lands or not. Talleyrand denied this, ambiguously stating that the republic was neither at war with the sultan's empire nor had any wish to start a war against it. Thanks to diplomatic secrecy in Paris, even after the French navy invaded Malta in late May, Ottoman strategists did not know where Bonaparte would head next.<sup>77</sup>

On 19 June, the grand vizier summoned the French chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, Pierre-Jean-Marie Ruffin (1742–1824), only to receive his assurances that the Directory government would by no means accept General Bonaparte's rumoured plans in Egypt, given the historical amity and alliance, commercial relations, and centuries-long peace that had existed between France and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>78</sup> Ruffin could not, however, state that the rumours in newspapers and diplomatic circles as to the French occupation of Egypt were false. Even so, if Bonaparte indeed aimed to invade Egypt, he said, it would be only for the punishment of the Mamluks and to cut off Britain from India. It would be a friendly act toward the Porte, not a hostile one.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless the grand vizier took the precaution of sending an agent, Ahmed Erib Efendi, to fortify Egyptian shores against a potential attack.<sup>80</sup> But he was too late. Before his arrival, French flags had been already raised in Alexandria.

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First, in late June, a Greek ship had seen a French naval force of 400 vessels approach the coast of Egypt. The Greek captain then rapidly sailed to the north, and informed the Ottoman authorities in Rhodes.<sup>81</sup> When Selim and his entourage received the news (soon after a second dispatch informed them that French troops had landed in Egypt on 1 July 1798), they did not feel shocked, as is portrayed in the literature.<sup>82</sup> Nor did they think that French aggression was simply

<sup>75</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 62; Kemal Beydilli, 'Seyyid Ali Efendi', *IA*, 45–7.

<sup>76</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 62–3. <sup>77</sup> Kobishanov, 'Dzhihad', 8.

<sup>78</sup> M. Bianchi, *Notice historique sur M. Ruffin* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1825), 14–15; Karal, *Osmanlı*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 320–23; Şakul, 'Global', 78.

<sup>80</sup> *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 291; Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 70. <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>82</sup> For a recent example, see Menchinger, *The First of the Modern Ottomans*, 188.

a stab in the back.<sup>83</sup> But aggression from a friendly nation was of course painful, provoking consternation and fury.

Seyyid Ali Efendi, for his part, was still unaware of subsequent developments, as Talleyrand continued to insist that Bonaparte had no other instructions than the occupation of Malta. In August, the Ottoman ambassador reported to Istanbul that there was not much to worry about even after France had already invaded Alexandria. 'What a donkey!' exclaimed the disgruntled sultan after reading his agent's misinformed intelligence.<sup>84</sup>

Soon after the details of the occupation were dispatched from Cairo, an imperial *firman* was prepared in Istanbul and sent out for circulation in all provinces of the empire. 'One of the French commanders, the general named Bonaparte', it read,

some time ago appeared in the Mediterranean with a large fleet... [On] the seventeenth day of the month of Muharrem [July 2], [he] suddenly attacked Alexandria... penetrating it, seized it by force... he detained the Muslims and non-Muslim traders of my Sublime Empire, and even sequestered the ships of the Ottoman traders—although no notice had been received from the Republic regarding the break-up of the peace existing between my Sublime Empire and the French.<sup>85</sup>

Fearing that the Republic would attack other areas of his empire, and knowing that his military and navy would be overpowered by the aggressor's army, Selim III did not hurry to declare war.<sup>86</sup> His peevish and embittered orders and poems written at the time, as well as the tone of his letters to co-religionist sultans, were evidence enough of his anger.<sup>87</sup> Grand Vizier İzzet Mehmed Paşa and Şeyhülislam Dürri-zâde Arif Efendi were sacked and exiled for failing to foresee the occupation, and for their pro-French inclinations. But, in fact, with this, Selim also aimed to obtain the support of the disgruntled Janissaries and the *ulema* (religious leaders) by appointing Yusuf Ziyauddin Paşa (d. 1819), a prominent conservative, as the new grand vizier, and the allegedly reactionary Ömer Hulusi Efendi as the new *şeyhülislam*.<sup>88</sup>

The New Order programme was then halted. Preparations for war began.<sup>89</sup> The French consul, Ruffin, was arrested and imprisoned in the Yedikule dungeon.

<sup>83</sup> Şakul, 'Global Moment', 50.

<sup>84</sup> Soysal, *Fransız İhtilali*, 242; Karal, *Hat-ti Hümayunlar*, 179.

<sup>85</sup> Joseph Cabra, 'Quelques firmans concernant les relations franco-turques lors de l'expédition de Bonaparte en Égypte (1798–1799)', in *Cahiers de la Société asiatique* vol. 10 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1947); cf. Gaultier-Kurhan, *Méhémet Ali*, 19.

<sup>86</sup> Hatt-ı Hümayun 1214, TSA 1173/13/478/26. See also Henri Dehérain, *La vie de Pierre Ruffin, orientaliste et diplomate, 1742–1824* (Paris: Geuthner, 1929), 138–9.

<sup>87</sup> Karal, *Osmanlı*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 351–5.

<sup>89</sup> [?] to Johann Amadeus Franz de Paula Freiherr von Thugut (Vienna), 25 July 1798, HHStA StAbt Türkei VII 40.

Islamic communities (the *umma*) and all *vilayets* and *sanjaks* along the coasts of the Mediterranean were asked to prepare for a potential French attack, to aid the Porte, and to welcome the British navy in the event of its arrival in their ports.<sup>90</sup> New, more energetic governors were appointed to Morea and Cyprus as a defensive measure.<sup>91</sup> The Barbary corsairs in Algiers were ordered to cut the connections of the French navy with its mainland, though the latter did not comply with this order. And dispatches were sent out to Bekir Paşa, the governor of Cairo, to rally the population for jihad against France.<sup>92</sup> Selim III ordered the governor and the Mamluk beys not to cede to the ‘rogue infidels’ even ‘a handful of Egyptian sand’.<sup>93</sup>

Letters were sent also to Morocco and India, to Sultan Moulay Suleyman (r. 1792–1822) and the Tipoo Sultan of Mysore in India, Feth Ali, who at that time had troubled relations with the British and was cooperating with France.<sup>94</sup> Selim’s letter to India luridly portrays the sultan’s emotions. He described the French invasion of Egypt as an act of ‘treachery and deceit, notwithstanding the observance of long subsisting friendship’. The ‘infidels’ had in view ‘subduing all Muslims in the world so as to erase the name of Muhammad’s religion and nation from the world’, as well as dispatching troops to India through Suez

wherever they had roamed, they had violated the international law, preying on dominions, killing people, and pillaging like bandits... The Frenchmen were such plunderers and liars that they even overran the dominions of the Pope... [Venice] professed neutrality and friendship towards France to no avail... [and their] government... was now erased from the surface of the earth.

The letter concluded by advising Feth Ali not to engage in an alliance with France, and to inform the Porte of his grievances against Britain ‘so that [the sultan] would remove them to Ali’s satisfaction’.<sup>95</sup>

When the news that the British fleet commanded by Admiral Nelson had destroyed the entire French fleet at Abu Qir on 1 August 1798 arrived in Istanbul, Selim was delighted. But he still remained diffident in making alliances with the European Powers, including Britain, due largely to his distrust of them.

<sup>90</sup> Firman of the declaration of Jihad, 18 July 1798, BOA A.DVNSNMH.d 9/1. Moreover, a firman was sent to Tunis to arrest the French consul and dragoman, BOA AE.SSLM.III 3/343.

<sup>91</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 86–7.

<sup>92</sup> BOA C.DH 7764/3806, cf. Yüksel Çelik, *Şeyhül-Vüzerâ Koca Hüseyin Paşa* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2013), 14.

<sup>93</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 88.

<sup>94</sup> Letter dispatched to Mevla Ismail bin Mevla Muhammad, the hakim of Morocco, 19 Jan. 1799, BOA A.DVNSNMH.d 9/395; letter dispatched to Mevla Suleyman, the hakim of Morocco, 14 Sept. 1798, BOA A.DVNSNMH.d 9/386; letter dispatched to Tipu Sahib, ruler of the kingdom of Mysore, 12 Dec. 1798, BOA A.DVNSNMH.d 9/388.

<sup>95</sup> Hikmet Bayur, ‘Maysor Sultanı Tipu ile Osmanlı Padişahlarından I. Abdülhamid ve III. Selim Arasındaki Mektuplaşma’, *Belleten* 12(47) (1948): 643–50; cf. Şakul, ‘Global Moment’, 4.

He decided to wait and see the results of the initial measures taken by his forces before making an alliance with the eager Britain and Russia. He was unsure about both, especially about Russia, the age-old enemy of his empire. He had been hoping to join forces with France against Russia only a few years ago. Now he found himself having to decide whether to open the Straits to the fleet of the Romanovs for an alliance against France. 'My vizier,' he wrote in a note, 'we should gain time like this... I am [normally] very brave in such acts, however, I cannot dare [to act this time].'<sup>96</sup> The entry of the Porte into an alliance with either nation was unprecedented, and its call for an alliance with the foreign powers could expose the internal decrepitude of his empire. As one of his ministers told the sultan, this could prove to be the 'most dangerous' threat to the 'Well-Protected Domains'.<sup>97</sup>

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France repeatedly implied to the Porte that the occupation targeted the enemies of the Ottoman state. Bonaparte's army was a friendly power to both the Porte and the religion of Islam. This, his agents claimed, was evidenced by the release of Muslim prisoners from Malta and the tolerance shown to the Egyptian population after the occupation, though a revolt had broken out in Cairo on 21 October and some 2,000 inhabitants and 300 French had died.<sup>98</sup> Before his arrest, the French consul, Ruffin, had even shared with the Ottoman authorities the instructions of the Directory to Bonaparte by which the latter was ordered to maintain good relations with the sultan.<sup>99</sup> Ruffin maintained that once the Mamluks were destroyed 'the darkened Ottoman moon would rise like the sun' in Egypt.<sup>100</sup>

But all in vain. For Selim and his agents, the French aggression was unacceptable. Seyyid Ali Efendi told Talleyrand in Paris that it would be only a territorial violation if revolts emerged in Marseille and the Porte intervened without the permission of Paris. The sultan officially declared war on France on 25 September 1798 after much hesitation—due in part to the insinuations of the pro-French party in his court, and to the relative weakness of his army before the French—and only after the news of the destruction of the French fleet by the British reached Istanbul in mid-August.

Eight days later he sent a note to the representatives of the European Powers, in which he explained his position: even though the Ottoman Empire and France had entertained friendship for centuries, and the Porte continued this friendship even after the French Revolution when France was isolated by other Powers, the French had reciprocated with hostility. Bonaparte had sent agents to incite revolts in Ottoman provinces after occupying Italy, and even though the Directory regime

<sup>96</sup> BOA HAT 34/1682.

<sup>97</sup> Kobishanov, 'Dzhihad', 15–16.

<sup>98</sup> Mikaberidze, *Napoleonic Wars*, 77.

<sup>99</sup> Ruffin to MAE, 2 Aug. 1798, AMAE CP 198.

<sup>100</sup> Kobishanov, 'Dzhihad', 16.

promised the Porte that Napoleon's policy would be terminated, further piratical (*korsan*) action was undertaken with the occupation of Egypt. The note concluded that the plan of France was 'overturning the world order, destroying customs of nations and peoples, staging a coup in the government regimes of all well-organized Powers... [F]or the order and security of not only the [Ottoman Empire] but perhaps all European states, ... it is obvious that the elimination of the tyrannical [French] rulers whose [only job] is malice and sedition [*fitne ve fesad*] is necessary.' The Porte was therefore hoping for the friendly Powers' immediate succour, 'both explicit and implicit'.<sup>101</sup>

As will be detailed in the next chapter, Britain had already acted against French aggression in the Levant as it threatened her connections with India, which had to be shielded for the security of the British Empire. Under Tsar Paul I, Russia had once again reversed her policy from the 'Greek Project' to an 'Ottoman project' which provided for the preservation of the sultan's empire within the orbit of Russian influence.<sup>102</sup> The tsar now desired to sweep the French off the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>103</sup>

In early September, with the permission of the sultan, a Russian squadron under the command of Vice Admiral F. F. Ushakov crossed the Straits, which was a first-time sight for the Istanbulite population and which commenced a decades-long dilemma that would occupy international diplomacy over the passage rights of warships in these strategically key routes.<sup>104</sup> Following the success of the joint Russo-Ottoman campaign in the Aegean Sea, the sultan felt more assured of the necessity for cooperation.

Consequently, Selim III signed alliance treaties with Russia on 23 December 1798 and Britain on 5 January 1799 (both for a duration of eight years) as well as with the Sicilian kingdoms.<sup>105</sup> These were the Porte's first alliance with both empires in history, and took place when the Ottoman Empire effectively started the War of the Second Coalition.

While Russo-Ottoman forces immediately captured the Ionian Islands from the French, the news of the successful defence of St. Jean d'Acre by Ahmed al-Jazzar Paşa with British and Russian naval aid were received in the Topkapı Palace with great excitement. The 'unbeatable' armies of Bonaparte had been defeated for the first time by the Anglo-Russian-assisted Ottoman forces since the beginning of the expedition. But this was an ephemeral victory. After the failed siege in Acre,

<sup>101</sup> *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 6, 412; Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 96–7; Kobishanov, 'Dzhihad', 19.

<sup>102</sup> T. Y. Kobishanov, 'Politika Rossii na Blizhnem Vostoke v Gody 'Ekspedicii Napoleona Bonaparta v Egipet i Siriyu (1798–1801)', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta Vostokovedenie* 13(1) (2010): 4.

<sup>103</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 99–101.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 102; J.C. Hurewitz, 'Russia and the Turkish Straits: A Reevaluation of the Origins of the Problem', *World Politics* 14(4) (July 1962): 605–32.

<sup>105</sup> BOA A.DVNSNMH.d 9/493, n.d.; Karal, *Osmanlı*, 30–36. For the sultan's *hümâyun* to Yusuf Ziya Paşa, 17 Sept. 1799, TSA 1173/29/478/42; Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 96–7.

Bonaparte routed the landing Ottoman forces and captured their artillery and ammunition, a tremendous dent to the morale of Selim and his men. Then, the French general secretly quit the Levant in 1799: the British leaked false news in the Levant of French defeats in Italy and the Rhine through fake newspapers, prompting Bonaparte to head back to Europe to fight for his *patrie*.<sup>106</sup>

Soon after General Kleber took over the French command at the end of 1800, French forces managed to establish control in all major Egyptian towns.<sup>107</sup> And, in late 1799, due to his differences with Britain regarding the dispatch of Russian troops to Egypt and frustration resulting from military setbacks, Tsar Paul withdrew from the war with France, though he strove to prevent either Paris or London establishing a dominant influence in the Levant through his agents in Istanbul.<sup>108</sup>

These new developments made Britain the only major ally of the Porte fighting against the French at the time. The British parliament had approved the dispatch of land forces to reinforce the Ottoman resistance against France in Egypt. However, Ottoman authorities, and particularly Selim, were disinclined to see the British troops in Ottoman lands. The sultan instead suggested their installation in the Mediterranean islands and the restriction of their departure for Egypt subject to Ottoman authorization.<sup>109</sup>

According to Thomas Bruce, earl of Elgin (1766–1841) and the British ambassador to Istanbul, Ottoman reluctance stemmed from its rulers' jealousy and desire to 'assume the appearance' in Egypt so as not to leave a hazardous impression in the minds of their own subjects, 'but also in view of guarding against any claim we might be inclined to assert, or any step we might take towards establishing ourselves in Egypt on the expulsion of the French'.<sup>110</sup> Lord Elgin was partially correct. Selim III was indeed suspicious of British objectives, and feared that the British troops might never leave Egypt once they had landed.<sup>111</sup> The sultan was moreover reluctant to cover the substantial expenses that would be incurred by the British expedition.<sup>112</sup>

Meanwhile, peace talks in Paris between Seyyid Ali Efendi, Talleyrand, and Bonaparte were under way. In February 1800, the two architects of the French expedition continued to tout their policy as a favour to the sultan. Talleyrand told Seyyid Ali that they were unhappy with the state of war that Paris and Istanbul were 'dragged into', and that they would leave Egypt only after French interests in the Levant were secured.<sup>113</sup> He asked Seyyid Ali to ensure that Britain and Russia would not invade Egypt after the French occupation. Bonaparte, for his part, looked to come out on top. 'The Porte followed a false path,' he complained; '[i]t cooperated with its enemies and formed an alliance against its friend . . . Our aim is

<sup>106</sup> BOA HAT 226/12584.

<sup>107</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 118–19.

<sup>108</sup> Schroeder, *The Transformation*, 202–9; Kobishanov, 'Politika Rossii', 10–18.

<sup>109</sup> BOA C.HR 23/1120, 7 Jan. 1800.

<sup>110</sup> Lord Elgin to Baron Grenville, 9 Feb. 1801, *LPM* vol. 1, 2.

<sup>111</sup> BOA HAT 34/1682.

<sup>112</sup> BOA C.HR 102/5076.

<sup>113</sup> Karal, *Fransa-Mısır*, 130.

not to keep Egypt. In fact we never intended to occupy it.' Puzzled by these words, the Ottoman agent Seyyid Ali responded that the only path to peace between the Porte and the republic was the latter's unconditional evacuation from Egypt. But the differences were too sharp between the French and Ottoman statesmen. News of the assassination of Kleber in Cairo in June 1800 heightened tensions during the talks in August and September, which came to a dead end for the time being.<sup>114</sup>

Seeing that peace with France was difficult to obtain, and that the Ottoman armed forces were proving incapable of driving the French army out of Egypt, first Reisülküttâb Atif Efendi and then the new grand vizier, Yusuf Paşa, and finally Sultan Selim III reluctantly accepted the involvement of British land troops in the expedition. They were assured by Lord Elgin as to the goodwill of Britain in landing her troops in Egypt. In September 1800, British preparations began. And in the spring of 1801, 20,000 British and Ottoman forces landed in Abu Qir. Britain also brought some 15,000 men from India through the Red Sea. And finally, the Ottoman imperial army of some 60,000 men under the command of Grand Vizier Yusuf Paşa arrived from Syria.

Detached from the motherland by the Anglo-Ottoman blockade, and overpowered by the arrival of these armies in waves, the French forces in Egypt were compelled to surrender. They did so on 27 June (Cairo) and 2 September 1801 (Alexandria) respectively. The one condition that French commanders set out was that French savants were to be permitted to send (in secret) their significant hoard of antiquities to France. It was accepted, with the exception of the Rosetta stone, which was then transported to London the same year.<sup>115</sup>

The inter-imperial war in Egypt was thus brought to an end. This was the last colonial war Britain and France ever fought with each other. It resulted in the first alliance between London and Istanbul, and also in the least likely one, between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The Straits were opened to Russian warships in this peculiar context, and from then on until 1936, it became a matter of disputes among the international actors.

For Selim, the French expedition was a wake-up call. He saw that the line between friends and enemies was too thin and could easily be transgressed amid the European politics of the time. He was baffled. Where would his empire locate herself now in this chaotic system? He knew better than ever, though, that there was an absolute need to hasten the 'New Order' programme and to acquire more concrete results. The new army, still limited in number, had not proved entirely efficient in Egypt. He had sacked his pro-reform ministers during the war in order to mobilize the Janissaries. And France had withdrawn her officers who had been training the Ottoman army. One year into the war, he had also pardoned all rebellious local notables, including the Pasvanoğlu family in the Balkans, and had

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 131–2.

<sup>115</sup> Silvera, 'Egypt and the French Revolution', 314.

even promoted them, to ensure domestic stability during the inter-imperial war. Yet the example of the Pasvanoğlus, as an Ottoman Greek observer wrote at the time, set the stage for future disorder, as ‘many started to follow his example, dissatisfied with [the New Order]’.<sup>116</sup>

### The Wrecked Victory

News of the victory in Egypt was greeted with huge celebrations in Istanbul. Dazzling fireworks illuminated the skies of the imperial capital at night, and a certain Selim Efendi, a man of British origin, flew a hot air balloon during the day to entertain the city’s inhabitants.<sup>117</sup> The triumph was recounted to the Istanbulites as an epic story of courage and bravery, a great success of Ottoman troops against the more advanced French forces in the battlefield. It was received with astonishment, inspiring awe among the population.

All this gave Selim III’s reform programme new momentum. He now aimed to enlarge his ‘New Order’ army by involving soldiers beyond Anatolia. His next move was recruitment in Rumelia, where a majority of the Janissaries were originally from. Yet his plans at once aroused doubt and suspicion among the opponents of the ‘New Order’ movement, and most prominently among the Janissaries, who were worried about the future of their units.<sup>118</sup> The financial pressures wrought by the war against France had led to an increase in food prices and thus to public resentment. Observing this, Selim held back and put a temporary hold to recruitments, thus offering some relief against the rising tides of discontent.

In the next half-decade, the opponents of the ‘New Order’ programme gained greater strength in the face of the unfolding international developments. In fact, after the evacuation of the French forces from Egypt, the relationship between France and the Ottoman Empire had swiftly normalized. During the peace negotiations in 1801, Bonaparte assured Selim:

[the] expedition from Egypt was not made with hostile views against the Ottoman Empire. But finally God wanted it to serve as a pretext for the rupture of the two nations, to convince us, on both sides, that our real interest is union and peace. Here we are brought back. If Your Highness shares the feelings which animate the French government, the past will be forever forgotten, and a solid peace, a mutually advantageous trade, will consolidate the prosperity of [both] nations.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Philliou, *Biography*, 68. <sup>117</sup> Beydilli, ‘III. Selim’, 47.

<sup>118</sup> Sunar, ‘Ocak-ı Amire’den’, 511.

<sup>119</sup> Bonaparte to Selim III, 11 Oct. 1801, in Baron I. de Testa, *Recueil des traités de la Porte Ottomane avec les puissances étrangères*, vol. 1 (Paris: Amyot, 1864), 502.



One month after receiving this ‘friendly message’, the Sublime Porte decided to accept a preliminary peace agreement in Paris, which unconditionally restored Egypt to Ottoman control.

The Franco-Ottoman deal was sealed with a peace treaty of 25 June 1802, three months after Britain and France concluded peace with the Treaty of Amiens on 27 March. An important point here, usually omitted in the literature, is the fact that after the French occupation of Egypt the customs tariffs between the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and France and Britain, on the other, were re-regulated for a period of seven years (to be renewed again). The second and third articles of both treaties stipulated that the capitulations of whatever description that had existed prior to the war were renewed in their fullest extent. The free navigation of the Black Sea was ensured to France with the same rights, privileges and prerogatives that she had enjoyed on the other coasts of the Ottoman Empire before the war.<sup>120</sup> These, in effect, launched a period that saw the gradual opening up of the Ottoman Empire to European trade by the 1860s, though, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the commercial agreements were only selectively implemented by the Ottoman authorities during and after the Napoleonic Wars.

One reason why Selim III succumbed to these economic concessions was the fact that he was feeling threatened by the continuous presence of 80,000 Russian soldiers in the Balkan borders with the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, as we will see in Chapter 3, despite the stipulations of the Treaty of Amiens, by the end of 1802 British forces had still not evacuated Egypt, which, Selim had feared, could turn into a permanent occupation.<sup>121</sup> Colonel Horace François Bastien Sébastiani de La Porta (1771–1851), who had been dispatched by Bonaparte to Istanbul to complete the peace negotiations and mend relations with the Porte in 1802, reported back that the ‘Turks detested’ the Russians and the British; ‘If the Porte succeeds in delivering the British out of Egypt, and if peace brings her closer to France, she will surrender herself entirely to us, but until then Britain will dominate her.’<sup>122</sup>

Sébastieniani had a point. When it had become clear in 1800 that the French forces could be driven out of Egypt only with the help of the British forces, Britain had come to exercise immense controlling influence over the Porte through her ambassador Lord Elgin. But now the Porte was in need of French aid to drive the British out of Egypt. At this hour of struggle for influence over Istanbul between Britain and France—and, as we will see in the next chapter, of the struggle between British and Ottoman agents on the spot as to how to secure Cairo and its environs—the Anglo-French peace was shattered by the outbreak of a new episode

<sup>120</sup> [Downing Street] to Arbuthnot, 1804, NLS MS 5625/29.

<sup>121</sup> Romain Rainero, ‘Napoléon et la grande stratégie diplomatique en Orient. La première mission d’Horace Sébastiani dans l’empire ottoman (1801–1802)’, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 57(1) (1998): 289–305; ‘Rapport du Colonel Sébastiani sur sa mission à Constantinople en date du . . . 1802’, in Testa, *Recueil*, vol. 1, 508.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 508–9.

of Napoleonic Wars. London and Saint Petersburg joined the third coalition against France.

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During the War of the Third Coalition (1803–6), Selim III pursued the same policy he had tried to follow in the 1790s. He wanted to isolate his empire from European wars and channel his funds towards domestic reform. Yet he again could not. In the mid-1800s the Ottoman imperial capital once more became a microcosm of European rivalries, ‘teeming with European diplomats vying to win the Ottomans over to their cause’.<sup>123</sup> The sultan was urged to make a decision as to whose side he would take in the European wars.

Bonaparte personally wrote to Selim III in January 1805: ‘If Russia has an army of 15,000 men at Corfu, do you believe that it is directed against me? Armed vessels have the habit of hastening to Constantinople. Your dynasty is about to descend into oblivion . . . Trust only your true friend—France.’<sup>124</sup> Throughout the year, the Corsican piled pressure onto the Porte through Halet Efendi (1761–1822), the sultan’s agent in Paris.<sup>125</sup> Halet found himself on the receiving end of repeated threats from the French emperor as to the forging of an alliance between Paris and Istanbul or the complete break-off of their relations.<sup>126</sup> In November 1805, when the French ruler sent an ultimatum to Istanbul and no positive response came from Selim, Bonaparte pulled his agent from the Ottoman imperial capital.<sup>127</sup>

The Porte was unwilling to form an alliance with France at that point, mostly because he believed that the Russian threat was more immediate and imminent. With his greater number of soldiers at Ottoman borders, Tsar Alexander I was in a far better position to attack the ‘Well-Protected Domains’. Moreover, a leading member of the French camp in his entourage, Küçük Hüseyin Paşa, had passed away in 1803. Finally, mounting Serbian nationalist activities in the Balkans could be more easily confined, Selim believed, if he could cut Russian support to their co-religionists. Accordingly, he decided to throw in his lot with St Petersburg and London.<sup>128</sup> A defensive alliance treaty was signed with St Petersburg on 23 September 1805.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Karsh and Karsh, *Empires*, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Napoleon to Selim, 30 Jan. 1805, in *Correspondance de Napoléon I, publiée par ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1858–1870), vol. 10, no. 8298; cf. Karsh and Karsh, *Empires*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> See Ch. 4 for more on Halet’s experience in Paris and its repercussions.

<sup>126</sup> Enver Z. Karal, *Halet Efendi’nin Paris Büyükelçiliği* (Istanbul: İstanbul Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1940), 71–7.

<sup>127</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 332–3.

<sup>128</sup> D’Italinsky to Czatoryski, 30 Nov. 1805, *VPR* vol. 2, 640–42.

<sup>129</sup> Beydilli, ‘III. Selim’, 49.

With this treaty, Selim III agreed on cooperating with the Triple Alliance against France by authorizing the free passage of their ships from the Straits, and by backing Russian efforts to involve other neutral states in the alliance.<sup>130</sup> And with the leverage he entertained, he managed to reject the Russian demands to include articles permitting Russia to intervene on behalf of the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, mitigating, to an extent, the pressures on Istanbul that had been engendered by the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty of 1774.

This procured Selim with temporary security from the Russian threat.<sup>131</sup> But Bonaparte did not give up. Getting the Straits closed to Russian ships and exerting influence over the Balkans to counterbalance Russia was of paramount importance to his war strategy. After his victories over the armies of Russia and Austria at Ulm (17 October) and Austerlitz (2 December), he made a new move. He included in the Treaty of Vienna on 15 December 1805 an article with which France obtained a guarantee of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire from the Berlin court.<sup>132</sup> All the while, he continued to decry Russia to the Ottoman authorities as the greatest threat to the Porte's territorial integrity.

Impressed by Bonaparte's victories and flattered by his willingness to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, in early 1806 Selim's policy again gradually turned toward France. There was certainly a strong degree of opportunism in the sultan's move. As the Russian ambassador, the Chevalier d'Italinsky, reported to St Petersburg from Istanbul, this resulted from the constant anxiety in the Topkapı Palace especially after the French territorial increments and the latter's return to the Ottoman borders in the Balkans as a dangerous neighbour.<sup>133</sup> 'The Sublime Porte', d'Italinsky wrote, 'fears that in case of its refusal, Bonaparte may undertake an invasion [in its territories].'<sup>134</sup>

The Russian agents were anxious. Foreign Minister Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770–1861) ordered d'Italinsky to do everything possible to fully expose Bonaparte's 'subtle duplicity, explaining to the Porte that it has nothing to fear from Russia, while it could expect anything from the French'.

Could it not be possible to finally get the Ottoman Ministry to understand that the manner of action of the imperial court from the time of the conclusion of the Treaty of Iasi [of 1792] must completely dissipate all doubts about his intentions... that exactly [Russia], along with Britain, saved the Ottoman Empire during the invasion in Egypt... that precisely [Russia's] constant concern contributed mostly to its preservation to this day... that exactly [Russia] will always be truly interested in its integrity, while Bonaparte thinks only about

<sup>130</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 334.

<sup>131</sup> Karal, *Halet*, 80–82.

<sup>132</sup> BOA HAT 1284/49818; 'Nota poslannika v Konstantinopole A.Ja. Italinskogo tureckomu pravitel'stvu', 4 Feb. 1806, VPR vol. 3, 37–8.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

profit at its expense? After all, if we assume that Russia has intentions that are dangerous for the Porte, who could prevent it from carrying them out?<sup>135</sup>

According to Czartoryski, Bonaparte's territorial acquisitions and his direct and indirect control over the continent had given him such dominance that no state would dare to go against him or even cause him displeasure. Russia and Britain therefore had to act together immediately; and if one of the central pieces of their joint policy was Prussia in the north, the other had to be the Ottoman Empire in the south.<sup>136</sup>

France or Russia? With whom would Selim side? His final decision was dictated by Bonaparte's new pledges in December 1805. The French chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, Ruffin, promised the sultan that France would help Selim regain the Crimea from Russia. This was the most exciting pledge the emperor could offer the sultan. Restoring the Crimea to his rule had been Selim's ultimate goal ever since he had ascended to the throne. He could meet that great expectation of his people. He could be the conqueror they hoped he would be.

As a result, in February, Selim recognized Bonaparte as emperor.<sup>137</sup> And after the French victory at Jena in October 1806, he felt reassured about which side to take.<sup>138</sup> On the advice of Bonaparte's special envoy to Istanbul, Sebastiani, he did not ratify the alliance treaty with Russia.<sup>139</sup> Instead he appointed a pro-French hospodar in the Danubian principalities, withdrawing the Phanariotes (Ottoman Greek subjects working in the service of the Porte) that Russia favoured. He did not renew the existing alliance with Britain, closed the Straits to foreign war ships, and declared the neutrality of his empire in the European war. These acts sufficed for Tsar Alexander I to order his units already stationed on the Ottoman borders to invade the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in November 1806. One month later, Selim III declared war on Russia.

Within the space of a few months the Porte thus shifted from cooperation to war with the Triple Alliance. Consequently, through her ambassador to Istanbul, Charles Arbuthnot (1767–1850), Britain constantly pressured the sultan to revert his position once more and declare war on France.<sup>140</sup> Arbuthnot believed that Selim III was more afraid of the British imperial fleet than of the French soldiers stationed in the Balkans. This is why, as a last-ditch effort, a British squadron under the command of Admiral General John Thomas Duckworth (1748–1817) entered the Dardanelles, destroyed the Ottoman ships that tried to stop it, and

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.      <sup>136</sup> Czartoryski to S. R. Vorontsov, 14 Feb. 1806, *VPR* vol. 2, 44–7.

<sup>137</sup> 'Nota poslannika v Konstantinopole A.Ja. Italinskogo tureckomu pravitel'stvu', 4 Feb. 1806, *VPR* vol. 3, 37–8.

<sup>138</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 352.

<sup>139</sup> Yaycıoğlu, *Partners*, 43.

<sup>140</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 335; Fatih Yeşil, 'İstanbul Önlerinde Bir İngiliz Filosu', in *Nizam-ı Kadim'den Nizam-ı Cedid'e III. Selim ve Dönemi*, 404–5.

blockaded Istanbul on 20 February 1807.<sup>141</sup> However, suspecting that his ships could be trapped in the Straits if the Dardanelles were fortified before his return, Admiral Duckworth lifted the blockade after ten days.

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For Selim, despite the revolution in France and the ideological differences with the French rulers, this scheme of inter-imperial politics was probably how things should have been in the first place, given his admiration for France since his childhood and his desire to regain the Crimea from Russia. The truth was that it was impossible to control the chaos of politics at the time, as abrupt changes were taking place in the blink of an eye. And one of these would hit the sultan at home.

The departure of the British fleet from Istanbul prompted great jubilation in the imperial capital in early March 1807. But the ten-day blockade had also incited immense horror, panic, and tragedy.<sup>142</sup> Never before had Istanbul been subject to such a blockade. Never before had its population seen a hostile navy at their shores since the city fell under Ottoman rule in 1453. That tens of thousands had been recruited and were preparing near the walls of the city for the expedition against Russia in the Balkans at the time of the blockade provoked tumult, drought, and massive inflation. Domestic anger was directed against the ruling elites and more so against the new institutions and the expenses incurred by the 'New Order' army. The city seethed with false rumours that the British fleet had arrived in fact to bombard the Janissary barracks.<sup>143</sup>

This was the crucial moment. The opponents of the 'New Order', and international and domestic foes of Selim's reign, had already started coalescing: Russian ambassador d'Italinsky had begun to support their cause openly as a reaction to Selim's inclination toward France. The pro-Russian Phanariotes, having lost their posts when Selim appointed pro-French hospodars in the Balkans, joined them. The idea of dethroning Selim and replacing him with his older nephew, *Şehzade* Mustafa, with Russian and Phanariot funds grew stronger among the powerful families in Istanbul and prevailing conservative figures such as the janissary agha Ibrahim Hilmi (1747–1825) and scholar Mehmed Ataullah Efendi (1770–1826).<sup>144</sup>

The opportune time for this coalition arrived when Selim III's popularity further faded among the inhabitants of the capital. The news of Wahhabi attacks on the Holy Lands and the British invasion of Egypt reached concurrently in March 1807 and demoralized the imperial capital.<sup>145</sup> Soon after the sultan's army left for the expedition against Russia on 12 April, Istanbul found itself in tumult. Led by an auxiliary Janissary unit under the leadership of Kabakçı Mustafa, a

<sup>141</sup> Yeşil, 'İstanbul Önlerinde', 408–9; Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 358–9.

<sup>142</sup> Beydilli, 'III. Selim', 50.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New*, 375.

<sup>145</sup> See Ch. 3.

revolt broke out. Between 25 and 29 May, the fighting claimed the lives of a few dozen people including one of the prominent advocates of the 'New Order', Mahmud Raif Efendi.<sup>146</sup> Anxious to stop violence at once, Selim accepted the demands of the rioters without resistance, suspended the 'New Order' institutions, and in the end agreed to his dethronement. He returned to a life of seclusion in his room in the Topkapı Palace 18 years after his rise to power. While descending from the throne, he told his nephew Mustafa (1779–1808):

I wanted the happiness of my subjects. However, I irritated the people that I love and to whom I wanted to give back their glorious past. Since they do not want me any more and I cannot do anything for their happiness, I quit the throne without any grief and I sincerely congratulate you on your ascendance.<sup>147</sup>

But the fall of Selim III did not bring tranquillity to the empire: Istanbul was shaken by another shock soon after the new Sultan, Mustafa IV, ascended to the throne in June 1807. Rumours of a secret agreement made between Bonaparte and Alexander I (7 July) emanated from Tilsit.<sup>148</sup> The two rulers who had once each pressured the Porte to join the war on their side against the other had made peace, and were now discussing the partition of the Ottoman Empire.

The rumours were true. Bonaparte and Alexander had discussed but, in the end, could not agree on the details of the partition, as the French emperor wanted Austria to be involved in the sharing of the spoils of the sultan's empire, and denied the tsar's annexation of Istanbul and the Straits.<sup>149</sup> Even then, Bonaparte accepted the end of his alliance with the Porte and pressured Istanbul to make peace with Russia.<sup>tonf</sup>

Defeated by French armies in Friedland in June, Alexander I, for his part, agreed to recognize French conquests and hand back Wallachia and Moldavia to the Porte, though this agreement never took effect. In the event that the Porte did not agree peace with Russia, the two rulers established, France would join the war against the Ottoman Empire and her European provinces would be shared between Paris and St Petersburg as colonies, 'leaving only Istanbul and Rumelian provinces to the sultan'.<sup>150</sup>

Diplomatically cornered, the Porte agreed to sign an armistice with Russia with French mediation.<sup>151</sup> But, as distrust and lack of coordination tarnished the

<sup>146</sup> Yaycioğlu, *Partners*, 43. For a French observation on the 1807–8 events, see Antoine Juchereau de Saint-Denys, *Révolutions de Constantinople en 1807 et 1808, précédées d'observations générales sur l'état actuel de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: Brissot-Thivars, 1819); see also Ali Yaycioğlu, 'Révolutions de Constantinople: France and the Ottoman World in the Age of Revolutions', in *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories*, ed. Patricia M. E. Lorchin and Todd Shephard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 21–51, at 41–3.

<sup>147</sup> Juchereau, *Révolutions de Constantinople*, 139; cf. Yaycioğlu, 'Révolutions de Constantinople', 42.

<sup>148</sup> BOA HAT 1367/54128.

<sup>149</sup> Bitis, *Russia*, 27.

<sup>150</sup> Karsh and Karsh, *Empires*, 14.

<sup>151</sup> BOA HAT 170/7254.

Franco-Russian alliance shortly thereafter, the war between St Petersburg and Istanbul continued intermittently until 1812. It came to an end only after another exhausting turn in European wars, when Bonaparte began his march on Russia with his *Grande Armée*, as we will see in Chapter 4.

Amidst this immense web of ambiguity, quicksilver alliances, chaos, and insecurity in international politics, and while the war with Russia was still under way, Istanbul could hardly enjoy domestic stability. Fourteen months after Selim III's dethronement, another coup d'état took place in the imperial capital.

The proponents of the 'New Order' who had managed to survive the 1807 revolt combined forces with the local nobility under the leadership of Alemdar Mustafa Paşa (1765–1808) of Ruschuk. The latter had successfully fought against the Russians in the Balkans, and with the winds in his sails, he was ready to march to Istanbul, restore Selim III to his throne, and restart the 'New Order' programme.

In July 1807, Alemdar Paşa's forces overwhelmed the Janissaries, managing to seize political power shortly afterwards. On the 28th day of the month, the Paşa arrived in Istanbul with 15,000 men. After routing all resistance on his way, he entered the Topkapı Palace, burst open the grand doors of the palace, and then proceeded past the *Babüssaade* (the Gate of Felicity). There before his eyes he found a corpse placed on a mattress on the sofa next to the copper fireplace, just under the pale pink rose decorations inscribed amidst the golden motifs on the ceiling. It was none other than the star-crossed Selim, strangled at the order of his nephew Mustafa.<sup>152</sup> The other heir, Mahmud (1785–1839), whom Selim had always favoured more, escaped the tragic fate of his uncle by hiding in the bathroom. The same day, Alemdar placed Mahmud on the throne as the new sultan, where he remained for 31 years.

Selim III's death marked the end of a period of volatile inter-imperial relations and the first efforts at comprehensive reforms in the Ottoman world. During no other sultan's reign was the Ottoman Empire engaged in wars and alliances with almost all major European Powers in such quick succession. Though Selim wished to avoid war in order to address the main social ills of his empire, and to guarantee the security of the 'Well Protected Domains' by ensuring the circle of justice, the Porte's involvement in the Coalition Wars, by actually starting the second one in 1798, dealt a huge blow to his plans.

Thereafter, the reign of Selim became an era of unmanageable imperial anxieties. He had learned that alliances with European Powers no longer truly meant lasting security for his empire. Admiration for the military achievements of his Western neighbours, need for their technology and know-how, and distrust of their foreign policies were all enmeshed in his quest for security. These left the

<sup>152</sup> Beydilli, 'III. Selim', 54; *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 8, 308; Ottokar Freiherrn von Schlechta-Wssehrd, *Die Revolutionen von Constantinopel in den Jahren 1807 und 1808* (Vienna: Gerold, 1882), 72. On the details and various accounts of the death of Selim, see esp. Aysel Danacı-Yıldız, 'III. Selim'in Katilleri', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 31 (2008): 55–92.

sultan in a continuous yet self-defeating cycle of haste and hesitation in grappling with political issues in the early years of the nineteenth century.

The heightened insecurities during the Napoleonic Wars continued to inform Ottoman policies for several decades. When Selim's nephew Mahmud II ascended to the throne in 1807, the latter consciously avoided forming alliances with any European Power, or entrusting his empire to European public law. This lasting cynicism became a central feature of political decisions taken by the Porte especially when the Powers offered it to become a part of the Vienna system in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic wars.<sup>153</sup>

The 1798 expedition not only left the sultan with an acute sense of loneliness in inter-imperial politics. It also launched a history of 'good-willed' occupations and interventions in the Ottoman periphery, laying the seeds of a new, transimperial culture of security, wherein the Powers thenceforth saw it justifiable to intervene in the Levant with the purpose of supplying security and by employing previously unexampled instruments and tactics beyond their imperial borders, and often against the will of the Porte. Talleyrand and Bonaparte believed that their invasion of Egypt was for a just cause as the local actors in the Levant were hampering both French commercial interests and the Ottoman political authority.

Yet they failed to see, or chose to ignore, that Selim had his own plan, one for obtaining security in his 'Well-Protected Domains'. Forging alliances had by the turn of the century become an integral feature of the 'circle of justice', with the reform of the military and maintenance of the continuity of the empire being important prerequisites for this. This was the Ottoman disposition toward the evolving Eastern Question of the time. However, the proponents of the 'New Order' movement could not overcome the domestic and global hurdles they confronted in order to realize their plan.

As Fernand Braudel has argued, the Mediterranean was not a wall or a barrier that divided the societies around it, but a bridge, a contact zone connecting peoples.<sup>154</sup> The crossing of the Mediterranean by French, British and Ottoman forces indeed brought their policies and security considerations as well as those of local actors in Egypt into the same equation at the turn of the nineteenth century. Be it a service for the sultan, as Talleyrand thought, or an element of the partition plan, as Bonaparte envisaged, the 1798 expedition also revived divisions and animosities on the ground, and interlocked local insecurities and hostilities with global imperial calculations. In Istanbul, it hit Selim III's plans for guaranteeing the security for his empire by bolstering the circle of justice, and marked the first steps of a decades' long process of the opening up of the Levant to European trade. In Egypt, it left behind a malicious civil war.

<sup>153</sup> Ozan Ozavci, 'A Priceless Grace? The Congress of Vienna of 1815, the Ottoman Empire and Historicizing the Eastern Question', *English Historical Review* (forthcoming).

<sup>154</sup> Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949).