

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

MASTER THESIS

**BALANCE OF POWER IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD:
A CASE STUDY ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE DURING
SELIM THE FIRST**

MUSTAFA YILDIRIM

**THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASSOC. PROF. ALİ ASLAN**

ISTANBUL, 2025

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SELIM THE FIRST**

by

MUSTAFA YILDIRIM

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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ÖZ

İslam Dünyasında Güç Dengesi: Yavuz Sultan Selim Dönemi Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Sultan Üzerine Bir Vaka Çalışması

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Bu tez, güç dengesi teorisinin açıklayıcı gücünü ve evrensel uygulanabilirliğini, I. Selim dönemindeki Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na odaklanan Batılı olmayan bir vaka çalışması üzerinden incelemektedir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun hızlı yükselişi ve Selim'in sekiz yıllık kısa ama dönüştürücü saltanatı altında on altıncı Orta Doğu'sunda Osmanlı hegemonyasının kurulması, bu vakayı teorisinin varsayımlarına ve uygulanabilirliğine meydan okuyan sapkın bir vaka haline getirmektedir. Bu çalışmada, Osmanlıların yükselişinin rakip devletler (Safeviler, Memlûkler ve Avrupalı Güçler) tarafından iç veya dış dengeleme mekanizmaları yoluyla neden etkili bir şekilde engellenemediğini araştırmak için süreç izleme yöntemini kullanılmaktadır. Tez, Osmanlı'nın Orta Doğu'da hegemonya kurmadaki başarısını üç faktöre bağlıyor: I. Selim'in liderliği, Osmanlı askeri üstünlüğü ve etkili bir karşı koalisyonun olmaması. Selim, hanedan rakiplerini ortadan kaldırarak ve elit kurumları kontrol ederek otoritesini sağlamlaştırmış, hızlı ve birleşik dış eylemlere olanak sağlamıştır. Osmanlı ordusunun gelişmiş barut kullanımı, disiplinli teşkilat yapısı ve lojistik verimliliği rakiplerini geride bırakmıştır. Buna karşılık, Safeviler ve Memlûkler yapısal eksiklikler ve kendilerine özel zorluklar nedeniyle zayıflarken, Avrupalı devletler kıtasal rekabetlerle dikkatlerini dağıtmaya devam ettiler. Osmanlıların rakiplerinin içinde bulunduğu bu yapısal ve siyasi koşullar, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na karşı etkili bir dengeleyici koalisyonun kurulmasını engellemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güç Dengesi Teorisi, Memlûkler, Osmanlı Devleti, Osmanlı Uluslararası İlişkileri, Safeviler, Yavuz Sultan Selim.

ABSTRACT

BALANCE OF POWER IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: A CASE STUDY ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE DURING SELİM THE FIRST

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This thesis examines the explanatory power and universal applicability of the balance of power theory through a non-Western case study focusing on the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Selim the First. The rapid rise of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of Ottoman hegemony in the sixteenth century of the Middle East under Selim's short but transformative eight-year reign make it a deviant case that challenges the theory's assumptions and applicability. This study utilizes process tracing to explore why the Ottomans' ascent was not effectively countered by rival states (Safavids, Mamluks, and European Powers) through internal or external balancing mechanisms. The thesis attributes the Ottoman success in establishing a hegemony in the Middle East to three factors: Selim the First's leadership, Ottoman military superiority, and lack of an effective counterbalancing coalition. Selim consolidated his authority by eliminating dynastic rivals and controlling elite institutions, enabling rapid and unified external action. The Ottoman military's advanced use of gunpowder, disciplined organizational structure, and logistical efficiency outmatched its rivals. By contrast, the Safavids and Mamluks were weakened by structural deficiencies and special challenges, while European states remained distracted by continental rivalries. These structural and political conditions inside the rivals of the Ottomans hindered the formation of an effective counterbalancing coalition against the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Balance of Power Theory, Mamluks, Ottoman Empire, Ottoman International Relations, Safavids, Selim the First.

DEDICATION

It is dedicated to those who are waiting for a new Yavuz Sultan Selim.



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I present my endless love and respect to my family, who did not leave me alone at every stage of my life. To my beloved father and mother, who endured countless hardships for my education, always prioritized my schooling above all else, and to whom I can never repay my debt of gratitude.

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BOP	Balance of Power
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis tests the balance of power theory's explanatory power through a case study on the Ottoman Empire during Selim the First. It directly addresses a fundamental question in international relations: "Why could Selim the First not be stopped according to the Balance of Power Theory?". This question is essential to grasp the complex dynamics of international relations in the sixteenth century in the Middle East. Selim the First's short but intensive and impactful 8-year reign was the cornerstone for the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East, and the world. During his sultanate, the Ottoman Empire established its hegemony in the Middle East through decisive military campaigns and victories and reshaped the geopolitics of the Middle East by erasing the long-standing Mamluk Empire from the stage of history and by compelling the Safavids to acknowledge Ottoman supremacy and retreat. These successful campaigns ensured to increase the empire's size threefold, to assume the prestigious title of Hadimul Haremeyni Sharifayn and caliphate. Therefore, the leadership of the Muslim world, both in practice and in principle, was transferred to Selim the First. This historical case challenges the assumptions of balance of power theory, one of the most distinctive theories of international relations. Balance of power theory claims that when states are exposed to a hegemonic threat by a revisionist state seeking dominance in an anarchic international system, states will act to prevent the establishment of dominance of a would-be hegemon through internal balancing and external balancing mechanisms such as enhancing military capacities and forming an alliance. Selim the First's swift ascent despite the Ottomans' rivals explicitly contradicts this theoretical expectation. Therefore, it necessitates a deeper inquiry that focuses on why balancing mechanisms failed to stop him. This historical case directly undermines the predictive power and the claim of universality, independent of time and space, of the balance of power theory. The historical reality demonstrates that neither internal mechanisms nor external mechanisms were able to balance the rise of Selim the First, which is against

the theoretical assumption. Thus, fundamental questions on the theory's explanatory power on internal relations are arising. This case is not just a historical event but also a critical empirical puzzle for the discipline and the theory. The main contribution of this thesis is to explain this anomaly, analyzing the understanding of balance of power theory's claims, scope, and limitations by testing specifically a non-Western historical example.

Balance of power theory anticipates that a swift expansion and rise of a power would give rise to a robust application of internal and external balancing strategies from its rivals in a multipolar international system. The 16th-century Middle East is a great example of a multipolar systems in which three major powers —the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, and the Mamluk Sultanate—alongside smaller entities like the Dulkadirid principality, exists, and Selim the First, with his hegemonic ambitions, tries to establish Ottoman dominance in the Middle East. However, the Safavids, Mamluks, Dulkadirids, and European powers collectively failed to materialize an effective counterbalancing coalition against the Ottomans. On the contrary, Ottomans rapidly rose as the hegemon of the Middle East within less than a decade. During Selim's short but intensive and impactful reign, series of decisive military campaigns broke out including the elimination of dynastic rivals (brothers and nephews), Chaldiran War (1514) against Safavids under the leadership of Shah Ismail, the conquest and dissolution of the Dulkadirids (1515), and the destruction of the Mamluk armies at the battles of Marj Dabiq (1516) and Ridaniye (1517). This rapid sequence of overwhelming victories, ending with the absorption of Mamluks and Dulkadirids and recognition of absolute Ottoman superiority by Safavids, underscores the absence of effective resistance.

The absence of an Ottoman case in influential comparative historical international relations studies, such as Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth's *The Balance of Power in World History*, which examines eight pre-modern and non-European international systems, highlights a significant empirical and theoretical gap in the existing literature. However, they emphasized that the medieval Middle East (including the Byzantines, the Arab Caliphates, and the Ottomans) is the longest relevant period to be studied in this regard, but it was still omitted. (Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth, 2007) This absence is the primary motivation for selecting Selim's reign as the subject of this

analysis. The Selim the First case functions as a definitive "deviant case" for the balance of power theory. Jack Levy (2008) defines "deviant case designs" as those that focus on "observed empirical anomalies in existing theoretical propositions, with the aim of explaining why the case deviates from theoretical expectations and in the process refining the existing theory and generating additional hypotheses". The Selim the First case perfectly aligns with this definition because it is a clear instance where the balance of power theory predicts balancing, but the empirical reality demonstrates a failure of effective balancing. This makes it an ideal case for an in-depth investigation to understand the mechanisms of this deviation. By rigorously analyzing this deviant case, the study aims to criticize the assumptions, scope, and explanatory-predictive power of balance of power theory. These critiques could involve identifying new variables, specifying overlooked causal mechanisms, or defining more precise scope conditions under which balancing behavior is, or is not, likely to occur. However, since the efforts made to expand the scope of balance of power theory in the current literature cause concept stretching, it would be more reasonable to accept this historical case as a criticism rather than to refine or redefine balance of power theory. Although the results can be used for the refinement of the theory, overstretching should always be in mind.

This case study is framed as a "least likely case" to test the balance of power theory because a rising Ottoman Empire (would-be hegemon) in a multipolar and anarchic international system should give rise to a counterbalance from its rivals. However, counterbalancing could not occur, making this case a deviant case that challenges the universal applicability of the balance of power theory. By using process tracing, the thesis unpacks the causal mechanism behind this failure more deeply. This case study ensures critical empirical leverage to critique the theory by revealing overlooked variables, including domestic and systemic variables that shape state behavior.

This thesis introduces the Ottoman case in international relations theory debates by empirically falsifying key assumptions of balance of power theory. While it is identifying alternative variables, such as internal consolidation, leadership style, and technological advantage, as determinants of (non)balancing behavior, it is also offering a critique of the theory's universality, suggesting the need for clearer scope conditions rather than concept stretching. Ultimately, by empirically demonstrating

the failure of counterbalancing against Selim I in a multipolar regional system, this thesis challenges the explanatory and predictive validity of balance of power theory and contributes to broader debates on the scope and limitations of realism in non-Western historical contexts.

The thesis structure consists of five chapters: introduction, literature review of balance of power theory, history of Selim the First's reign, analysis, and conclusion. Chapter I, Introduction sets forth the research question, articulates its historical and theoretical significance, and outlines the methodological approach, explicitly framing Selim the First's case as a crucial test for Balance of Power theory. Chapter II, literature review, provides a comprehensive overview of Balance of Power theory, exploring its various interpretations across different schools of thought (including classical realism, neorealism, offensive and defensive realism, the English School, liberalism, and constructivism). It delves into the theory's historical applications and critically examines its key criticisms, laying the essential theoretical groundwork for the subsequent analysis. This chapter is refined to specifically highlight critiques and nuances relevant to the Yavuz anomaly, such as the debate over BOP's universality and the factors contributing to underbalancing. Chapter III, Historical events of the period of Selim the First presents a detailed chronological account of Sultan Selim I's reign, meticulously detailing his internal consolidation of power and his significant military campaigns against the Safavids, the Dulkadirids, and the Mamluks. This section serves as the empirical foundation and rich historical data source for the case study analysis. Chapter IV, Analysis, this pivotal chapter applies the process-tracing methodology to systematically explain why Selim I's rapid ascent to hegemony was not effectively counterbalanced by rival states. The analysis is structured around three core explanatory factors: Selim the First's leadership, Ottoman military superiority and the fundamental absence of an effective counterbalancing coalition. This Chapter V, Conclusion, summarizes the key findings of the thesis, discusses assumptions of balance of power theory through findings from the case study, and suggests future research in international relations.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis uses a single-case study design and process tracing to examine the causal mechanisms and sequences of events within the case. The chapter outlines the methodological foundations of the thesis and explains the logic of the research design in detail. It provides a comprehensive justification for the use of a qualitative single-case design and a process tracing method. The chapter also presents the operationalization of key variables and explains how this study employs a deviant case analysis to test the assumptions of the balance of power theory in a non-Western historical context.

The central aim of this thesis is to understand why the rise of Selim the First to regional hegemony in the early 16th century was not effectively countered by rival powers, despite the expectations of the balance of power theory. The case of Selim's reign is not merely a historical narrative; it is treated here as a critical test for evaluating the explanatory power and scope conditions of balance of power theory. To that end, this chapter addresses the choice of case, defines the key variables, and elaborates on the process tracing methodology used to uncover the causal mechanisms behind the absence of balancing behavior.

The study's dependent variable is the absence of effective balancing behavior against a rapidly rising Ottoman power. This outcome contradicts the theoretical expectations of the balance of power, which predict that states will engage in either internal balancing (enhancing military and economic capabilities) or external balancing (forming alliances) to prevent the emergence of a hegemon.

The study identifies three interrelated independent variables that potentially explain this outcome.

First, Selim I's leadership is his internal consolidation of power and unitary actorhood with his hegemonic ambitions. This includes the elimination of dynastic rivals, suppression of autonomous elite institutions, and re-centralization of political authority with his hegemonic ambitions.

Second, Ottoman military-technological superiority. The effective use of gunpowder weaponry, superior logistics, and disciplined military organization enabled the Ottoman Empire to gain rapid and decisive victories.

Third, the inability of rival powers to construct a counterbalancing coalition. Special weaknesses and disadvantages, including fragmentation, misperception of threat, and ideological rigidity, of each rival empire enabled them to counterbalance the Ottomans. Also, conflicting priorities among the Safavids, Mamluks, and European powers prevented coordinated balancing efforts.

To thoroughly investigate this complex historical puzzle and challenge an established theoretical framework, this study adopts a case study methodology. Case studies offer distinct advantages in social science research, particularly when the aim is to explore nuanced historical processes and theoretical limitations that broader quantitative analyses might miss (Gerring, 2004). A key strength of case studies is their ability to achieve high levels of conceptual validity, enabling researchers to precisely define and measure abstract theoretical concepts, such as "power" or "balancing behavior," within their specific historical context⁶. This approach facilitates a "contextualized comparison," allowing for a detailed consideration of unique historical and cultural factors that are crucial for understanding how general theoretical concepts manifest in particular settings. Moreover, case studies are highly effective for the heuristic identification of new variables and hypotheses, especially when researchers engage in in-depth fieldwork, such as archival research, which can uncover previously unconsidered factors influencing outcomes. Unlike statistical methods that often rely on existing, pre-coded datasets, case studies provide an inductive pathway for discovering "left-out variables" that are critical for a comprehensive explanation. They are also uniquely suited for exploring the intricate operation of causal mechanisms by delving "inside the black box" of decision-making, offering insights into the perceptions, expectations, and choices of key actors that statistical approaches,

typically focused on correlations across cases, cannot easily provide. Additionally, case studies are adept at modeling and assessing complex causal relations, including phenomena like equifinality (where different causal paths lead to similar outcomes), multiple interaction effects, and path dependency, which are central to understanding complex social processes. They are particularly strong in identifying the scope conditions of theories and evaluating arguments about causal necessity or sufficiency in specific instances. Ultimately, case studies are regarded as indispensable for both theory development and testing, especially in generating new hypotheses and refining theoretical frameworks (George & Bennett, 2005).

This configuration of variables and outcome makes Selim's reign a strong candidate for what George and Bennett (2005) call a deviant case. A deviant case is one in which the outcome of interest deviates from theoretical expectations. George and Bennett (2005) argue that deviant cases can be used to refine existing theories by identifying omitted variables, specifying causal mechanisms, or identifying boundary conditions. Selim's rise to hegemony despite the multipolar nature of the international system and the presence of rival powers is anomalous within the logic of the balance of power. This gives the case strong theoretical leverage to critique and potentially falsify the theory's claims of universality.

Moreover, the case also fits the definition of a "least-likely case", in the sense that if balance of power theory were valid in any situation (universality claim), it would be expected to operate in a context where a rapidly rising power emerges in a multipolar regional order. The fact that balancing did not occur under these conditions suggests a significant theoretical anomaly.

To analyze the causal mechanisms at work, the thesis employs process tracing as its primary method. As defined by David Collier (2011), process tracing is a within-case analytical technique that identifies the intervening causal processes—the "causal mechanisms"—that link independent variables to outcomes. Collier (2011) emphasizes that process tracing is particularly valuable for uncovering non-obvious causal pathways, especially in historical and qualitative research. The method allows for the collection and evaluation of causal process observations, rather than mere dataset observations, to test competing hypotheses.

Process tracing is appropriate for this research for several reasons. First, the study involves a complex historical sequence of events in a single case, which requires in-depth analysis of context and timing. Second, the outcome in question is historically specific and causally complex; it cannot be explained by simple correlation. Third, process tracing permits the systematic testing of alternative explanations through the application of inferential tests, such as hoop tests, smoking gun tests, straw-in-the-wind tests, and doubly decisive tests (David Collier, 2011).

To apply process tracing in this study, the empirical analysis is organized into three diagnostic clusters corresponding to the independent variables:

First, Leadership of Selim I: This includes key events such as the deposition of Bayezid II, the execution of Selim's brothers and nephews, and the political neutralization of Janissaries and viziers. These episodes are analyzed to demonstrate how Selim transformed the Ottoman state into a centralized and coherent unitary actor capable of and intended for external expansion.

Second, Military Superiority: The thesis examines how Selim leveraged superior weaponry, experienced military cadres (especially the Janissaries), advanced logistical organization, and swift campaigning to achieve victories over rival powers. These factors are treated as intervening variables that enhance the state's ability to project power and deter or defeat opponents.

Third, Rival Powers' Constraints: The Safavids' post-Chaldiran decline, their eastern threat from the Uzbeks, the Mamluks' structural stagnation and internal divisions, and the political fragmentation of European states are all analyzed to explain the absence of balancing. These explanations are tested through primary and secondary historical sources and interpreted through the logic of process tracing.

The sources used for this analysis are mainly primary and contemporary secondary sources, including diplomatic correspondence, military records, contemporary chronicles, and the writings of historians. These sources are used to reconstruct sequences of decision-making, perceptions of threat, alliance dynamics, and strategic calculations.

In sum, this thesis adopts a historically grounded, theory-testing approach that combines deviant case analysis and process tracing to unpack the causal processes behind a major theoretical anomaly. This methodological framework provides a strong foundation for critically engaging with the balance of power theory and enhancing our understanding of international political dynamics in non-Western historical contexts.



CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

"If there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it"

Kenneth Waltz, 1979

3.1. Introduction

The Balance of Power theory is a central and useful theory in the international relations discipline. It is the most fundamental concept of IR. Balance of power is seen by some as being akin to a law of nature, by others as simply an outrage. Some view it as a guide to statesmen; others as a cloak that disguises their imperialist policies. Some believe that a balance of power is the best guarantee of the security of states and the peace of the world; others believe that it has ruined states by causing most of the wars they have fought (Waltz, 1979).

It is rooted in realist tradition, which assumes that the world is anarchic, states are in competition, and there is no central authority to preserve the security of each state. Thus, if any state tries to dominate the international system by establishing its hegemony through hard power mechanisms and alliances, other states try to prevent the emergence of the hegemon by various mechanisms and strategies. The stability and peace in the international system can be primarily reached by equal power distribution. This equilibrium is not static; it is a dynamic process that evolves over time, influenced by internal and external factors, which causes a wide range of strategic choices and outcomes.

The BOP theory mainly explains the nature of power politics in international relations; therefore, it gives insights into state behaviors and dynamics of international power politics. Meanwhile, the BOP has faced various criticisms from different scholars on

its assumptions, applications, and relevance. The claim that BOP explains power politics universally, regardless of time and geography, raises questions. Wohlforth, Kaufman, and Little wrote on this and refuted this claim by posing historical non-Western political successes in their book, *Balance of Power in World History*.

3.2. Definition of Balance of Power

Though the term is a main concept in IR, the most used words to describe the definition are "vague" and "ambiguous". There is no clear-cut definition of the BOP. Different schools of thought and scholars have different definitions of BOP. The roots of the concept of balance of power can be traced back to antiquity. In this place, the thesis will focus on the school of thought with the examples of scholars.

Realist schools with different versions have different understandings of BOP. Classical realists such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau see BOP because of human nature, where states as rational actors seek power and security. Thus, national interest and the role of power are central in state behaviors.

Thucydides offers important insights regarding the balance of power; however, he does not explicitly use the phrase "balance of power" (Andersen, 2016, p.13). The logic and thinking behind the balance of power is seen in Thucydides' mind, but not word by word in his writings. There is evidence of balance of power thinking in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Sheehan, 1995, p.25). The anxiety in the politics of Greece was with regard to the balance of power. Thucydides attributes the establishment of the league against Athens and the cause of the Peloponnesian War entirely to the balance of power (Moorhead Wright, 1975, p.59). The growth of Athenian power and the fear of Spartans stemming from the rise of Athens was the fundamental cause of the Peloponnesian War, according to Thucydides (1954, p. 49). Thucydides in *History of the Peloponnesian War* (400 BCE) provides the logic of BOP, centrality of power dynamics, and state behaviors by explaining the rise of Athens as a hegemonic power and Spartan balancing behaviors.

Machiavelli played an important but indirect part in the development of the concept of balance of power (Sheehan, p.30). Niccolò Machiavelli did not explicitly formulate a

theory of balance of power, but his writings contain foundational elements of balance of power. Machiavelli's broader view of politics, where states rise and fall in power, and this causes conflicts among states, aligns with his dynamic theory. Machiavelli emphasizes that states need to act to preserve their security and balance in the international system. For him, states should expand their power to maintain the equilibrium (Sullivan, 1973, p.265).

Hobbes' philosophical ideas about human nature and the state of nature provide a foundational ground for the realist perspective, in which there is anarchy in the international system and a central security dilemma. The desire for power in an inherited condition of insecurity and the essentiality of a strong military force in competition with other states are core assumptions of Hobbes's theory, which lead to a threat to the other and counterbalancing. The Hobbesian perspective of international relations dominated the Western balance of power understanding (Sheehan, 1995, p.152). Sheehan (1995, p.169) conceptualized the traditional balance of power theory as, in the mindset of realists, a "Hobbesian, Anglo-Saxon version of balance of power" theory. For a Hobbesian international system, the only way to achieve security is through the balance of power among states (Oldemeinen, 2016, p.1).

In his famous book *Politics Among Nations*, Hans J. Morgenthau depicts Balance of Power theory as 'a necessary outgrowth of power politics'. According to him, each state tries to either maintain or overthrow the status quo, leading to a configuration of the balance of power. BOP is an essential and inevitable stabilizing factor in the international system. The aim of all equilibria (balance) among nations is to maintain the stability of the system through protecting the multiplicity of the system's composing elements. There are two fundamental factors of international society: multiplicity and antagonism among different nations. Aspirations for power produce conflict among nations in two ways: either through direct opposition or competition. In direct opposition, states want to establish their domination over the other, and the other refuses it. The balance of power emerges as the result of the rejection of domination. Through balance of power, states achieve two things: stability (which is always in danger of being disturbed) and freedom from domination. The fragile structure of the balance of power and the dynamic nature of the relations among states underscore the importance of power acquisition for states. In competition among

relatively big powers, there are always small nations and buffer states that owe their existence to the balance of power or domination of a protecting power. The competition among big powers supplies existential opportunities for weaker states. Morgenthau underlines four different methods of balance of power: divide and rule, compensations, armaments, and alliances. Rising powers that want to weaken their competitors always divide them and keep them divided. Compensation of territories is a natural part of the balance of power in which the acquisition of new lands is distributed in a balanced way among nations, so that no nation gets an unacceptable advantage from newly acquired territories. Armaments are the main tools to gain power and protect or change the equilibrium among nations. Alliances are a necessary function of the balance of power. Alliances or counter-alliances occur when a power or a coalition has imperial desires over the other, which threaten the states' existence. Alliances are the most frequent configuration in the balance of power. Alliances emerge among two rival groups to aim at the preservation of stability in the international system. National interests are important but secondary compared to the collective security of the entire system. When four hundred years of multipolar European history are checked, the success of the balance of power in obstructing the emergence of domination by one power is seen (Morgenthau, 1973, pp. 125–169). It is worth underscoring that Morgenthau's balance of power is seen as more expansive than Mearsheimer's or Waltz's. Thus, his understanding of the balance of power got criticism as being ahistorical, ambiguous, and incoherent (Little, 2007, p. 91).

Kenneth Waltz is a central figure in the development of Balance of Power theory, particularly through his theory of structural realism. Balance of power theory was revived and recast in 1979 with the publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (Nexon, 2009, p.1). According to him, the balance of power theory can explain the system generally, but not in particular cases. The core assumption of the theory is that states are unitary actors that seek to preserve their existence and then try for universal domination. The existence of two states in the international system is enough for the realization of the Balance of Power theory. There are two requirements for the emergence of BOP. The first one is that each state's interest is to preserve its existence. If states lose their interest in self-preservation, the theory does not work. The second requirement is that the international order must be anarchic. In an anarchic system, the priority of the states is their security. Thus, states'

primary concerns are maintaining their positions rather than power maximization. When survival is reached, states can seek other aims like power, profit, or tranquility. There are two main means to preserve existence: internal and external efforts. Internal means include an increase in economic capability, military strength, and clever strategies, while external means include the establishment and empowerment of alliances and the weakening of the other side. The theory forms recurrently and states that it follows certain similar steps. Indeed, theory mainly explains state behaviors, which always appear in the expected forms because states experience similar situations in the international system. Theory gives a general and useful answer to "how will a state act and react" through assumptions about the interests and motives of states. A crucial assumption about state behavior is that states emulate strategies of the successful state in the army, technology, and other fields. Thus, the whole world starts to use similar military equipment, which was the innovation of the successful state previously. The theory focuses on constraints of all states rather than on the explanation of states' motivations behind their actions. Waltz (1979) believes that the balance of power is crucial for the maintenance of international stability and national independence, with assumptions on the nature of the state and system. Waltz and some of his followers have claimed that their theory explains balanced outcomes without necessarily predicting balancing strategies by states. This argument makes the theory exceedingly general, extremely difficult to test, and impossible to apply to any specific case (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004, p.217).

Mearsheimer, a representative of offensive realism, is seen as a successor of early realist thinkers like Waltz and Morgenthau (Lemke, 2004, p. 52). John Mearsheimer's understanding of balance of power is a more contemporary view in which states are primarily driven by a desire to maximize their relative power compared to other states. Thus, each state that fears the power aggregation of the other, who wish to establish its domination in the international system, needs to increase its power. Especially great powers need to seek power at the expense of integration in rivalries; otherwise, they will be dominated by the rising power (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 45). The core tenet of Balance of Power theory, according to Mearsheimer, is that states will act to prevent the rise of a hegemonic power through balancing to check the centralization of power in the system. Thus, the balance of power is an indispensable mechanism in the competition of states on their hegemonic strategies.

Walt's understanding of balance of power was formed on his balance of threat theory. Walt's perspective is away from the classical balance of power tradition, especially from Waltz's. Indeed, Walt's perspective criticizes Waltz's structural realism and highlights power distribution. Instead, he underscores that states balance against threats rather than power concentration. There are several factors that determine the level of threat, including aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived aggressive intentions (Walt, 1985, pp. 9-12). State makes alliances as a security cooperation to answer the threat, not to gain power. If there is a security or economic advantage for weaker states, states can bandwagon with the powerful state. However, balancing is more prominent than bandwagoning in the international system. Walt's explanations on alliance are an important point that distinguishes him from other realists. Diplomacy, ideology, penetration, and foreign aid are political tools to shape alliances (Walt, 1987, pp. 12, 275-277, 424-448).

As a result, the balance of power theory is strongly associated with the realist school, which has different forms, such as classical realism, neorealism, and offensive and defensive realism. In all forms, balance of power is considered a central mechanism of maintaining stability, and its main goal is to prevent the emergence of hegemony in the international system. There are core tenets of realism underpinning the balance of power. These are:

- Nation states are primary actors
- The international system is anarchic
- Power is the currency of international relations
- States are self-interested and look for survival and security

Meanwhile, there are differences among realist schools. Classical realists like Morgenthau underscore that the balance of power is a constant in international relations because of states' nature, which leads to a drive for power and preventing dominance. Neorealists like Waltz highlight that balance of power is a structural imperative in an anarchic system, which emerges as an unintended consequence of states' survival efforts. Offensive realists like Mearsheimer point out that states aim to maximize their power to establish a hegemony over others. Defensive realists like Walt (also Waltz can be named here) highlight that a state's primary goal is to seek security

rather than power maximization. With all the similarities and differences among the realist schools, the balance of power theory is a cornerstone of the realist school of thought in explaining the international system and state behaviors.

The English school offers a different perspective on the balance of power. Hedley Bull, Martin Wight, and Watson are important names on this issue. The English school does not reject the existence of power dynamics that are profoundly emphasized by realists, but the English school adds the importance of international society, shared norms, institutions, and states' conscious actions and behaviors to shape the balance of power in the context of the balance of power. The main assumptions that differentiate the English school from the others are as follows. Balance of power is a manually operated system, not automatic or unintended outcomes of state actions to protect their self-interest, as neorealist says. Human agency significantly affects the balance of power. Skilled diplomats and statesmen who strove to maintain the balance of power in the Europe for common good constitutes the system (Schweller, 2016, p. 4) Balance of power is one of five foundational institutions of international society with diplomacy, war, international law, great power management and balance of power is central compared to other four (Bull, 2002, p. 102). English schools regard the balance of power as a European concept and often focus on European history. Wight pointed out that the balance of power is normatively approved by Europeans, and there was no idea of balance of power in ancient times (Wight, 1977, p. 66). Great powers intersubjectively agree upon the existence of independent states in Europe, which is called the institutionalized balance of power, making European experience historically specific (Kaufman, Little, & Wohlforth, 2007, p. 48). As a result, balance of power is a social and historical phenomenon deeply embedded within the context of international society in which shared norms, institutions, and human agency consciously and manually maintain the order that aims at the existence of independent states in Europe.

Liberals do not reject the existence of the balance of power but reframe it with a less central position in international relations. Instead of a purely realistic view, they reshaped it within liberal peace theory in which institutions, diplomacy, cooperation, and alliances are central in balancing rather than power politics. Liberal's position in

balance of power theory is often related to the critiques of realist assumptions and understanding of balance of power, which will be touched upon in the following parts. Constructivists reframe the balance of power as a concept that is intersubjectively shaped and shapes international relations. Identities, ideas, interests, norms, and rules are all outcomes of social constructs as a balance of power's assumptions. Constructivists' perception of power and politics opens the gates for variations in state behaviors because constructivism closes the doors for a mechanistic and material understanding of the balance of power as realists do. Their understanding of the nature of politics and power is different. Wendt's famous phrase "Anarchy is what states make of it" shows that international culture and norms define and determine the meaning of anarchy, in which states are assumed to prioritize balancing behavior for their security. Power is necessary for security, but power is just a material concept, and it is socially constructed (Guzzini, 2004, p. 542). Ideas, norms, and identities are crucial in a state's perception of threat, interest, and behaviors for constructivists as for English school (Kaufman, Little, & Wohlforth, 2007, p. 13). The stability in Europe, because of the balance of power, is attributed to normative approval, as mentioned before. State behaviors, including balancing or non-balancing, are related to human agency, ideas, and interaction rather than automatic responses.

The thesis will ultimately proceed within the framework of the realist understanding of balance of power theory.

3.3. World History Through Balance of Power

The last five hundred years have been analyzed through the lens of balance of power theory to understand the sixteenth century of the Middle East, from which the case study was chosen.

The origins of balance of power politics reach back to the Italian Renaissance of the late fifteenth century. The late fifteenth-century's Italy consisted of five major city-states, including Venice, Florence, Milan, Naples, and the Papal States, whose primary aim was preventing the emergence of one single hegemon's domination over the others. Pillini (1970) describes this era as "'un equilibria di egoismi', where one state's self-interest was balanced by another's. This relatively self-contained system lasted

from the 1454 Peace of Lodi to the 1494 French Invasion of Italy (Moorhead, 1975, pp. Introduction–ix). During these forty years, Milan and Venice made an agreement called the Peace of Lodi, which ended with a rough equilibrium between these two states. Later, Florence joined them to solidify a balance in Northern Italy through a non-aggression pact. The Italian League was established through the participation of the Papal States and Naples. Thus, members of the Italian League are obliged to respect the territorial status quo. These five members always balanced each other by establishing new coalitions with different combinations of these five states, though balancing behaviors included military action. The traditional alliance was Naples, Milan, and Florence on one side while Venice and the Papal States were on the other side (Mallett, 1998, pp. 564-567). Lorenzo de' Medici, who governed Florence from 1469 until his death in 1492, was a central figure in the Italian balance of power system. He was named as "Vago della bilancia" (the tongue of the balance) (Wright, 1975). The powerful and potentially expansionist one was Venice, and the other alliance always aimed to keep down the power of the Venetians, who were not able to take control of everything when united. (Nelson, 1943, pp. 130-131). Thus, Lorenzo actively worked to solve disagreements between Naples and Milan to prevent a conflict that would lead to an uneven distribution of powers in favor of Venice, while against Florence's interest (Little, 2009, p.86). Ultimately, the French invasion of Italy in 1494, led by Charles VIII, ended the Italian balance of power system and initiated the Italian Wars, which lasted for several years. This invasion changed the political landscape of the Italian peninsula, which became a battleground for European major powers, including primarily France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire, and landscape of the Italian peninsula, which became a battleground for European major powers, including primarily France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire, and was open to foreign interventions (Botero, 1975, p. 21). This era, the arena for the interplay of the five major city-states of Italy, can be seen as a preparation for the emergence of the European balance of power system.

Following the Italian Wars (1494-1559), the balance of power began to broaden beyond the Italian peninsula with the emergence of the European state system. The 16th and 17th centuries were central in terms of the balance of power because this era was a scene of tensions between European great powers, especially to prevent the dominations of the Habsburgs of Spain and Austria. Morgenthau (1974, p.188) defines

the political atmosphere of the time as "the first modern example on a grand scale of the balance of power operating between an alliance and one nation intent upon establishing a universal monarchy." Because France, England, and the Ottomans were trying to balance against the Habsburgs. Two important conflicts were central during that time, which were the struggle for mastery between France and Burgundy-Spain (later Austria) and the doctrinal conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism (Wight, 2024, p. 60). France and the Habsburgs (which controlled Spain and later the Holy Roman Empire/Austria) dynasties became two dominant powers of the continent. This rivalry involved a struggle to gain more influence and land across Europe, especially in Italy and the Netherlands. During these struggles, the rise and fall of the relative power of each state gives rise to two different roles of threat and response. England played a balanced role in this struggle by aligning with a weaker side to prevent the emergence of a single dominant power. This was, in a way, the European balance in embryos (Wright, 1975, p.60). Intense religious upheavals arose because of the doctrinal conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. The protestant reformation caused division in Europe along confessional lines between the Catholic church and Protestant denominations like Lutheranism and Calvinism. Dominant Catholic Powers have found a common ground against Protestantism, the heresy. However, rivalrous differences are intertwined with political ambitions and state rivalries. Protestant states often aligned against Catholics like Spain and Austria, especially if they perceived them as a threat to the balance of power (Wight, 2024, pp.60-146). The Thirty Years' War (1618-648) emerged because of these intertwined political and religious tensions. This exceptionally brutal conflict significantly shaped the development of the European state system. The desire to prevent the dominance of the Habsburgs was the underlying reason for the war and ended Habsburg dominance in Europe (Zarakol, 2022, p.208). The war started with the protestant Bohemian revolt against Habsburg rule in 1618. Bohemian rebellions initially deposed Habsburg Ferdinand from the palace and elected Calvinist Frederick V. The Catholic League intervened and defeated Protestant forces at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, which resulted in the consolidation of the Habsburg and the suppression of Protestantism. The growing power of the Habsburgs caused the Danish intervention, which was financially supported by England and the Dutch Republic. However, Danish forces were defeated at the Battle of Lutter in 1626. Sweden entered the war under the devout Lutheran King Gustavus Adolphus. The Swedish army achieved

early victories against the imperial forces in 1631 and 1632 and weakened the Habsburgs. Then, France joined the war on the side of Protestants (Sweden and the Dutch Republic) though France is catholic. France wanted to weaken the Habsburgs' influence in Europe and increase its power. At the final phase of the war, numerous battles and sieges between the Franco-Swedish alliance and the Habsburg forces and their allies took place across Europe. This caused the wearing down of all forces and ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia brought the principle of state sovereignty, where each state was regarded as independent and closed the doors for external intervention. The power of the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor diminished profoundly. France and Sweden gain more power and influence in Europe (Janžekovič, 2022, pp. 563-570). The Peace of Westphalia provided a functioning international system in which the primary goal of national policy was the sovereign independence of states. The formalization of this political condition was necessary for the existence of a complex balance of power and the spread of the logic behind the balance of power among the foreign policies of European states. The War of Religions ended the aspirations of the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire for the recreation of Christian imperium in Europe and diminished the role of the church in European politics (Sheean, 1995, p.39). After the Westphalian peace, the hegemonic threat to European security shifted from Spain to France. Spanish power declined compared to France's rise. France and Spain were two poles of the time. (Wright, 1975: p.35). Meanwhile, England played an increasingly important role in the European balance of power. While Spain was the threat, England was balancing Spain. Later, England started to balance the growing dominance of France. At the end of the seventeenth century, England, which was capable of consciously following the balance of power as a foreign policy, developed as the key balancing actor of the European balance. At the end of the seventeenth century, the balance of power idea was largely accepted by European states, as it is seen lastly in balancing the French aspiration to be hegemon through War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697) against Louis XIV and The Treaties of Ryswick (1697) that balance considerations played a major role. (Sheean, 1995, pp.50-51)

The eighteenth century has been named as 'the golden age of the balance of power', in theory and practice (Morgenthau, 1978, p.196). The eighteenth century witnessed a complex balance of power system containing great powers such as Great Britain,

France, Austria, Russia, Prussia, and Spain. Unlike the earlier centuries, the eighteenth century was central for more fluid alliances and multipolar distribution of power rather than rivalries between dual or triple power centers. Diplomacy and alliances were central tools to maintain the equilibrium (Rosecrance, 1963). The rise of Prussia and the increasing power of Russia changed European politics, while Britain empowered its "key balancer" role due to its geographical position and naval strength. Several key historical developments, such as wars and alliances that took place in the eighteenth century, are crucial to understanding why the balance of power's golden age is this century. The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and the Treaty of Utrecht (1713-1714) are major events of this period. The possibility of unification of Spanish and French crowns under a Bourbon Monarch gave rise to counterbalancing efforts of the Grand Alliance, which mainly consisted of England, the Dutch Republic, and the Habsburg Empire, along with other powers like Prussia, Savoy, and various German states. A unified French-Spanish empire under Philip of Anjou was seen as a direct threat to the balance of power in Europe. It meant the emergence of France's hegemony and led England to play the role of a balancer again. The war ended with the Treaty of Utrecht. The treaty ensured the separation of France and Spain and prevented unification. The Treaty of Utrecht was the first treaty to explicitly state the balance of power phrase in history. The goal of Utrecht was to settle and establish the Peace and Tranquility of Christendom by an equal Balance of Power (which is the best and most solid Foundation of a mutual Friendship, and of a Concord which will be lasting on all sides) (Janžekovič, 2022, pp.570-572). After the Treaty of Utrecht, the Triple Alliance was formed among Britain, France, and the Dutch United Provinces in 1717. These alliances showed how historical rivalries were secondary when the threat changed, and balancing was more important. Two historical rivals, Britain and France, united against Spain's territorial ambitions in Italy, which would change the power equilibrium. (Andersen, 2016, p.140). In the mid-century, the balance of Europe was tested by two major wars, which were the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). The war of the Austrian Succession emerged when Prussia seized Silesia after the death of Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI and challenged the Pragmatic Sanction, which secures Maria Theresa's (Habsburg female ruler) inheritance right of Habsburg lands. This encouraged the involvement of France, Bavaria, and Spain to compete with Austria's position. Britain again played its balancing role and supported Austria to prevent the emergence of a single hegemonic

power in central Europe. Austria's desire to retake Silesia, and Spain's desire to compete with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), concluded the war with Prussia retaining Silesia, which fueled the Diplomatic Revolution in which Austria strategically realigned with France. The Diplomatic Revolution led to the emergence of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). The Seven Years' War was the first global war. Austria, France, and Russia were in one alliance, while Prussia and England were on the other side. Prussia ultimately retained Silesia, and Britain emerged as the dominant global colonial power against France and Spain by the Treaty of Paris (1763). These conflicts gave rise to a more complex multipolar balanced system involving Prussia and Russia in the game in Europe (Andersen, 2016, pp.145-165). The Ochakov Crisis arose in 1791-1792 because of Russian expansionism against the Ottoman Empire. It triggered concerns among other European powers, especially England, which wanted to prevent Russian domination in the East. Though England threatened to intervene, parliament did not allow the Prime Minister William Pitt to intervene. The Ochakov Crisis became the first formulation of the problem of intervention in the affairs of independent states. This was a pivotal moment that challenged the idea of automatic balance of power, underscored the complexities of intervention, and Great Britain's political position compared to Russia in European affairs (Scroeder, 1994, p. 80).

The nineteenth century witnessed a complex and evolved application of the balance of power principle in European politics, especially when coalitions of great powers turned into large-scale conflicts among great powers. The French Revolution destabilized the existing European order. The idea of popular sovereignty and nationalism shook the legitimacy of the monarchies across Europe. European powers attempted to stop revolutionaries and their ideas, and this ended with the Revolutionary Wars in 1792-1802. The French administration, with the revolutionary fervor and military innovations, achieved significant victories and expanded its influence across newly conquered territories. These achievements demonstrated the fragility of the previous order. The leadership of Napoleon opened a new phase in conflicts in which France wanted to dominate Europe and established French Empire which was perceived as the biggest threat for European balance of power since Westphalia (Sheean, 1995, p.122) To stop Napoleon's domination desires, the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) were started. A coalition was established against the French threat, including Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Eventually, Napoleon stopped at Waterloo in 1815, and

the reconstruction of the new European order was provided. Statesmen of 1815 wanted to establish an order that constrains international violence and prevents the emergence of another hegemonic threat. Thus, power distribution among states must deter any single power from trying to dominate Europe. The fear of the emergence of a new dominator and the desire for a stable order based on the balance of power led European leaders to the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815). The Concert System (1815-1854) was established, and periodic congresses were organized among great powers to address potential threats. The Napoleonic Wars' experience showed that the balance of power requires more conscious, rational management (Wright, 1975, introduction, p. xviii). Thus, the Concert System represented a conscious effort of great power to protect the balance of power through diplomacy, cooperation, and periodic consultation. The concert system achieved a stable and peaceful order for decades, but internal tensions, power dynamics, and the emergence of new political conditions broke down the concert system in the end. The Crimean War between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was the first major war that ended the Concert of Europe (Streich, 2010, p.65). Britain and France were involved in the war to balance the Russian expansion, the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and the dissolution of the balance of power in Eastern Europe (Wright, 1975, p.117). The unification of Italy in 1861 and Germany in 1871 significantly changed the European balance of power (Little, 2007, p.113). Especially unified and powerful Germany under the Bismarck's leadership was crucial. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck sought to maintain a new balance of power which centered Germany, isolate France, and prevent anti-German coalitions through a web of alliances, including dual (Germany & Austria-Hungary, 1879) and triple alliances (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy, 1882). Bismarck's Alliance System was aiming to be one of three as long as the world is governed by an unstable equilibrium of five great powers (Craig & George, 1990, p. 38). However, with the dismissal of Bismarck (1890), non-renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, Franco-Russian Alliance (1894), Britain's alliances with France (1904) through the Entente Cordiale and with Russia through the Anglo-Russian Agreement (1907) against the France (1904) through the Entente Cordiale and with Russia through the Anglo-Russian Agreement (1907) against the rising power of Germany changed the atmosphere of Europe. Two main alliance blocks formed. These were the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) and the Triple Entente (France, Russia, Britain). The multipolar balance of power turned to a bipolar balance of power through these two blocs. This

polarization was tested with some other crises too, like the Balkan wars and the Moroccan Crisis; however, the balance of power in Europe was seen in "zero-sum" terms for the first time compared to before. Warfare and the destruction of others were limited until that point. However, nationalism and armed forces fastened the process that ended with the First World War (Sheean, 1995, pp. 135-137). The flexible, dynamic, cooperative style of balance of power was transformed into an inflexible and destructive one by the early 20th century through the emergence of a bipolar zero-sum mentality of blocs.

The 20th century witnessed a changing balance of power, leading to World War I, which broke down the traditional multipolar balance of power system in Europe. There are four major eras in the twentieth century: the First World War (1914-1918), the Interwar Period (1919-1939), the Second World War (1939-1945), and the Cold War (1945-1995) ensured this transformation further. The golden age of the balance of power, the rigid alliance system could not stop the emergence of the first World War between two blocs (Parrott, 1992, p.4) There was an unstable equilibrium in Europe during 1890-1914 where exact polarization was seen between two blocs while going to the First World War. (Sheean, 1995, p.135) Allied Powers (including Great Britain, France, Russia, and later the United States) had a significant advantage in terms of capabilities compared to the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) while going to war (Paul Kennedy, 1984, p.9). One of the main outcomes of the First World War was a significant change in the equilibrium among the great powers, including the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the defeat of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Also, the First World War made the United States the holder of the balance of power (Wight, 2024, p.50). President Wilson (1918) called balance of power as "unstable thing" that characteristic of the older order and added "thing in which the balance was determined by the sword which was thrown in the one side or the other; a balance which was determined by the unstable equilibrium of competitive interests; a balance which was maintained by jealous watchfulness and an antagonism of interests which, though it was usually latent, was always deep-seated." However, Criticism of Wilson's views on the balance of power was not universally accepted, and certain rejections emerged against it, such as Clemenceau's (Macmillan, 2021, p.23) and Martin Wight's. Wilson's emphasis on collective security finds a reflection in the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920 whose goal was to provide a legal framework for the

international order. The Interwar period started with efforts to establish a stable world order through the League of Nations; however, those years were marked by instability and the rise of revisionist powers like Germany and Japan. The formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis in 1936 again transformed the world into a simple balance between two blocs, the Allied Powers and Axis Powers. (Wight, 2024, p.34) The international system failed again to maintain the peace. The hegemonic ambitions of the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) started the war, and the Allied powers (including Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, and others) counterbalanced it. As a result of the war, European dominance in world politics ended, and Europe was reduced to a mere function of the worldwide balance (Morgenthau, 1973, p.201). The Second World War transformed the US into a great power, which was one of the actors in a simple balance (Wight, 2024, p.50). The center of global power shifted to the United States. (Little, 2007, p.5) The other side of this simple balance was the Soviet Union. There were two moral and political systems claiming universal validity, and both actively competed for the domination of the world (Morgenthau, 1973, p.254). Meanwhile, the destiny of the other major power was also interesting. Germany and Japan were defeated and occupied, while England and France were significantly weakened, though they were on the winning side (Schweller, 2008, p.9). Similar to the aftermath of World War I, the United Nations was established based on the idea of collective security. However, the ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union did not allow the UN to work efficiently (Sheean, 1995, p.180). The world turned out to be a bipolar system, and the claim of universal validity between the USA and the USSR became the main rivals. The post-war era, the Cold War was a bipolar balance of power between the US and the USSR, in which the balance of terror, based on the mutual possession of nuclear weapons, became a defining feature of this period. Rather than traditional military balancing, nuclear deterrence became the main means of balancing. This war was more than a balance of crude military capacity but a balance of political power (Sheean, 1995, p.177). The United Nations was also constrained by this competition by the veto power held by the permanent members of the Security Council, including the US and the USSR. The alliance systems (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) contributed extensively to the bipolar structure and balance of power. The Cold War era was a relatively stable era within the overall balance of power because of the conscious management of military power by both the US and the USSR. Thus, there were no major wars or conflicts among great powers.

It is claimed that the balance of power system ended with the First World War, and the twentieth century was guided by different mechanisms such as collective security and the nuclear balance of terror. This is not totally wrong, but when the Cold War is analyzed, it is seen that a balance between superpowers and their bloc was provided. (Sheean,1995, p.170)

The collapse of the USSR led to a period of unipolarity in which the US was the sole superpower, possessing unprecedented military, economic, and technological power (Williams, Lobell, & Jesse, 2012, p.3). The unipolar hegemony of the US raised questions on the traditional balance of power, which requires the emergence of a balancing alliance. However, expected balancing alliances did not occur immediately, and it is asked why other great powers have not yet responded in a way anticipated by balance-of-power theory (Ikenberry, 2002, p.3). This absence of hard balancing opened debates on the relevance of the balance of power during the 90s and the following years. The lack of traditional balancing against the US is named as a balance of power paradox (Wirtz, 2004, p.139). This lack of hard balancing opens a gate to discuss "soft balancing," which includes non-military mechanisms such as diplomacy, economic statecraft, international institutions, and international law (Layne, 2006, p. 8; Pape, 2005, pp. 7–45). However, the debates over the relevance of balance of power theory and its critics continued. The post-Cold War era has raised significant challenges to traditional balance of power theory due to the emergence of US sole hegemony and the lack of a hard balancing coalition. However, the concept continues to be debated and adapted, with the notion of soft balancing gaining prominence to understand how states might be responding to US preponderance without engaging in traditional military build-ups and alliances. The ongoing discussion highlights the ambiguity and evolving nature of the concept of balance of power in contemporary international relations.

In short, balance of power theorists talk about balancing coalitions against the Habsburgs under Charles V in the early 16th century, Philip II at the end of the 16th century, and the combined strength of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire in the Thirty Years War; against France under Louis XIV and then Napoleon; and against Germany under Wilhelm and then Hitler (Paul, 2004, pp.40-41). After the Second World War, the balance of power emerged in the Cold War between the US and the USSR. The

collapse of the USSR led to a unipolar world order of the USA. As of 2025, the rise of China and the return of Russia in world politics have again revived discussion on the balance of power theory.

The relative decline of the US in most fields, including the economy, military, and technology, is seen nowadays. Meanwhile, critiques of balance of power theory continue. In the following chapter, the thesis will focus on the critiques of the balance of power theory.

3.4. Process of Balance of Power

The BOP assumes that states engage in balancing behaviors to prevent the emergence of any state's or alliance's hegemony over others in different ways.

3.4.1. What is Balance?

The concept of "balance" within the context of balance of power theory is as ambiguous as the definition of balance of power. It is not a precise equality of power between states as in the case of two equal weights placed on a set of scales. (Wright, 1975, p.67) The term is highly metaphorical and described as "equivocal and plastic". If it is simplified, the meaning of the verb "to balance" is "to compare weight". Weights can be compared to find them equivalent, or to measure the difference, or to minister to the sense of authority. All these meanings coexist in this context. (Wight, 2024, p.27) At the end, the concept of "balance" in international relations is linked with the prevention of hegemony and preservation of the independence of states (Little, 2007, p.135).

There are generally two approaches to what power is. In the national power approach, which is the older approach and plays a central role in the balance of power, power is a unit-level attribute based on military capability and the aggregation of various variables, including economy, population, and natural resources. In the relational approach, power is a relational concept between units, meaning the ability to make others do whatever they

3.4.2. What is Power?

Power is a central concept, especially in the realist school of international relations. From a realist point of view, power is vital. There are different types of power. It can be viewed as military strength, a means of deterrence, a fundamental element of international politics, a goal in itself, or a means to achieve other ends. Power can be categorized in several ways, including by domain (political, economic, social, technological, prestige), intent (revisionist, status quo), realization (potential, real), status (rising, declining), dimension (great, small, dominant, superpower, global), scope (national, regional, global, international), and degree (hard, soft, smart) (Kızıl, 2022, p. 15). Morgenthau (1978, p. 9) defines power as 'anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man'. In general, power is the capacity to achieve objectives. (Sheean, 1995, p. 13) States, people, or organizations may have power. All social arenas of life involve power (Baldwin, 1989, p. 1). No doubt, in traditional balance of power theory, where realist perspective prevails, states strive to acquire power as a main means of ensuring security and independence. A rise in the power of a state that tries to ensure its security sometimes threatens the other state's security. Then, the threatened state attempts to increase its own power, which is called balancing behavior (Posen, 2014, p. 61).

3.4.3. What is Balancing?

Balancing means actions or strategies taken by states to counteract the perceived threat or rising power to prevent domination. There are different types of balancing and different classifications according to scholars. Schweller (2006) defines "hard balancing, Paul (2004, 2018) underlines "soft balancing" and "asymmetric balancing", Josef Joffe (2002) highlights "psycho-cultural balancing, political-diplomatic balancing, and strategic balancing", Heginbotham and Samuel (1998) explain "economic balancing", Haas (2005) clarifies "ideological balancing". Schweller (2016) classifies balancing into four types, including appropriate balancing, inappropriate balancing, non-balancing, and under-balancing, while Paul (2004) classifies balancing into three types: hard, soft, and asymmetric balancing. Schweller's and Paul's classifications are primarily important in grasping the theory.

Hard balancing is a realist and neorealist conception of balancing in which states adopt strategies to increase their military capabilities and establish alliances to counter their opponents. Soft balancing is a strategy in which states seek to ensure their security through more indirect means, rather than forming open alliances with one another through modest arms buildups, ad hoc exercises, or collaboration in international institutions, which can escalate into hard balancing if security competition intensifies. Asymmetric balancing refers to efforts of nation states and non-state actors to balance and contain each other. (Paul, 2004, p. 3)

Appropriate balancing occurs when the perceived threat is genuinely dangerous and appeasement is not possible. Inappropriate balancing occurs when a non-threatening state is mistakenly perceived as an aggressor, which leads to unnecessary and costly arms buildup. Non-balancing occurs when states are reluctant to directly confront the aggressor and undertake the cost of war. Buck-passing, bandwagoning, appeasement, engagement, distancing, or hiding can be examples of non-balancing strategies. Underbalancing refers to a failure of threatened states' balancing efforts against the revisionist power. This can end up with a more costly avoided war. Under-balancing behaviors include buck-passing, distancing, hiding, waiting, appeasement, bandwagoning, incoherent half-measures, and, in extreme cases, civil war, revolution, and state disintegration. (Schweller, 2016, p.10)

3.4.4. The Purpose of Balance of Power

A hegemony or dominance of one state can destabilize international actors because of a lack of deterrent rivals. Disproportional power of the only hegemon in an anarchic international system ensures an opportunity for the hegemon to impose its will on any state, and this poses a security threat for all other states. This threat perception sometimes ends in conflict and destabilizes the international system. The theory accepts that states are rational actors and seek to maintain a power equilibrium and their survival. Thus, states should take a self-regulating process through various mechanisms to preserve their security and sovereignty. As a result, the purpose of BOP is to prevent the emergence of a hegemon and keep a multi-state system, maintain the survival of states, and protect the stability and peace. (Schweller, 2016)

3.5. Internal and External Balancing

One of the main classifications of balancing consists of internal and external balancing. This is the common ground in the literature.

Internal balancing means enhancing the state's capacities against the hegemon. This approach prioritizes self-reliance. States seek to develop their military and economic capacities through various ways, such as technological advancements or industrial mobilizations, to balance external threats. This endeavor is to be a self-sufficient and more reliable way rather than relying on other states' behaviors, with the risk of getting engaged in an arms race or escalating tensions among states. States can increase their military capacity through. Enlarging the armed forces through national conscription (Hui, 2005, p. 31), improving the quality of their military organization through enhanced training, expanding professional cadres and raise in salaries (Posen, 2014, p.62), developing military doctrines that stress use of different types of forces (land, sea, air, nuclear) (Posen, 2014, p. 13). Investing in military technology and weaponry significantly influences states' military capabilities. Acquiring more lethal weaponry in greater quantities (Posen, 2014, p.21), developing and fielding new military technologies (Buzan & Little, 2000, p. 305), investing in weapons design and production facilities (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004, p. 80) and focusing on specific military assets like submarines, aircraft carriers, armor, infantry (Posen, 2014, p. 14) have crucial importance in a state's military capacity. Meanwhile, a strong economic base is fundamental to support a robust military. Therefore, states need to strengthen its economy through restricting consumption and promoting investment (Posen, 2014, p.62), rearranging their internal economic and political practices to divert more wealth, (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004, p.81), economic growth (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004, p. 219), imposition of direct and indirect taxes, promotion of economic productivity (Hui, 20005, p.31). From the early 19th century, national unification and economic growth have been the main sources of internal balancing (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004). Schweller (2008) pointed out that "Strong and unified states are more effective at adapting to systemic incentives for internal balancing". State capacity is specifically crucial for enhancing military and economic capacity. Administrative reforms such as Self-strengthening reforms, including establishing meritocracy and bureaucratization, allow a state to raise and manage larger armies, mobilize more

national resources for war, and alleviate logistical problems in long-distance campaign establishing meritocracy and bureaucratization, allow a state to raise and manage larger armies, mobilize more national resources for war, and alleviate logistical problems in long-distance campaigns (Hui, 2005, p. 31). Internal barriers and institutional lags negatively affect internal balancing efforts and cause a rise in cost and lower supply of self-strengthening reforms (Buzan, Jones, & Little, 1993). Increasing returns, path dependence, and barriers to collective identity change give rise to similar negative effects on internal balancing (North, 1990; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; March & Olsen, 1989; Schweller, 2006). Waltz (1979, p. 168) highlights that internal balancing is much more reliable and precise compared to external balancing. States can increase their military capacity through enlarging the armed forces through national conscription (Hui, 2005, p.31), improving the quality of their military organization through enhanced training, expanding professional cadres and raise in salaries (Posen, 2014, p.62), developing military doctrines that stress use of different types of forces (land, sea, air, nuclear) (Posen, 2014, p.13). Investing in military technology and weaponry significantly influences states' military capabilities. Acquiring more lethal weaponry in greater quantities (Posen, 2014, p.21), developing and fielding new military technologies (Buzan & Little, 2000, p.305), investing in weapons design and production facilities (Posen, 2014, p.80) and focusing on specific military assets like submarines, aircraft carriers, armor, infantry (Posen, 2014, p.14) have crucial importance in a state's military capacity.

External balancing occurs when states form alliances, coalitions, and cooperate with other states to counterbalance a state or coalition that is perceived as a threat or a hegemon. They use their sources to create an establishment to distribute the cost of defense against the perceived threat. External balancing can be achieved by alliances, coalitions, or diplomatic arrangements. Hard balancing acts like forming open military alliances and engaging in arms build-ups, and soft balancing acts like using international institutions, diplomacy, and economic statecraft are two major forms of external balancing. The establishment of NATO is an example of an alliance in which a group of states gets together against the threat of the USSR. Also, Russia, France, and Germany's cooperation within the UN Security Council to prevent the US invasion of Iraq is another example of soft balancing (Paul, Wirtz, & Fortmann, 2004, p. 14). Coalitions, compared to alliances, are short-term cooperations that target certain

purposes temporarily and more urgently. This approach prioritizes short-term gains and survival over long-term strategic goals. There are various challenges that hinder the effectiveness of external balancing. These are collective goods problems, wedge strategies, domestic constraints, and uncertainty. The preservation of the balance of power is the public good. Balancing is costly; thus, states can be inclined to free ride or buck pass the balancing task to others. Though external balancing is the most effective way to protect the balance, the collective good problem obstructs such balancing coalitions (Snyder, 1997; Olson, 1965). Non-excludability, non-rivalrous consumption, incentive to free-ride (or buck-pass), difficulties in achieving collective action, exploitation by threatening actors, lack of trust, and shared norms are the main reasons behind the collective good problem. A would-be hegemon state may apply wedge strategies, including selective accommodation (appeasement, compensation, endorsement) and confrontation, to prevent the formation of counterbalancing coalitions (Crawford, 2011, p.158). Domestic political constraints, like elite fragmentation and uncertainty regarding the identity and severity of threats, interrupt balancing efforts (Wohlforth et al., 2007, p.158).

The decision to pursue internal balancing or external balancing is influenced by various factors such as the nature and severity of the perceived threat, a state's own capabilities, and the cost and benefit calculation. This decision is not straightforward and involves complex calculations of reward and risk. There is a complex interplay of factors behind the decision.

3.6. Mechanisms of Balancing

States use different mechanisms to maintain or restore the balance in the international system. These mechanisms can be military, economic, diplomatic, and institutional. Each of them can be used according to the perceived threat level and the capacity and resources of the user states. Military mechanisms are always the first and most deterrent means, and they include the use of hard power tools and seeking strategic positions against threats. Economic restrictions, tariffs, sanctions, and trade restrictions on resource access are restrictive economic mechanisms, while investments, improvements on infrastructure, and enhancing financial reserves are constructive mechanisms that aim to strengthen internal capacity and resilience.

Diplomatic means include making alliances, negotiations, diplomatic maneuvering, and pressure that aims to deter or isolate the aggressive state. The use of institutional mechanisms like international organizations such as the UN, WTO, and EU can also play a role in balancing.

3.7. Critiques of Balance of Power

The explanatory power of each concept and theory is limited. Theories have assumptions, and assumptions are limitations. Despite the widespread use of the BOP, it takes certain critiques too because of its inherited simplifications and limitations in capturing the complexities of international relations.

These critiques come from different traditions and can be classified in various ways. I will use two classifications. One is school of thought-based critiques, and the second is idea-based critiques.

There are three different schools of thought that criticize the BOP. First, the liberal school. Liberal scholars, as they do against realists, underscore the overemphasis of the theory on power and competition while undervaluing cooperation and international institutions. International institutions like the UN, economic interdependence, and the spread of democracy can play a role in preventing conflicts and lightening power imbalances. Economic interdependence and a complex web of global trade put an end to the conflict and ensured incentives to cooperate. International institutions like the UN are the platforms on which open dialogue and conflict resolution processes are provided. Meanwhile, the democratic peace theories' main assumption that democratic states are less likely to go to war against each other is another criticism of liberals against realists. Some liberal criticisms of balance of power theory rest on historical examples in which balance of power failed and on the inability of the theory, when applied to foreign policy behavior, to offer a long-term solution to the security dilemma. To liberals, anarchy is malleable, and the structural condition of conflict is not so determinative as realists would have us believe. Conflict is not structurally determined as realists posit (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004).

Second, the constructivist school. Constructivists critique the theory because it neglects the role of identity, norms, and ideas on state behaviors. For example, Alexander Wendt (citation) claims that not only material capabilities but also social and ideational factors influence states' perception of threat and security. Historical experiences, social relationships, and cultural contexts are important in determining some states' behaviors rather than focusing on their material capacity. Sometimes states may prioritize how to balance between diplomacy and hard power mechanisms according to historical or normative reasons and experiences.

Third, English schools' critiques mainly target the neorealist understanding of BOP. They reject the idea that a systematic balance of power is natural and automatic. On the contrary, they underline the role of international society, norms, and deliberate state action. An English school ensures an understanding of how the balance of power is manually operated. The role of agency is a crucial part of state behaviors, so it is in the BOP. Also, hierarchy is a norm rather than anarchy in the international system, and BOP is just a transition period (Kaufman, Little, & Wohlforth, 2007).

Fourth, some realists also criticize the theory's assumption of constant power equilibrium among states. Power is not always distributed in balance, as seen in history. There has always been an imbalance of power in the international system that ends with conflicts or war, as in the world wars. Hegemonic realists are compared to balance of power realists, who posit that hierarchy or hegemony is more common in international history, so that states do not prioritize balancing the hegemon.

Idea-based critiques are various. First, the definition of BOP is ambiguous, and there is no clarity on it. There are multiple definitions, and this raises such a question. There is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of the concept. Ernest Haas (1953, pp. 447-57) identifies eight different meanings of balance of power, while Martin Wight (1966, p. 151) identifies nine different meanings of the concept. Jack Levy (1989, p. 229) pointed out that there is no single balance of power theory, but instead a multiplicity of theories. The confusion is all the greater because balance of power theorists cannot even agree on what it is they are trying to explain.

Second, there are empirical challenges that falsify the assumptions of the BOP. There are various historical examples in which states do not balance the rising power. For example, Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth's study of eight pre-modern and non-European international systems in their book, *The Balance of Power in World History*, shows that hegemonies tend to exhibit durability, thereby posing a direct challenge to the core balance-of-power hypothesis that balancing behavior prevents systemic hegemony.

Third, there is not enough specified explanation for underbalancing, which states that it fails to balance the threat. It is assumed that states counterbalance when a threat emerges to ensure their survival; however, it does not always occur. There are various factors behind this fail including domestic political factors, institutional constraints, elite fragmentation and disagreement (Schweller, 2008, p.11), economic and social priorities such as prioritization of states' well-being and economic development rather than investing on military power (Wirtz, Fortmann, & Paul, 2004, p. 15), misperceptions of a rising power's intentions (Schweller, 2008, p.10), and state coherence and mobilization capacity (Schweller, 2008, p.11).

Fourth, the balance of power focuses on great powers and neglects smaller states' behaviors. Traditional balance of power theories explicitly regard great powers as key actors of the international system. Smaller states are seen as having a marginal impact on the outcomes of great power competition and their potential actions beyond balancing, such as bandwagoning or remaining neutral (Levy, 2004, p.38). A great power-centric perspective neglects smaller states' strategies, including supporting, following, and challenging a dominant power. Thus, this also neglects the complex reality of the balance of power, as traditionalists do.

Fifth, the theory regards states as actors in the international system; however, non-state actors have become effective actors in international power dynamics compared to the past.

Sixth, the theory is Eurocentric. The applicability to non-European contexts is limited. Thus, the claim to be universal is invalid.

Seventh, the theory serves as an ideological tool for aggressive states to justify their policies rather than as an explanatory natural phenomenon. (Morgenthau, 1973)

Eighth, the theory lacks explaining the unipolar international system, especially in the lack of balancing powers to balance against the hegemon.

Nine, its oversimplification of state behaviors neglects certain factors that affect it, such as ideology, domestic politics, and local and international institutions (Boucoyannis, 2007).

Tenth, theory accepts that states are rational, as realists do. However, some argue that states do not always act rationally. Ideologies, ideas, emotions, and some other factors significantly affect state behaviors and the decisions of policymakers (Harrington, 2016).

Eleventh, theory's predictive power has been challenged by globalization, interconnectedness, and the rise of actors in international politics. It is more complicated compared to the past's less complex traditional balance of power framework to predict how states will act.

Twelfth, Collective security sometimes can be undermined by the interest of one state; that is, states do not always prioritize the security of the international system. For example, Italy's position changed during WW1 (Morgenthau, 1973).

Thirteenth, there is uncertainty regarding the balance of power: precise calculation of the power is impossible, and only approximate results are possible. Forming alliances also complicates the calculation, especially if a state's power relies on different fields and if the actors in alliances are not truly anticipated (Morgenthau, 1973).

3.8. The Future of BOP

There is discussion on the reformulation of the BOP because of the challenges that it faces. Broadening the concept's scope is one solution. Involving non-state actors as actors in the international system and adding new means to balancing behaviors can

broaden the scope. Accepting that there are different versions of BOP that have different forms, such as conditional and unconditional forms, and different focuses, such as power and threat. Moving beyond the Eurocentric examples and testing with non-Western systems and examples can modify the BOP. Balancing failures are challenging the BOP as well. Thus, why states fail to balance and the factors that affect underbalancing need to be examined. Lastly, accepting the complexity of international systems and balancing behaviors, adopting more nuanced approaches is necessary. Integration of the influence of domestic political factors and international institutions on policy decisions and state behavior is also a crucial step. Some scholars accept a weaker version of BOP, which may not result in systemic power balancing, while others want to adopt a more inclusive BOP. Some scholars regard BOP as descriptive, while others accept BOP as explanatory. As a result, there are various opinions about what should be done to balance the power theory, as in the case of the history of the balance of power theory.

3.9. Conclusion

The balance of power remains a central concept in IR. It has different versions and understandings of explaining power dynamics and state behaviors. Its historical depth and persistent relevance in analyzing global events demonstrate its enduring significance.

The theory is as complex as the international system is complex. Thus, it has various interpretations and criticisms. As international relations evolve over time, the concept of doing so. However, the core assumption of the balance of power theory is still alive and explanatory. States seek to prevent the emergence of a hegemon in the international system and maintain the balance of power among states. This idea is central in the literature. The BOP still provides certain frameworks to predict states' behaviors on power distribution in the international system. On the other hand, there are different criticisms of it, including school of thought version critiques and idea-based critiques. Solutions to those critiques are also evolving. There are various efforts to test the balance of power theory with more empirical cases, while some accept the limits of the balance of power theory and use it accordingly. While the world politics gets more complex and the scope of IR gets expanded, the concept requires more

nuanced touches, but with the danger of concept stretching. The rise and fall of hegemonic powers, as well as current discussions in international relations, underscore the relevance of the balance of power theory. The theory's enduring appeal isn't merely historical; it remains a crucial lens through which to examine contemporary global dynamics.



CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL EVENTS OF THE PERIOD OF SELIM THE FIRST

Sultan Selim I was the 9th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, ruling between 1512 and 1520. His grandfather was Mehmed II, who conquered Istanbul and transformed the Ottoman Sultanate into an empire. Mehmet II, who ruled for 30 years between 1451 and 1481, is considered by many to be the most important Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. His father was Bayezid II, who ruled the Ottoman Empire between 1481 and 1512. Bayezid II was more passive in his 31 years of rule than his own father, Mehmet II, and his son, Selim I. Selim the First's successor was his son, Suleiman the Magnificent. Suleiman the Magnificent reigned as Ottoman Sultan for 46 years between 1520 and 1566, bringing the empire to its peak. The three most prominent sultans in Ottoman history, Mehmed II, Selim the First, and Suleiman the Magnificent, were in fact the great victorious sultans in a grandfather, father, and son relationship. Although the impact of these three sultans on the empire was different from each other, they always contributed greatly to the further development of the empire.

During his 8-year reign, Selim the First brought many political, economic, religious, and structural changes and benefits to the empire. There is a huge difference between the Ottoman Empire before and after Selim the First, especially in terms of identity and religious understanding. Selim the First's changes require putting him in a different place on the stage of history. His main campaign was on the east against the Ottomans' main target, the west. He had definite success in his campaign targeting the Safavids and the Mamluks. To understand why Selim the First focused so much on the east and how he gained such victories, it is necessary to comprehend the periods that preceded him and the political climate of that era.

4.1. The Mehmed II Period on the Way to Selim the First

Mehmed II transformed the Ottoman Sultanate into an empire after the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 and worked ambitiously to expand its borders by setting his sights on both the west and the east. As a result of his 30-year reign in 1451-1481, the Ottoman Empire, which extended to the Aqqoyunlu in the east, the Mamluks in the south and Hungary in the west, had solved its internal problems to a high extent and had established its standards in many areas of the structure of the state (İnalçık, 1993; Tansel, 1953).

The Ottoman Empire of the Mehmed II period had basically three problems on its eastern borders. Karamanids, Trabzon Greek State and Aqqoyuns-Mamluks. In 1461, he conquered Trabzon with the operation he organized against the Greek State of Trabzon and erased this state from the stage of history. Mehmed II increased his sovereignty in Anatolia by capturing the lands of the Karamanids and their leader İbrahim Bey in 1468.

While the Aqqoyunlu formed an alliance against the Ottomans in the east during the reign of Mehmed II, they also tried to put Mehmed II in a difficult situation by establishing secret contacts with the Western powers, especially the Venetians (Baykal, 1964; Yücel, 1985). Uzun Hasan eliminated the Qaraqoyunlu and squeezed the Timurids further east. The Aqqoyunlu allied with the Karamanids and suffered a serious defeat when they confronted the Ottomans in 1472. Thereupon, Aqqoyunlu attacked the Mamluks, captured strategic places such as Aleppo and Ayntab, and targeted the Ottomans again. Uzun Hasan tried to weaken the Ottomans by contacting the aid fleet from his friends in the Western alliance (Venice, Naples, Rhodes, Papacy and the Latins of Cyprus), but Mehmed II's counterattack resulted in a battle at Otlukbelin in 1473, which ended in an absolute Ottoman victory (Baykal, 1957). After that, the Aqqoyunlu Empire weakened and disintegrated with the death of Uzun Hasan in 1478. Instead of the Aqqoyunlu, a new state, the Safavids, emerged as a new threat with a different religious-ideological outlook, attracting Turkmens from Anatolia. During the reign of Bayezid II, the Ottomans fought hard to limit the influence of the Safavids in Anatolia and prevented them from becoming a political entity.

The rivalry with the Mamluks was also reciprocated during the reign of Mehmed II. While the Ottomans' legitimacy and fame in the Islamic world increased due to the conquest of Constantinople, the Mamluks were in a strong position because they ruled strategic trade routes and historical cities, were the servants of Mecca-Medina and the caliph was from their side. Although relations improved after the conquest of Constantinople, the competition for influence over the Dulkadirids strained relations between these two great states. The competition between two Dulkadirid princes (Şahbudak bey supported by the Mamluks and Şahsuvar bey supported by the Ottomans), who were supported by two states, for the throne is the best example of this. This struggle for influence was in fact a cold war, and ultimately, when Mehmed II crossed to the Anatolian side in 1481 for his last campaign, the Mamluks were his target (Tekindağ, 1966).

4.2. The Period of Bayezid II on the Way to Selim the First

Bayezid II, one of the two sons of Mehmed II who were vying for the throne, had been worn out for a long time by internal Ottoman struggles due to his campaigns against Cem Sultan and found it difficult to keep his eyes on the outside. Bayezid II, who had to pursue soft policies in this process, made small advances in the west, but failed to show success in the east, especially against the Mamluks. The strained relations and cold war during the reign of Mehmed II turned into a hot war during the reign of Bayezid II. Between 1486 and 1491, the two armies confronted each other several times, and the Mamluks managed to emerge victorious from these wars. The process ended with an agreement in favor of the Mamluks. Of course, in fact, this hot war and agreement created the Mamluk problem, which Selim the First had to deal with personally.

In the last period of Bayezid II, the throne fights between his sons created a vacuum of authority, and in this process, Safavid-inspired rebellions broke out in Anatolia, such as the Şahkulu Baba Teke Rebellion. Selim the First saw his father as passive and inefficient against the Safavid rebellions and influences.

4.3. Selim the First Period

He was born in Amasya in 1470 as the son of Bayezid II. His mother was Ayşe (Gülbahar) Sultan, daughter of Ala al-Dawla Bozkurt Bey of the Dulkadirids. His childhood was spent in Amasya, a border city, where he received the education a prince would receive. Amasya was known as a city of princes, and some of these princes ascended to the throne, but she was the youngest prince by age. It is a fact that Amasya, which was also very lively in terms of science and culture, had an impact on Selim the First's upbringing. As a child, he saw his grandfather, Sultan Mehmed II, at his circumcision ceremony in Istanbul. He was sent to Trabzon in 1487, his first post as Sanjakkbeyi, where he served for about 24 years until 1510 (Uluçay, 1954-1955). The administrative experiences he gained during his years in Trabzon would shed great light in the years to come. Although Trabzon was a port city, it had limited economic opportunities compared to the other princely cities. Although Selim the First complained about these conditions, he was able to make a name for himself with the military activities he carried out on the border line while in this city. Selim the First had achieved great success in his campaign against the Georgian King in 1509. The captives, the spoils, the intimidation he gave to his rivals (especially Shah Ismail), and the fame he gained from this campaign are among the main achievements in his personal adventure at that time.

Similarly, in 1501, he conveyed his demands to his father Bayezid II for the protection of the border line, the repair of castles and the supply of ships against the activities of Shah Ismail, but his father did not want many enemies on the border line (Çelebi, 1998, pp. 25–26). Selim the First had already realized the danger of Shah Ismail during his principedom and sanjakkbeylik and started to take precautions. In this context, he embarked on expeditions and diplomatic contacts with the beys in the region, attracting some names to his side. (This is one of the wedge strategies.) Selim the First, who increased his influence as far as Erzurum before 1507, after Shah Ismail sent troops to Trabzon after his expedition to the Dulkadirids in 1507, Selim the First personally fought with Safavid forces of 12 thousand people in Erzincan and achieved an absolute victory (Şükri-i Bitlisî, 1997). In the following period, he protected the Sunnis who were persecuted by Shah Ismail and settled them in Trabzon. He also captured and imprisoned the brother of Shah Ismail who attacked Trabzon in 1511 (Celalzade,

1990, p.59-61). He promised to bring economic prosperity to the people of the region in order to prevent the people, especially the sipahis with fiefs, from inclining towards Shah Ismail, and that he started a propaganda by spreading these discourses in the region proved this with his Georgian campaigns.

4.4. Fight for the Throne

In the years 1500-1510, a struggle for the throne emerged between the sons of Bayezid II, who failed to stop the internal turmoil caused by the increasing influence of Shah Ismail in Anatolia. While the eldest brother, Ahmet, who was a prince in Amasya, was the strongest candidate for the throne, Prince Selim was making a name for himself with his successes. Prince Selim wanted to take office in a central sanjak with high revenues to be closer to the center and to move faster in the struggle for the throne, but the Sultan could not find a response. These two brothers made their moves knowing each other's positions, strengths, and weaknesses. In time, they killed each other's men, and even when brother Selim tried to march on Ahmet, the two were pacified through intermediaries. (Künhü'l-ahbâr, 1997, p. 926-933) This showed that Prince Selim had no choice but to ascend to the throne; otherwise, it would be difficult for him to survive during his brother's reign. (Emecen, 2010, p. 45) In this process, Bayezid II responded to the demands of the princes to a certain extent by giving each of their sons a new sanjak (place of duty). Following the granting of the Sanjak of Kefe to Süleyman (later to become Selim the Magnificent) in 1509, a major earthquake occurred in Istanbul in the same year, and with the intention of taking advantage of the unfavorable atmosphere created by the earthquake, Şehzade Selim took action to seize the Ottoman sultanate by force. Meanwhile, the third actor in the struggle for the throne, Shahzade Korkut, amid rumors that his father was on his deathbed, moved towards Manisa while Selim the First moved towards Kefe. All three actors were planning to reach Istanbul quickly in case of news of his death, but it was Prince Ahmed who was the most respected among the people and the administration of Istanbul. However, Prince Selim also had the support of the Crimean khan, the beys and soldiers in Rumelia, and especially the janissaries. Despite his father, Bayezid II's, attempts to mediate and meet Selim's demands to a certain extent, Selim was unwilling to do so. In the following days, when Prince Selim was moving from Kefe to Edirne (the Sultan was in Edirne at the time), taking into his army fighters from the Crimean khanate, the Alevi Turks

of Dobruca and the forces of the end lords in the Balkans, he had accepted the sanjak of Kefe in Rumelia, which his father had given him in order to stop him, but he had stated that he would still come to Edirne in order to eliminate the negative atmosphere created about him in the capital (Uluçay, 1954-1955, pp. 84-85). Finally, Bayezid II set out with his army and met Prince Selim at Çukurçayır. Selim was again given the sanjak of Semendire near Belgrade in Rumelia, which met his specifications, permission to raid against the Hungarians, and the agreement that the Sultan would not leave the throne to any other prince as long as he lived. (Tansel, 1966, p. 279) In return, while Selim was taking slow steps towards his new sanjak, he suspected and even heard rumors that his father, Bayezid, was returning to Istanbul and would leave the throne to his brother, Şehzade Ahmet. Thereupon, marching against his father, Prince Selim first took Edirne, and then the two armies came face to face at Çorlu. The two armies started a heavy battle, and Prince Selim's army suffered a serious defeat and had to retreat to Kefe. This defeat damaged the reputation of Prince Selim. Meanwhile, Shahzade Ahmet was dealing with the Shahkulu Rebellion, which was started by the masses who were inclined towards Shah Ismail, under the leadership of Shah Kulu Baba, with the aim of revolutionizing the Ottoman Empire. The trust and support for Shahzade Ahmed, who was not successful in suppressing the rebellion, was waning. When Prince Selim was informed about his actions, and Bayezid II could not withstand the pressure of his environment and invited him, Prince Ahmed came to Üsküdar. In the meantime, the janissaries, an important power center in Istanbul, started a revolt against Prince Ahmed and in favor of Prince Selim, and Prince Ahmed had to return to Anatolia (Hoca Saadeddin, 1280, p.189). When Prince Ahmed returned to Konya and began to act as a ruler in his own right, the pashas persuaded Bayezid II to appoint Prince Selim to stop Prince Ahmed's rebellion and summon him to Istanbul. While Bayezid II took this seemingly self-destructive decision, in fact, he was going to weaken Prince Selim and Prince Ahmed by making them fight, thus leaving Prince Korkud as the sole heir to the state, and in the meantime, Prince Korkud had already come to Istanbul under various pretexts and without openly rebelling. When Şehzade Selim reached Istanbul upon Bayezid II's invitation, some say that Sultan Bayezid handed over the sultanate to him peacefully when he reached the palace under the leadership of the Janissaries, others say that Sultan Bayezid, who had no chance to move against the pressure of the Janissaries, handed over the sultanate out of necessity, and he ascended the throne as the ninth Ottoman ruler on April 24, 1512. In any case,

the role of the Janissaries in Prince Selim's becoming Sultan Selim cannot be denied. In fact, when Sultan Selim was returning to the palace after seeing off his father from the palace, the Janissaries wanted to make the new Sultan walk under their swords in order to influence Sultan Selim, but Sultan Selim somehow escaped from the Janissaries and entered the palace and thus showed that he would not be dominated by the Janissaries. It is clear that Sultan Selim would not accept such a thing, but as a precautionary measure, he also gave generous treats to appease them, such as distributing the jülus and increasing the ulufas. After a while, his father, Bayezid II, died by poisoning (there are two opinions about the death of Bayezid II: that he was poisoned by a Jewish physician and that he was poisoned by Sultan Selim). Undoubtedly, this death was a beneficial development for Sultan Selim in his struggle with other princes in terms of the balance of power.

4.5. First Actions

As soon as he ascended the throne, Selim took several measures to strengthen his power. The most important of these were the generous rewards to the janissaries who had helped him come to power and the elimination of his brothers, who were a threat to his power. Especially, Murad, the son of Prince Ahmed's son, who was inclined towards red-headedness, collaborating with Shah Ismail and the increasing influence of the Shah in the eastern provinces, had attracted Selim the First's attention. As a result, in the third month of his ascension to the throne, Selim the First moved to Anatolia and took action to solve the problem of his brother, Shahzade Ahmed. Selim the First, who gave Prince Ahmed the right to live outside the Ottoman lands, signaled that he was about to take drastic measures when he executed Viziriazam Koca Mustafa Pasha, whom he held responsible for the process as a result of Prince Ahmed's occupation of the city of Amasya. Immediately afterwards, he had five more of his nephews executed based on the fatwa of fratricide, and this move, which can be read as an effort to make his position unshakable, also coincides with the idea that the state is more important than the dynasty. In other words, five princes were eliminated for the sake of "order and order". Likewise, he had his older brother, Prince Korkut, captured and drowned on March 12, 1513 (Emecen, n.d.). After these moves, Prince Ahmed remains the only problem. Sultan Selim the First had sent various letters to Prince Ahmed through the mouths of prominent members of the state for him to seize

the sultanate. Selim the First wanted Shahzade Ahmed to attack for the sultanate in order to prevent Shahzade Ahmed from becoming a long-term problem by fleeing outside the Ottoman lands, to Iran or Egypt. In fact, Shahzade Ahmed had no choice but to fight for the sultanate, knowing the outcome rather than defecting (Emecen, 2010). Prince Ahmed gathered his strength and troops and confronted Selim the First on the plain of Yenisehir on April 15, 1513. Using a classic Ottoman tactic of feint attack, retreat, and then flanking, Selim the First dispersed Prince Ahmed's army and captured him as he was about to flee. Then, by order of Selim the First, Prince Ahmed was also drowned. After Shahzade Ahmed, his sons were also eliminated one by one. Thus, Selim the First, who left no power threatening his reign, showed both the state officials and his rivals how sharp and fierce he was in the conduct of his affairs. Selim the First, who showed his determination and the attitude he would adopt in its implementation to everyone around him, blocked the dissenting voices and built his unity and authority within a short period of 9 months (August 1512, May 1513). With no more internal threats, Selim the First turned his attention to Shah Ismail.

4.6. Towards the Safavids

Shah Ismail, the leader of the Safavids, was establishing a state with a religious understanding based on the Aqqoyunlu heritage. This state had close contacts with the Turkmens in Anatolia due to their close religious understanding. The Safavids, who organized and supported anti-Ottoman rebellions in many parts of Anatolia, had upset the Ottoman order, especially in recent years, and the society was affected by this situation. It was as if social and population engineering were taking place in Anatolia. The founder of the Safavid state, Shah Ismail, belonged to the Erdebilli family, the sheikh family of the Sunni Safaviyya sect, and was of Turkish origin, but later on, they started to adopt the doctrine of the 12 Imams. His grandfather, Sheikh Cüneyt, was a famous and important figure in Anatolia because he had attempted to conquer Trabzon during the reign of Murad II (Hinz, 1992, pp. 62-96). His grandson, Shah Ismail, was also considered a sheikh and made good use of this power. Shah Ismail had influence over the nomadic Turkmens under Ottoman oppression. Because the Turkmens, overwhelmed by the Ottoman imposition of taxation, resettlement, order, and fiefs, were looking for a savior, and Shah Ismail, who presented a religious belief mixed with their old beliefs (Shamanism) and made anti-Ottomanism a mission, appeared

before them. Shah Ismail's turning religious beliefs into a political object, and his vision and leadership of anti-Ottomanism, led to serious changes in the religious understanding and mission of the Ottoman Empire. (Emecen, 2010, p.94-95) Shah Ismail sent caliphs to Anatolia with a Mahdist Shi'ism understanding, influenced Turkmens with similar beliefs with propaganda and promises, and presented himself as "God in the form of Hz. Ali". By mixing pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs and the Shiite understanding of the 12 Imams, the belief of Kizilbashism (or Rafism) was created, in which Hz. Ali was considered a god (Ocak, 1998, pp. 142-143). In time, this mass defined itself as Alevi. Shah Ismail's target was Anatolia, and he had great support, especially from the Turkmens of the Karaman region. In fact, those fleeing from the harshness and taxes of the Ottoman administration also sought refuge with the Shah. In 1511-1512, Anatolia turned into a bloodbath with the revolts of Shahkulu and Nur Khalifa. The Shah had gained a reputation with rumors that those who sought refuge with the Shah were beys (İbn Kemal, 1985, pp. 43-44). 14 Selim the First knew that Shah Ismail openly supported the rebellions in Anatolia from his support for Shahzade Murad, the son of Shahzade Ahmed, his support for the Nur Khalifa Rebellion, his sending men and letters to Turgutoğulları asking them to be subject to him, and many other issues. Selim the First, who decided to march on the Shah, was faced with a Shah Ismail who did not engage in a hot war and fought for the throne with the Uzbek threat and his brother. The Shah wanted to weaken the Ottomans through proxies rather than direct and hot war, because he had suffered a heavy defeat in 1512 in Gücdüvan in the war he waged with the Mughals against the Uzbeks. In short, the Shah was in no mood to fight the Ottoman enemy in the west while there were troubles in the east and at home. However, in the winter of 1513, Selim the First started military preparations, although he seemed to be taking steps to reconcile by sending men to the Shah. While the preparations for war were underway, Selim the First, who received support from the Ulema and spread this to the people, also gave orders to identify the Shah's supporters in Anatolia and to take the necessary measures (Emecen, 2010, pp. 100-106). In this process, it is known that the Ottomans, contrary to Shah Ismail's policies of converting his subjects to Kızılbaş by force and sword, gave the right to live to the Kızılbaşs in their own lands, which is why Alevis continue to exist even in today's Turkey. However, due to Shah Ismail's policy of Alevization, the Ottomans drew sharper and more serious lines in terms of the official religious view of the state compared to previous years.

Different reasons are given for Selim the First's march against the Shah. Undoubtedly, Selim the First based this expedition on religious differences and the Safavid threat. The Turkmen rebellions supported by the Safavids within the Ottoman borders, their efforts to spread Alevism, and naturally their intention to disrupt the Ottoman order are obvious. At the same time, in order to understand that period, it is necessary to touch upon other events that took place during that period. The Safavids had taken control of the Diyarbakır-Baghdad line. This meant that the trade routes through Anatolia would be cut off or come under Safavid control. The Safavids' good relations with the Mughals also threatened the trade network and its potential to India. At the same time, the issue of the Dulkadirids between the Safavids and the Mamluks was of great concern to the Ottomans. Moreover, Shah Ismail had improved his relations with the Venetians in the last decade. Shah Ismail had taken steps to form a military alliance with the Venetians, such as the supply of firearms and the request for artillery masters. Some smaller reasons that were seen as war-starting were also mentioned, such as the Safavid ruler of Diyarbakır, Ustacalu Muhammad Khan's declaration of war against the Ottomans, or Nur Ali Khalifa's burning of the Tokat (Rumlu, 2004). In addition to these, and possibly as a more central reason, it can be said that Selim the First, seeing the impending formation of an alliance of Safavids, Mamluks, and Dulkadirids on the eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire, took action (Felsefi, 1952, p.63). Within the general atmosphere created by all these reasons, we should consider that Selim the First, taking into account religious, military, and economic reasons, took action legitimately by obtaining fatwas from the Ulema to fight against the Safavids. It should also be remembered that Shah Ismail was seen as the main person responsible for the breakdown of the Ottoman order in the eyes of the state officials and the Ulema of the period. While the famous Ibn Kemal in his fatwa expressed in a lamenting tone that Kızılbaşs had committed blasphemy, Sarıgörez stated in his fatwa that it was *wajib* (obligation) to fight Kızılbaşs (Tekindağ, 1967, pp. 54-78). It is known that Selim the First attached importance to legitimacy and disseminated these fatwas to the public. Of course, although these fatwas were not realized in practice, they are important in terms of showing the final state of relations. These fatwas were important in terms of reconstructing the religious view of the Ottoman Empire rather than social conflicts. Selim the First convened the divan and asked the pashas for their opinions on the war, but he could not get as clear support as he wanted, but by explaining the reasons for the war to his pashas and bringing the opinions of those who thought like him to the

forefront, he ordered the war preparations to begin. On March 20, 1514, Selim the First set out with his army from Edirne to Istanbul and started the campaign.

In early 1514, the Hungarians and the Holy Roman Germanic Empire contacted Selim the First, despite the Pope's call for a crusade, to maintain peace relations with the Ottomans after the accession of Selim the First. Since this call also suited Selim the First, a favorable turnaround was achieved with these two states in order to guarantee the western front while marching against the Shah (Fodor & Dávid, 1994, p. 41).

Similarly, in March 1514, Selim the First attempted to form an alliance with the Uzbeks, one of their main enemies, against the Safavids. However, the letters he sent would only receive a positive response after the Battle of Chaldiran (Feridun Bey, 1274/1857).

Having started the campaign, Selim the First imposed a commercial embargo against the Safavids and banned the entry of Iranian silk and merchants into Ottoman territory by closing the borders. This embargo would negatively affect not only the Safavids but also the Mamluk and Indian merchants.

After leaving Istanbul, he wrote to Shah Ismail, informing him that he must follow the Sunnah of the Prophet, otherwise he would be eliminated as a heretic. Selim the First framed the war in terms of ending the Shah's tyranny and fulfilling Allah's command. As he advanced towards Shah Ismail, Selim the First's army was getting more and more crowded with reinforcements. When Selim the First reached Sivas, the fighting strength of the army reached 50.000-60.000, and due to the excessive number of soldiers, he left some of them behind for protection and continued to advance with an army of 40.000 warriors. (Feridun Bey, 1274/1857) When he reached the vicinity of Erzincan, since it was the border line, the order of battle was entered. Since the army began to experience difficulties in obtaining food, he sent men to the surrounding area and to Istanbul and started to work on the supply of food. On July 18, the Shah's letter of reply arrived, informing Selim the First of his readiness for war and containing various insults.

On July 19, Ferruhşad Bey, one of the Aqqoyunlu Turkmens, came to Selim the First, declared his allegiance, and joined the army. However, Dulkadirid Ala al-Dawla Bey did not respond positively to Selim the First's call for him to join the army, citing old age as an excuse, and remained neutral, thus maintaining a balance between the Mamluk-Safavid-Ottoman triumvirate. However, this attitude of neutrality was to be the main reason for the Ottoman army's shortage of supplies (Tekindağ, 1967, p.59). During the same period, Selim the First exchanged letters with the Mamluk sultan, and although the contents of the letters are unknown, he probably conveyed to Qansuh al-Ghawri that his intention was to march on the Shah (Emecen, 2010, p.115). As it can be seen, even while on the front, Selim the First was in constant communication with different power centers.

As the army left Erzincan and headed for Tabriz, grumblings began within the army. The fact that the Safavid army was not encountered and that there were difficulties in the supply of provisions caused unrest among the soldiers. When the pashas became involved in this situation, Hemdem Pasha, the Beylerbeyi of Karaman, who had been Selim the First's close friend since his childhood and was highly respected, conveyed the discomfort of the soldiers to the Sultan. However, Selim the First, who said that he would fight against the Safavids regardless of the conditions, showed how he would respond to a possible withdrawal and hesitation in the army and how determined he was by killing his childhood friend Hemdem Pasha (Emecen, 2010, p.116).

On July 14-24, 1514, Selim the First wrote two letters to the Shah again, telling him that he was coming for him, that if he was a man, he should take the field and not run away. The Shah replied with another letter that he had not fled, that he had come a long way and was near Tabriz. On August 12-22, 1514, Selim the First wrote a letter again, saying he had been advancing on Shah Ismail's lands for days. Sultans protect their homeland when an enemy comes to their land, but Shah Ismail is nowhere to be seen.

On August 16, 1514, due to the failure to meet the Safavid army and to meet the needs of the soldiers who had been miserable on the roads for 3 months, the soldiers revolted twice on the same day and raised their voices. Selim the First ignored the first uprising, but when it was repeated, he addressed the soldiers and made a speech full of emotion

and bravery, and after calming them by saying "I will go alone if necessary", he was able to silence them with the information that Shah Ismail was coming for them (Âlî, 1997).

Meanwhile, the Shah had moved towards the Ottoman army in order to protect his reputation, both because of the information he had received that some members of the "Selim the First's army would change sides" and because he needed to maintain his image as an invincible superior among his subjects. In the meantime, Shah Ismail was also taking into account the fact that the Ottoman army would suffer from food shortages and wear and tear as the Safavid beys plundered the entire region from Erzincan to Tabriz. There was no longer any uncertainty about what the Shah was doing, and he began to march towards Selim the First. On August 22, the vanguard troops met, and it was understood that the battle would take place on August 23 on the Chaldiran Plain.

Shah arrived early on the plain of Chaldiran and deployed. It is thought that the reason behind this decision was that there were people from Selim the First's army who would cross over to his side, the Ottoman army was tired, and he did not take into account the cannon and rifle (Felsefi, 1952). Likewise, the necessity to protect his reputation against Selim the First, who called him to war, to act in accordance with his divine mission instead of waiting like a coward, and his trust in his fierce warriors who were loyal to death against the tired Ottoman army that had been marching for 6 days without interruption are also among these reasons. It is estimated that the two armies faced each other with around 40,000-60,000 soldiers. Selim the First thought that by starting the battle as soon as possible, despite the fatigue of the soldiers, he would win the victory over the infantry forces equipped with firearms. Shah Ismail, on the other hand, thought that he would squeeze the Ottoman army in a narrow area in the hills of the Chaldiran Plain and disperse the Ottoman forces with trained Turkmen mounted troops. However, the Ottoman army had centralized forces reinforced with chariots and maneuverable small arms. Tactically, the Ottoman army was building a fortified fortress in the center with about 2,000 riflemen behind and on top of 500 cannon carts linked together by chains. This fortress was surrounded by camels, and behind it were the Sultan and his viziers. This center was like a mobile fortress with different troops on the left and right. Shah Ismail's army, on the other hand, was divided into right and

left wings, all of which consisted of mounted troops equipped with light armor. Historical sources describe the soldiers in Shah Ismail's army as devoted to the Shah to the point of worshipping him, while in the army of the Selim the First there was a group of Shah's loyalists who would turn to the other side at any moment and a second group who did not want to fight out of exhaustion. The Shah's battle strategy was that the vanguard of the two armies would fight each other while the Shah's lightly armored, fast, and aggressive mounted units would surround the Ottoman center from the flanks and attack the main center from the rear. The Ottoman army's tactic would be the classic cavalry attack from the flanks, then retreat as if defeated, before retreating back to the center, where the cavalry would again turn and destroy the enemy. Unlike the Ottoman army, the Safavids did not have cannons and rifles and did not know how to use them. Therefore, the Safavids did not have armed infantry, but they thought that their cavalry would have superiority over the armed Ottoman infantry. When the war finally started, the Safavids were on the offensive, attacks were organized from different fronts, and Shah Ismail himself attacked the Ottoman central forces, the line of carriages, where the Sultan was, 7 times, but he incurred the wrath of the janissaries with rifles. Relying on his own fast and fierce cavalry, the Shah's plans were thwarted by the Janissaries' muskets. In the end, the Ottoman soldiers surrounded the Shah, who ordered a retreat and fled, but when he saw that there were only 300 horsemen left, he gave up the fight. Shah, who fell off his horse while fleeing from the Ottoman soldiers, was able to escape by riding on the horse of another soldier. (Emecen, p.125-40) However, the fact that he left behind two wives had negative effects both on the reputation of the Shah and on the portrayal of the Shah in terms of historiography. The fact that rifle infantry determined the fate of the war to this extent at Chaldiran is a first. For the first time, the use of portable firearms in such an effective manner was the decisive factor in the outcome of the war, and this is seen as the most important contribution of the Ottomans to the history of world warfare. Especially when one remembers the success achieved by riflemen at the Battle of Pavia in 1525 between France and the Habsburgs, it is remarkable what the Ottomans did at Chaldiran 10 years earlier. (Emecen, 2010, p. 151) Of course, this does not mean that the war was not difficult. For the first time, the Ottomans suffered so many casualties at the level of senior commanders. After the battle, the Sultan had his soldiers distribute tips and had the wounded Safavid soldiers executed. He immediately sent news to neighboring states announcing the victory.

As a result, despite all the hardships, Selim the First was able to win the war with great determination and achieved a political, religious, and psychological victory that would have a long-lasting impact on both sides. The Ottomans, who crowned their superiority in terms of religious understanding with their military victory, assumed the role of the protector of Sunnism and the stopper of superstitious views. This increased the fame of the Ottoman Empire in the Islamic world, which was renowned for its military victories against the west, and further expanded its role in the Islamic world with its mission of protecting Sunnism. At the same time, it would be the beginning of the solution of the problems caused by Shah Ismail in Anatolia.

Selim the First moved to Tabriz to find Shah Ismail, who had managed to escape, and to solve this problem once and for all. The Shah, on the other hand, sensibly decided to avoid fighting Selim the First again and to continue his struggle with guerrilla tactics. On September 6, 1514, 15 days after the victory at Chaldiran, Selim the First entered Tabriz. Selim the First, who restored Sunni traditions in Tabriz, wanted to spend the winter here and go as far as Khorasan, but under pressure from the viziers and janissaries and due to the shortage of supplies, he decided to return, albeit reluctantly. On September 15, Selim the First left Tabriz and deported some 1700 scholars, artisans, and craftsmen to Istanbul (Çelebi, n.d.). On his way back, on November 29, a letter from Shah Ismail arrived in Amasya, stating that Selim the First was the authority of Iskandar and that he wanted peace (Bitlisi, 2001, pp. 219-220). Selim the First, thinking that the Shah was doing this as a stalling tactic and that he intended to prevent the Ottomans from attacking his country again, told the Shah in a letter that these stalling strategies were futile. Selim the First, who continued his preparations for the campaign after the winter in Amasya, was once again confronted with the Janissary rebellion. The Janissaries did not want another expedition to Persia and looted the houses of the pro-expedition pashas. Selim the First thought that Grand Vizir Dukakinzade was behind this and had his vizier executed. However, he postponed the rest of the problem to be solved in Istanbul and focused on the two main obstacles before the next Persian expedition, the capture of the Safavid-controlled Kemah Castle and the solution of the Dulkadirids issue. On May 19, 1514, Sultan Selim the First arrived in front of Kemah Castle and succeeded in taking the castle within 6 hours. Ala al-Dawla, the Dulkadirid, was left behind.

4.7. Toward Dulkadirids

The new target was Ala al-Dawla Bey, the head of the Durkadiroğulları, who was the father of Selim the First's mother, his grandfather. Ala al-Dawla Bey, who ascended to the throne with Ottoman help in 1480, did not respond positively to Selim the First's request for support for Chaldiran and even caused difficulties in obtaining supplies. It was also suspected that there was diplomacy between the Shah and Ala al-Dawla Bey to form an alliance, but there was no conclusive evidence. However, Ala al-Dawla Bey's main rival for the throne of the Dulkadirids, Şahsuvaroğlu Ali Bey, had actively supported Selim the First at Chaldiran. This was a good reason for Selim the First to replace Ala al-Dawla Bey with Şahsuvaroğlu Ali Bey after Chaldiran. In fact, the conquest of the Dulkadirids had a strategic importance that would strengthen the Ottoman hand against the neighboring Mamluks, with whom the Ottomans had been competing for years, as well as against the Safavids. Finally, Selim the First led an army against Ala al-Dawla Bey, and on June 12, 1515, the two armies faced each other. The army won a clear victory in classic Ottoman battle tactics, and the severed head of Ala al-Dawla Bey was sent to Selim the First. The severed head of Ala al-Dawla Bey, who had informed the Mamluk Sultan of the situation before the war began, was sent to Cairo to Qansuh al-Ghawri on Selim the First's orders (Ibn Iyas, 1984, p.437). Ala al-Dawlat Bey was replaced by Şahsuvaroğlu Ali Bey.

4.8. Kurds

In the spring of 1516, returning to Amasya to march against the Safavids and finalize his preparations, Selim the First sent the Kurdish scholar Idris-i Bitlisî to the Kurdish beys to convince the Kurds in the east to support the Ottomans against Shah Ismail, as he had done on his return from Tabriz. Since the Kurds were Sunni and Shafi'i, they did not favor Alawism and were persuaded to ally with the Ottomans against the Safavids and even expelled the Safavids from their territory and took control of Mosul and Kirkuk (İdris-i Bitlisî, 2001, pp. 236-254). In this region, khutbahs began to be read in the name of Selim the First. Selim the First sent an army to capture the strategically important city of Diyarbakir, but the people of Diyarbakir expelled the Safavids from the city and became subject to Selim the First. The Shah then sent an army to Diyarbakir and had the castle under siege, but when Selim the First heard

about this, he sent reinforcements and broke the siege. Selim the First knew that he had to capture the strategic cities and castles in the east before the second eastern campaign, so he assigned various commanders, especially Idris-I Bitlisî, and serious successes were achieved.

4.9. Preparing for War

On July 11, 1515, Selim the First arrived in Istanbul, and on his agenda was the issue of the Janissaries rebelling in Amasya. He wanted to rule the army with his absolute authority by bringing the Janissaries, who sometimes caused him problems before the new campaign he was about to embark on, into line. The Sultan tried various ways to find the instigators of the rebellion; he did not attend the divan meetings, he pressured the pashas and aghas to give their names, and even said that he would abdicate if they did not. In a way, he stopped the functioning of the state to solve this matter, and although the janissaries resisted at first, they finally submitted their names to Selim the First on August 18th. These names were Vizier İskender Pasha, Kazasker Tacizade Cafer Çelebi, and Sekbenbaşı Balyemez Osman Pasha, and Sultan Selim the First had them all killed (İdris-î Bitlisî, 2001, pp. 215-216). In addition to these, Piri Pasha was also dismissed from his post even though his house in Amasya was looted by janissaries because Selim the First understood that there was a conflict between Piri Pasha and Tacizade as a result of his investigation and by killing the rebel and dismissing the other one, he showed again that there could not be any other power center in the army. After this event, he started military preparations and expanded the Golden Horn shipyard for the construction of a powerful navy. On March 15, 1516, the second eastern expedition was announced in the council. In the meantime, the peace treaty with the Hungarians was renewed to avoid any problems in the west. During the time the Sultan spent in Istanbul and Edirne after his return from Chaldiran, Safavid activity increased in the east. Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha in Diyarbakır attacked the Safavids in the region but was defeated with serious casualties. Armies from Istanbul and the surrounding area moved to Diyarbakir in support. Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha joined with some additional forces and launched another attack against the Safavids. The Safavid commander Karahan was shot with a rifle during the battle, and his army was defeated. With this victory, the Ottoman position in the east was consolidated. After the battle, a spy of Shah Ismail was captured, and the following

information was obtained. The Safavids formed a rifle corps, cannons and cannon carriages were made using the Ottoman cannons, the Mamluk envoy met with Shah Ismail with a delegation of 200 people, the Shah was offered Sunnism, and if he accepted, they stated that they would mediate between the Ottomans and the Safavids, and if the Ottomans did not accept this, the Mamluks and the Safavids assured that they would unite and march on the Ottomans. It can be thought that this information supports the already existing rumors rather than determining its veracity as a historical source, and that it was effective in Selim the First's turning the direction of his eastern campaign to the south.

4.10. Toward Mamluks

Having dealt a blow to the Safavids with the Chaldiran Victory, the Ottomans wanted to conclude this matter with a second campaign. On the other hand, Shah Ismail accelerated his activities against the Ottomans in the East in order to repair his damaged image.

Ottoman-Mamluk relations were quite positive, except for Yildirim Bayezid's resistance in Malatya and the waterway crisis on Mehmed II's pilgrimage route. For the principalities in Anatolia, support from the Caliph in Cairo was very valuable in terms of legitimacy. The Mamluk border extended to eastern and southeastern Anatolia. During the reign of Bayezid II between 1485 and 1491, these two states were in a serious competition for influence in Çukurova. However, Bayezid II did not refrain from giving military support to the Mamluks because of the Portuguese threats against the holy cities (Tekindağ, 1968, pp. 77-80). The Mamluk leader Qansuh al-Ghawri wanted to maintain friendly relations with Selim the First and congratulated him on his accession to the throne. Selim the First had offered to unite against Shah Ismail on his way to the Safavids, but Qansuh al-Ghawri had refused (Emecen, 2010, p.197). Qansuh al-Ghawri's relations with Shah Ismail were not good between 1510 and 1514. In 1511, joint Ottoman-Mamluk forces launched a joint attack against the Safavid forces. The Safavid attacks along the borders, the tone of the letters sent back and forth, and Shah Ismail's sending the head of the Uzbek Khan Muhammad Shaybani to Gavri were indicative of the rivalry and discontent between the two (Ibn İyas, 1984, pp.219-230). In fact, Gavri perceived both the Ottomans and the Safavids as threats to him

and pursued a policy of balance and neutrality. The fact that Selim the First had reached the Mamluk border with the elimination of this after the victory of Chaldiran made Gavri uneasy. When the severed head of Ala al-Dawla was sent to Gavri, Qansuh al-Ghawri began to think that Selim the First would target him.

Selim the First had planned to conquer Egypt, but in order to monitor the activities of Shah Ismail, he intended to carry out the expedition as far as Baghdad, where the Shah was located. For the Ottomans, who wanted to be the leaders of the Islamic world since Mehmed II, it was inevitable that the Mamluks, who ruled this geography, would be a target. The Mamluks were the most important actor in the eyes of the Ummah and the state where the Caliph was located, with the name of the servant of the holy cities (Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn) and the duty to protect these cities, but they were powerless in the face of the threats of the Christian Portuguese and could not give the necessary response. In this situation, the role of savior fell to the Ottomans, and the Ulema of Cairo repeatedly invited the Ottoman Sultan to take power in Egypt. There are enough records of these invitations. The Ottomans, replacing the Mamluks ruling Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, Mecca, and Medina, would make the Ottomans the leaders of the Ummah. It would also bring enormous commercial and economic benefits. Undoubtedly, the status of the protector of the harem (Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn) would have also contributed greatly to the Ottomans in terms of legitimacy and religion. There are even widespread accounts that Selim the First, Sultan, was given the task of protecting the holy cities by the Prophet Muhammad in a dream. But of course, the information that Selim the First aimed for Cairo at the beginning of his Eastern Campaign is not correct, the widespread opinion among historians is that the Sultan decided to proceed to Damascus in Elbistan, where he came with the aim of ending the Safavid mobility around Diyarbakır, and it became clear in Damascus that he would go to Cairo after Damascus. (Emecen, p.202) In short, the goal was first to solve the Safavid problem in the Diyarbakır region under the rule of Karahan Bey and, if possible, to solve the Shah Ismail problem completely, but the circumstances and the environment changed the direction of the goal first to Damascus and then to Cairo. (Of course, some names, such as Celalzâde Mustafa Çelebi (1990) and Çerkesler Katibi Yusuf (n.d.), also said that the goal was Egypt from the beginning.) The two main reasons for the change of target were the arrival of Qansuh al-Ghawri with his army as far as Aleppo and the belief that he had made an alliance with Shah Ismail.

The Venetian traveler Angiolello says that the Shah wrote a letter to Gavri and told him that Selim the First was going to enter the Mamluk realm, so they planned to unite before Selim the First and target Sinan Pasha in Elbistan from two fronts (Gündüz, 2007). Idris Bitlisî also reports that Gavri exchanged letters with Shah Ismail, fearing that if Selim the First ended the Safavids, the Ottomans would become too strong and the Mamluks would be next (İdris-î Bitlisî, 2001, p.303). Sinan Pasha was informed about these collaborative efforts, and there are spy reports. On April 28, 1516, the Sultan sent Sinan Pasha with an army of 40,000 men. On the way, on May 23, the news came that the Safavid ruler Karahan had been killed. A spy from Egypt reported in Kayseri that Qansuh al-Ghawri, as a result of his consultations, fearing that they would be next in line after Shah Ismail, had hurried from Cairo to Damascus, then to Aleppo, and from there to Aleppo with an army to eliminate the Ottoman forces and their masses in a vanguard movement before Selim the First arrived (Silahşor, 1958). However, in April 1516, Gavri addressed Selim as "my son", complaining about the trade ban imposed since November 1515 and stating that he had heard rumors that he was coming against him and that it would not be right for two Sunni states to fight. In the same letter, he described Shah Ismail as "a Kharijite whose murderers were given fatwas by scholars" (Edhem, n.d.). Selim the First, in his letter to appease him, called him "my father" and said that all the preparations and measures he had taken were for Shah Ismail and had nothing to do with him. He added that he would target him if he opposed his offensive against Shah Ismail (Feridun Bey, 1857/1274 AH). The circumstances led Gavri to take a counter-balancing action against Selim, whom he called "my son", and Selim to attack Gavri, whom he called "my father".

Ibn Zünbül writes that Gavri looked favorably upon Shah Ismail's offer of alliance, that Selim the First's departure from Chaldiran with such a victory, the economic embargo and what he did to Ala al-Dawla were proof that he actually coveted "Persian and Arabian property", and that for this reason he said in his court that he would not allow the Ottomans to use Mamluk lands to attack Shah Ismail and that he would prevent them. However, he sent a messenger to Shah Ismail, indicating that he would mediate between Selim the First and the Shah. On May 18, Qansuh al-Ghawri set out from Cairo with the Caliph, the Ulema, and an army of 20,000 men, reaching Damascus on June 19 and Aleppo on July 11, while Selim the First set out from Istanbul on June 5 and met Sinan Pasha in Elbistan on July 23. In the meantime,

Mamluk-Arab sources describe Selim the First's arrival against the Mamluks, while Ottoman sources emphasize that Gavri was on his way to support Shah Ismail. For example, one source says that the Mamluks decided to cede Urfa to Shah Ismail. Of course, such rumors pulled Selim the First in the direction he was worried about. Selim the First sent envoys to Aleppo to Gavri and said, "My Sultan father, do not come between me and Sufi for peace". But Gavri saw this rhetoric as an excuse.

In this process, Gavri's arrival in Haleb with a large army in order to take measures against the Ottoman threat aroused the idea that the Ottoman army would be exposed to a joint Safavid-Mamluk movement in line with the information and concerns coming to Selim the First, and accelerated the expected Ottoman-Mamluk war in this process. This was, in fact, an important breaking point. Venetian sources even state that the Shah set out with an army of 60,000 men to support the Mamluks, but this attempt was in vain as the route was blocked by Ottoman troops. The fact that Shah Ismail watched the battle from afar in the later stages shows that the Safavid-Mamluk alliance in the Ottoman mind was not that strong, and Gavri was probably aware that the alliance of the Sunni Mamluks with the Shiite Safavids would pose a legitimacy problem (Emecen, 2010).

When the Sultan was informed that Shah Ismail was on his way with a fighting force of about 10,000 men, the Sultan was relieved, but when the Mamluk emir of Malatya refused to allow the Ottoman army to cross the Euphrates on a bridge, Selim the First's thoughts about Gavri were almost answered (Haydar Çelebi, n.d.).

On July 30, Selim the First and his vizier decided to change the target and march to Aleppo. Selim the First, who then sent men to Istanbul to ask for a fatwa on the war between two Sunni states, found the fatwa he was looking for (Celalzâde, 1990, p. 185). In the meantime, Gavri again sent emissaries to the Ottoman Empire to try to broker a peace between the two and said that since Elbistan was under Mamluk rule, Selim the First should leave there, but this was the last embassy attempt because the ties were now broken (Ibn Iyas, 2018). At the same time, he brought 13-year-old Qasim, the son of Shahzade Ahmed, who had taken refuge with him during the reign of Gavri, to Aleppo, which was a preliminary step towards an alternative to Selim the First's rule. This move further sharpened the relations between them.

On August 5, the army left Malatya and headed for Aleppo. A letter was sent to Gavri, sternly inviting him to war for aiding Shah Ismail, that is, the blasphemers. On August 20, war drills were held. Selim the First left Ayntab, and Gavri left Aleppo, and the armies reached the Marj Dabiq Plain.

There was a serious rivalry between Qansuh al-Ghawri's commanders. There was discord between Sibay, regent of Damascus, and Hayırbey, regent of Aleppo. Canberdi Ghazali, regent of Gaza, defended Noibey. Canberdi continued his war with the Ottomans until the last moment. At the same time, Qansuh al-Ghawri thought that Sibay, the regent of Damascus, was eyeing his throne. Noibay, on the other hand, was seen as favorable to the Ottomans as he maintained diplomatic contact with them.

On the Marj Dabiq Plain, the Mamluks had an army of around 50,000-60,000 cavalry (jundi), all lightly armored. There is nothing specific about firearms and artillery. The Mamluk army relied on fast, trained, good spear-wielding warriors. They disliked firearms, considered them contrary to the Prophet's Sunnah, and considered them an infidel invention (Ibn Zünbül, 1962). The Ottoman army numbered just over 60,000 and had around 2,000 riflemen. The Ottomans had fewer than 150 mobile and light artillery pieces. Both armies were on the battlefield on August 24 in the classic Ottoman order of battle. The Caliph and Prince Qasim were also present on the battlefield alongside Gavri. During the battle, different conflicts and divisions arose in the Mamluk army, while the Ottoman army was disciplined and acted with superiority in firearms without any strife. The battle was concluded in about 3 hours, and with the sudden attack of the Ottoman central forces, the center of the Mamluk army, which was busy fighting on the flanks, was dispersed. While Sibay fought and died on the field, Hayırbey was forced to retreat and even sent Gavri's men fleeing from the field, claiming that Qansuh al-Ghawri was dead. However, Gavri would die on the way to Aleppo, falling off his horse on the way back (there are different opinions on this issue; the thesis follows Ibn Iyas, Silahşör, and Ibn Zünbül). The lack of coordination between the different warrior groups in the Mamluk army (Julban and Karanisa) and the failure of governance (rivalry between the emirs) accelerated the heavy defeat. But of course, it was Ottoman firepower that decided the fate of the war. As a result of the battle, Caliph al-Mutawakkil and three major Egyptian qadis were captured (Barthold,

2006, p. 103). This victory ensured the Ottomans' control over Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Egypt remained a matter to be decided later.

When the Mamluks fled the battlefield and returned to Aleppo, they were not accepted by the people of Aleppo because of their previous atrocities, and were even killed. The emirs fled to Damascus (Ibn Iyas, 2018). The people of Aleppo had invited Selim the First to the city by letter while he was in Ayntab, and now it was up to Selim the First to enter Aleppo, a city where he had already been accepted. On August 28, Selim the First entered Aleppo and left on September 15. New appointments were immediately made and administrative units established. However, some of the army was sent back to their hometowns due to the fear of a possible Safavid attack on Diyarbakır (Matrakçı Nasuh, n.d.). Afterwards, a council was established, and the decision to march on Damascus was taken unanimously. Interestingly, for the first time, the elders of the Ottoman army were so unanimous about advancing. Of course, the fleeing Mamluk emirs met in Damascus, and since they intended to appoint an emir from among them to act against the Ottomans and fight, Selim the First wanted to conclude this business (Idris-î Bitlisi, 2001). Of course, the competing Mamluk emirs could not choose one of them as a leader, but they postponed it to Cairo. In the meantime, Selim the First had requested help from Istanbul by sea and prepared for the long and thirsty journey the army would take. The army marched in turn towards Hama, Homs, and Damascus. It encountered no resistance on the way, but 12 days after reaching Damascus, it entered the city. On November 3, Selim the First performed Friday prayers at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and a sermon was read in his name. During this period, he visited many symbolic and religiously important places along the way, including Damascus. These included the tomb of Imam Zayn al-Abidin, a visit to see the Holy Quran attributed to Hazrat Uthman, a visit to the place where Jesus Christ will descend near the end of the world, etc. While in Damascus, Selim the First was consulting about moving on to Cairo. Soldiers in the army demanded to go back, and although the Sultan intended to go back, he thought it would be better to stay in Damascus for a while as a precaution (Çerkesler Katibi, n.d.). Meanwhile, on October 10, 1516, in Cairo, the great emir Tumanbay, who ruled Cairo, agreed to become the new Mamluk Sultan on condition of "the allegiance of all the emirs". Selim the First wanted to march on Cairo with the concern that the Ottoman gains would be jeopardized and the Mamluks would recover, and with the idea that he could easily

defeat the Mamluk emirs who were not united among themselves, but the pashas were not in favor of this idea due to concerns such as insufficient troops, logistical support and climatic conditions. In this process, Anatolian beylerbeyi Zeynel Pasha and Anatolian bookkeeper Zehrimar Kasım were dismissed from their posts after they argued in front of the Sultan. As a result, instead of a direct war with Tumanbay, a compromise was made with the conditions such as the acceptance of Ottoman sovereignty in Egypt, taxes being paid to him as they had been paid to the Caliph in the past, the reading of the khutbah and the offer to give the authority to rule Egypt to Tumanbay. Otherwise, there would be war, but the new Sultan Tumanbay sent an army of 10,000 men to Gaza with Canberdi. In the meantime, the former Regent of Aleppo, Hayırbey, and Şahsuvaroğlu Ali Bey, who had been appointed as the head of the Dulkadirids, helped and advised Selim the First on the Egyptian campaign, as they knew the region and the conditions better. Selim the First wanted to take Damascus and not march to Cairo, just like Timur, but Hayırbey convinced Selim the First that they could cross the desert in the same way as the Mamluk soldiers had crossed the desert. While a vanguard force led by Sinan Pasha was sent to Gaza, the army began preparations, and tips were distributed to the soldiers to boost their morale. Selim the First was relieved when he was informed that the navy from Istanbul was ready (which would be delayed and arrive after the conquest of Egypt) and that the peace with the Hungarians had been renewed. When he was also informed that Shah Ismail was in Tabriz and had sent troops to Baghdad as a precaution, Selim the First had no doubts in his mind and focused on his goal. On December 15, Selim the First set off from Damascus, and the envoys he sent would reach Cairo on January 10 and be massacred. However, Tumanbay was going to accept Selim the First's offer with the intention of avoiding Muslim bloodshed and maintaining Mamluk rule, but Emir Allan had the Ottoman envoys killed without asking anyone, and convinced the emirs by insisting on a war, claiming that they could defeat the Ottomans, citing various reasons behind it (Ibn Zünbül, 1962). Tumanbay, who even had difficulty in recruiting soldiers due to financial problems, encouraged the beys to fight for their own families and said that if the beys did not fight, he would not fight either. Tumanbay emphasized the consensus of the emirs to act together while the Sultan was being sultanized. In the end, the emirs united and decided to fight under the leadership of Tumanbay.

The two armies led by Canberdi Ghazali and Sinan Pasha came face to face as vanguard near Gaza. Ghazali intended to wear down the Ottoman army, deny them supplies, and block the route to Cairo. On the morning of December 21, the two armies went into battle, and once again, the Ottoman firepower was superior, inflicting heavy losses on the Mamluk army and defeating them. At least a third of the 4,000-strong Mamluk army was killed in action. The Ottoman army now had a difficult desert road to Cairo, where there was no resistance, and geography had to be fought against. However, since it was winter, the Ottoman army was not afraid of thirst and heat problems and even perceived this as a divine sign.

After the Gaza victory, Selim the First visited Jerusalem, a city of great symbolic importance. Jerusalem was a very important and symbolic city due to the fact that it was the center of three religions and the Ottoman Empire gathered and ruled people from different religions under its rule, it was the third holy city according to Islam, and prophets such as Prophet Solomon and Prophet David were the rulers of this land. This visit is important in terms of emphasizing and displaying the Ottoman religious mission. According to Idris-î Bitlisi, since powerful sultans were considered the caliphs of the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets, it would have been considered disrespectful for Selim the First not to visit Jerusalem and the prophets' offices (Idris-î Bitlisi, 2001). During his visit to Jerusalem, Selim the First, as if sending a message to society, visited Jerusalem carefully, prayed at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, toured the mosques of the Prophet Yusuf and other prophets, distributed abundant tips to the people, Jerusalem carefully, prayed at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, toured the mosques of the Prophet Yusuf and other prophets, distributed abundant tips to the people, and slaughtered sacrifices (Silahşor, 1958). Selim the First arrived in Gaza on January 2 after his trip to Jerusalem. Here, while he was discussing the Egyptian expedition with the pashas, he encountered an opposition that the expedition should not be carried out due to the difficulty of the road and the lack of troops. Selim the First was angered by this opposition and had Hussein Pasha, the leader of the opposition, executed, thus intimidating the opponents of the Egyptian expedition (Çerkesler Katibi Yusuf, n.d.).

On January 8, 1517, Sinan Pasha and Hayırbey were sent to the Katya desert towards Cairo as a vanguard to ensure road safety. On January 9, Selim the First set out with

his army, and for a while, there were no water problems due to the rains, but as they advanced, they were subjected to water shortages and looting by the desert Bedouins. However, by the time the army reached Salihyye on January 16, the problem of thirst was no longer a problem, and the army was on its way directly to Cairo, crossing the desert. Selim the First dictated forged letters to deepen the divisions among the emirs and increase the dissension in the Mamluk army. However, when the letters arrived at Tumanbay's palace and were discussed among the emirs, they were recognized as Ottoman deception (Ibn Zünbül, 1962). This classic Selim the First tactic was used as a propaganda tool at every stage of the campaign, with some success. As Selim the First's army was advancing, some Arab tribal sheikhs were subordinate to Selim the First, while others were organizing operations to wear down the Ottoman army. Although Tumanbay wanted to target the Ottoman army when it was tired at the exit of the desert, after consultations with the emirs, he decided to meet it at Ridaniye in front of Cairo.

Both armies had about 20,000 inhabitants. Tumanbay had trenches dug at the entrance to the city and had created a line of defense with hidden cannons and rifles. Tumanbay was going to confuse the Ottoman army by setting up his own firepower against the Ottoman firepower and render the Ottomans helpless with a sudden cavalry attack (Idrisî Bitlisî, 2001). However, this plan would be thwarted when Ottoman intelligence, especially through information provided by Hayırbey's men, learned about the cannons. The Ottoman army neutralized the cannons by coming around the mountain from the other side, rather than from the side where they would have been aimed. On the morning of the next day, the armies were in battle stations. The Ottomans followed their classical tactics and strengthened the center. On the other hand, the Mamluk army, unaccustomed to defensive warfare and the use of cannons, had the goal of having skilled and fast cavalry directly attacking the center where the Sultan was, but the connection between the emirs was broken. The main objective was to capture the Sultan dead or alive, but the center of the Ottoman army was not only protected by firearms, but the Sultan's center was also surrounded by cannons and wagons, designed to be inaccessible to outsiders. When the Ottoman army moved, it did not attack the defensive line directly, but changed direction to go around the mountain and did not enter the range of the cannons, so the Mamluks failed to remove the hidden cannons and reorganize the army. However, since the Ottomans were

skilled in the use of cannons and rifles, they were able to successfully attack and neutralize the enemy forces. Sinan Pasha died at the front, and some of the Mamluk emirs and Tumanbay escaped. On January 22, victory was achieved, a khutba was read in the name of the Sultan at the Friday prayer a day later, and all the captives taken were executed. On January 24, the Ottoman army entered Cairo. The battle of Ridaniya was not as easy as Marj Dabiq; the Mamluk army had both acquired firearms and made successful tactical moves. However, the Ottoman army was more maneuverable, disciplined, and experienced in the use of firearms, which allowed the Ottomans to achieve victory. On the other hand, the lack of contact and communication in the Mamluk army also affected this defeat. It is true that the Mamluk army despised firearms for religious reasons, and that swordfighting was the main weapon of choice, but it was not the firearms used by the central forces that decided the fate of the war at Ridaniye, but the classical cavalry warfare on the flanks, and it is also known that the Mamluks had firearms at Ridaniye. Although for a long time the defeat of the Mamluks was based on the idea that the Mamluks were opposed to firearms on religious grounds, the reality was not that the Mamluks did not own firearms but that they could not use them efficiently. However, the Ottomans had successfully used rifle warfare against many states since the Battle of Otlukbeli (1473). Likewise, he would use them against the Westerners in the Battle of Mohaç (1526). In this respect, it can be said that what made the Ottomans superior was the correct and efficient use of firearms on the battlefield. (Emecen, 2010, p.280-282)

After the Ridaniya victory, the Ottoman army entered Cairo. Some Mamluk dignitaries obeyed and were granted amnesty and duties. However, the city's inhabitants and a significant part of the Mamluk emirs who supported Tumanbay, whose property had been looted, supported Tumanbay, who intended to organize a secret raid on Cairo. After the defeat, when Tumanbay realized that he could not directly attack the Sultan's otbah with the Mamluk beys and his army of 7,000 men, he attacked the city of Cairo on the night of January 27 and, with the support of the people, massacred several thousand of the Ottoman soldiers who were scattered in the city. Tumanbay, who captured certain parts of the city, set up his camp outside the city and took defensive measures against Selim the First by erecting barricades. On January 28, when the Ottoman army led by Yunus Pasha entered the city, it broke through some of the barricades, but not all, and was forced to leave at night. The Mamluk soldiers

and the people of Cairo united and prevented the Ottoman troops from entering the city. On January 29, the Ottoman army managed to break through the barricades of the previous day, but this time, Tumanbay retreated to the vicinity of the Great Mosque, and Selim the First, upon hearing the news, entered Cairo with his army. But because of the effective resistance of the people in the streets, Selim the First was forced to return to his camp at night. But the Mamluk beys had no strength left to resist and were tired of fighting. On Friday, January 30, Selim the First took charge of his army and dispersed the Mamluks with intense cannon and musket fire, and Tumanbay was forced to flee the city with his men. In the process, Selim the First's wrath took its toll on both the people who supported the resistance and the captives. Although the numbers differ, it is a fact that thousands of people were put to the sword. After taking control of the city, amnesties were issued to calm the people, and the authority and acceptance of the Caliph in the eyes of the people of Cairo were used.

On February 3, at the first divan in Cairo, Yunus Pasha, who had contributed greatly to the city's resistance, was appointed Grand vizier. On February 8, Canberdi Ghazali, one of the most important Mamluk emirs, and his dignitaries obeyed the Sultan, who appointed him Sanjakhbeyi of Sofia. However, those other than Canberdi Ghazali were taken into custody for fear of assassination. Sinan Pasha and Mehmed Pasha, who opposed the imprisonment of these beys in the court, were beaten by Selim the First (Feridun Bey, n.d.). On February 10, Selim the First sent a letter of amnesty to Tumanbay, and on February 13, he sent a message to Mecca and Medina and demanded that these regions be subject to him as the new owner of Egypt. On February 15, he ceremoniously entered the castle and sat on the symbolic throne of Joseph and declared himself the Sultan of Egypt. Selim the First tried to establish an administration in Egypt by taking into account the dynamics of Egypt rather than dictating the Ottoman system. For example, he reinstated the qadi of the four sects, whereas in the Ottoman Empire, a single qadi would have done this job. Although the Sultan sent envoys to Tumanbay and offered him to surrender on condition that he would be given a post (probably the sultanate of Egypt), Tumanbay could not trust the Sultan (naturally) and had the last envoys and intermediary qadi slaughtered. At the same time, the people Tumanbay had sent to assassinate Selim the First were captured. One of these assassins was assigned to go to Shah Ismail and inform him that Tumanbay would be subject to him if the assassination failed. It is also noteworthy

that, as a last resort, Tumanbay was now cooperating with the Safavids. All these developments prompted Selim the First to march against Tumanbay again on March 15, 1517. Selim the First, who sent some of his men against the Arab tribes supporting Tumanbay, also sent envoys to Tumanbay and asked him to surrender. Tumanbay did not accept this either, but the troops sent by Selim the First finally captured Tumanbay alive on March 30. (There are different rumors about the way he was captured.)

There was constant diplomacy in sending envoys and surrender between Selim the First and Tumanbay. In this process, it is understood that Tumanbay had the intention to end this war by responding positively to the conditions offered by Selim the First most of the time, but as a result of the pressures and moves of other beys, Tumanbay always had to oppose Selim the First. Selim the First, although he took military measures, had taken many steps to settle this problem peacefully. But circumstances brought the two commanders to an end that would result in the death of one of them. With the capture of Tumanbay, the main problem with the resistance was solved, and the Sultan was relieved. At the same time, forces were being sent against the Arab tribes, and the last efforts were being made to restore order. Tumanbay was brought before the Sultan and Selim the First, and Tumanbay had a long conversation. Selim the First had great respect for Tumanbay, but it was clear what Tumanbay's end would be. As a result of the people's admiration for Tumanbay, what the situation would be when the Ottoman army returned from Egypt, and concerns about the complete control of Egypt, Selim the First had Tumanbay, whom he respected very much, executed in Cairo on April 13 in a public place in order to prevent any mischief that would occur regarding the fate of religion and the state (İdris-î Bitlisî, 2001). The reason for his execution was announced as causing sedition among Muslims and having the ambassadors and judges who were sent twice slaughtered, and that he should be subjected to retaliation by Sharia and custom.

After the hanging of Tumanbay, the Sultan performed Friday prayers in the Al-Azhar Mosque and distributed tips. The people of art and science who were to be expelled from Cairo were identified. Although there were two assassination attempts in the following days, nothing happened to the Sultan. The fleet expected in Istanbul arrived in Alexandria on May 19. Selim the First went to Alexandria on June 5 and returned after visiting the Prophet's mausoleum, the footprint of Prophet Ali, the place where

Amr bin As sat when he entered the city, and other important mosques and places of symbolic importance. He had many sciences translated and books written. Piri Reis even came and presented him with the world map. On July 6, 1517, the son of the Sharif of Mecca came to Selim the First and became subject to him, and as before, the Hejaz region would be ruled by the beys of the region, but would be subject to the Ottomans. Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn, that is, the protector of these holy lands, would now be the Ottoman Empire. The discontent in the Hejaz caused by the Mamluks was resolved, large amounts of gratuities were sent to be distributed to the people, and new beys were appointed in the necessary places. In the process of Egypt's gradual military, administrative, and financial integration into the Ottoman system, mistakes and abuses led to the dismissal of Yunus Pasha, who was appointed as the first beylerbeyi of Egypt, and several notables. The dismissal of Yunus Pasha, who had been appointed in April, before the end of July, showed Selim the First's sensitivity to the administration of Egypt. On July 15, about 1,800 people, including the Caliph Mutawakkil, Gavri's son, Mamluk dignitaries, scholars, artisans, merchants, some Jewish craftsmen, and other influential or important people, several Ottoman soldiers set sail for Istanbul with the fleet (Ibn Iyas, s, 1984). Before leaving, Selim the First received ambassadors from various countries and appointed Hayırbey as the governor of Egypt. Staying in Egypt for 8 months, Selim the First wanted to ensure the security of Egypt by personally managing and controlling the affairs of state administration. Of course, the Sultan's knowledge and involvement in all processes caused unrest and uneasiness among some soldiers and statesmen. Finally, on September 9, 1517, the Sultan left Cairo for Damascus, leaving 3,000 Ottoman soldiers in Egypt.

When Yunus Pasha, who was competing with Hayırbey on the road to Damascus, informed the Sultan of his discomfort as a result of the rumors that Hayırbey was the beylerbeyi of Egypt and that Canberdi Gazali would be appointed as bey in his hometown after Sofia, Selim the First got extremely angry and had Yunus Pasha executed and had his severed head displayed for 3 days. On the way to Damascus, intelligence about Shah Ismail was coming in, and information was coming in that the Shah was marching towards Diyarbakir at first and then turning towards Amasya. On October 7, Selim the First reached Damascus and ordered the border beys to prepare for war, and when the information that Selim the First had reached Damascus reached Shah Ismail, the Shah retreated towards Tabriz. During this period, Selim the First,

who went to the Umayyad Mosque on October 17 to perform the Eid Prayer, visited the tomb of Sheikh Muhyiddin Arabi, an important scholar, and ordered the restoration of the tomb and the mosque. Selim the First, who stayed in Damascus for a while, was informed that the first Ottoman Hajj caravan, which was also of great symbolic importance, had arrived in Mecca from Egypt. While Selim the First was in Damascus, as a result of the news about Safavid activity, Selim the First decided to prepare the army for war. However, Selim the First sent these preparations against Emir Muhammad ibn Hanesh, one of the Druze Arab Sheikhs who had fought the Ottoman forces after the Marj Dabiq victory, but who nevertheless secretly supported Tumanbay and secretly encouraged the revolts in Safed in January 1517, and the Ottoman army slaughtered Ibn Hanesh. Piri Pasha, who arrived in Damascus at that time, was appointed to the long vacant position of Grand vizier by the divan on January 31. On February 12, it was reported that Qasim, the son of Prince Ahmed, who had fled and gone into hiding after Tumanbay's death, had been captured and slain in Egypt. Selim the First still cared about eliminating dynastic figures who could undermine his authority, and on February 12, 1517, he was the victorious Ottoman Sultan of Chaldiran, Marj Dabiq, and Ridaniye, the victorious Ottoman Sultan who had defeated the Mamluks, defeated Shah Ismail, and defeated Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn. While he was in Damascus, the gold he had requested from the treasury in Istanbul to cover the high costs of the war had arrived, and he was closely involved in the financial problems. When it was realized that money had been stolen from the treasury, he had six treasury officers and seven janitors, who were in charge of protecting the treasury, slaughtered by having them impaled on stakes while he himself watched as an example. On February 16, Shah Ismail sent a letter in which he recognized Selim the First's territories and superiority, demanded that Tabriz be left to him as it was his capital, and stated that he agreed to pay taxes for other places and wanted the sultanate. But Selim the First thought this was a game. On February 22, Selim the First left Damascus on his way to Aleppo, angry at the disorganization in the army and took the symbolic step of reducing the salaries of Ishak Çelebi, the Kadi of Skopje, Nihali Çelebi, the Kadi of Galata, and Kadı Bozanzade, whom he blamed for the tension between the competing pashas. On May 1, he ordered the punishment of Isa Bey, the Kadi of Bolu, who was reported to be in contact with Shah Ismail, and on May 5, he gave the order to march against Shah Ismail. In fact, Selim the First had been lingering in the Aleppo-Antakya line for some time, traveling and hunting. It was

clear that Selim the First intended to fight a war with the Shah and end the Safavid threat. Suddenly, however, the Sultan left the Grand Vizier Piri Pasha in Aleppo and moved towards Istanbul. This move may have been motivated by the pressure on the Janissary force and the idea of returning after dealing with the events unfolding on the western borders. (Emecen, 2010, p. 333) Before leaving Aleppo on May 19, he banned the commercial activities of Iranian merchants in the region, banned the Silk trade, the so-called Ibris ban, which targeted the Safavid economy, and deported the Iranian merchants in Aleppo to Istanbul. He himself arrived in Istanbul on July 15, 1518.

It is very important for Muslim leaders in the Islamic world to obtain the approval of the Caliph for legitimate reign. However, the Ottoman sultans emphasized the title of "Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn " more than the title of "caliph". Caliph al-Mutawakkil was brought to Istanbul, and in time, his religious-political position was downplayed. Fearing that the Caliph might flee, after a while it was decided to imprison him until his death, but when Suleiman ascended the throne, he put Al-Mutawakkil on a salary and sent him to Egypt. When al-Mutawakkil died in Egypt in 1543, he was not replaced. In other words, the last Abbasid caliph passed away quietly, and the Abbasid caliphate came to an end (Barthold, 2006). The caliphate was not handed over to Selim the First with a ceremony in Hagia Sophia as it is described. In fact, Selim the First used the title of Caliph even during his expedition to Egypt, just as other Muslim sultans called themselves caliphs in the context of sovereignty. In other words, the caliphate did not theoretically pass during the reign of Selim the First, but practically it passed to Selim the First, who was the leader of the Ummah and the servant of the holy lands.

Selim the First traveled to Edirne 10 days after he arrived in Istanbul. Selim the First was to reside in and around Edirne for a while. In the vicinity of Sivas, a man named Shah Veli, who was linked to Shah Ismail, started a rebellion and gained wide support. Ordering an intervention, Selim the First's army captured Shah Veli in late April 1519, sent his severed head to the Sultan, and ended the rebellion. In the meantime, Selim the First, who was informed that Murad, the son of Prince Ahmed, was alive and about to come to Anatolia, gave a definite order to kill Prince Murat and his collaborators (Celalzâde, 1990). However, when it was realized that this intelligence was wrong, many heads had already rolled.

He had been worried about a crusade led by the Pope since 1513. He was trying to convince the Venetians and Hungarians. However, the Venetians wanted to maintain their good relations instead of confronting the Ottomans. They even promised to give the Ottomans the taxes they had paid to the Mamluks for Cyprus. The Hungarians, on the other hand, were trying to maintain their peace treaty with the Ottomans, even though they were engaged in minor conflicts with the Ottomans on the border. Sultan Selim I signed a peace treaty with the Hungarians in 1516 and signed a second treaty in 1519. Unable to find what he was looking for from the Venetians and Hungarians, the Pope turned to France and declared the king of France the vanguard of the Holy War. But the Pope could not find what he was looking for here. However, on March 16, 1517, he was able to get the Lateran Council to declare war against the Turks, but he could not put it into practice. In 1519, the Spaniards also sent an envoy to Selim the First and demanded the continuation of Mamluk rights.

As of April 1519, Selim the First, who attached great importance to naval preparations, was targeting Rhodes, which was of great strategic and commercial importance. The expedition was postponed until the following year due to the weather conditions and the guidance of the people of the horoscope. In addition, the Ulema pressured the Sultan to attack Shah Ismail before Rhodes and issued a fatwa because Shah-led rebellions were continuing in the east. It is a fact that the Ulema had an influence on Selim the First.

On July 18, 1520, Selim the First, who left Istanbul for Edirne, ignored the boil on his back before the journey and had it tightened. On the way, when his illness increased around Çorlu, physicians were brought from Istanbul. Although the physicians tried various treatments on Selim the First, they could not find a cure. On the night of September 21, 1520, he died in the morning due to this disease. The news of his death was not announced until his son Süleyman arrived in Istanbul after a 4-day journey. Then the news of his death was announced, and his body was carried to Istanbul and buried in his grave on October 1, 1520. His son Suleiman became the new Ottoman Sultan.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

Yavuz Sultan Selim, Selim the First, stands as one of the most prominent and consequential figures among Ottoman sultans—not only in the context of Ottoman history, but also in the broader narratives of Turkish-Islamic and world history. The unique historical stature of the Ottoman Empire as the most expansive and enduring state in Turkish history naturally elevates Yavuz's position. As the longest-lasting Islamic empire, the Ottomans ruled three continents, conquered Constantinople in fulfillment of a widely cherished prophetic tradition, assumed the caliphate for the first time in Turkish hands, and carried the frontier of Islamic expansion as far as the gates of Vienna. Through centuries of governance, they held the Middle East longer than any other Muslim power, dismantled Byzantium, challenged European supremacy, and functioned as the *de facto* inheritors of the Roman legacy. The establishment of *Pax Ottomanica* situates the empire—and by extension, Yavuz himself—as a central actor in world history.

As Alan Mikhail (2020) argues in his study of Selim, the Ottoman control over critical trade routes in the early 16th century served as one of the driving forces behind the Age of Discovery, indirectly compelling European maritime exploration. Within this historical framework, Yavuz emerges not only as a pivotal figure of Islamic and Turkish history but also as a global actor whose eight-year reign reshaped the geopolitical contours of three civilizations.

Between 1512 and 1520, Selim consolidated Turkish political authority in Anatolia under Ottoman leadership, effectively neutralized the Safavid threat and preserved the dominance of mainstream Sunni Islam, dismantled the Mamluk Sultanate to gain control over the Middle East, and transferred the symbolic and spiritual authority of the caliphate to the Ottoman throne. By incorporating the holy cities of Mecca and Medina under his authority, he assumed the title *Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn*

(Custodian of the Two Holy Sanctuaries). Militarily, he extended Ottoman dominance over the Mediterranean, penetrated the Red Sea, and secured direct control over both the Silk and Spice Roads through his Middle Eastern conquests. Through the integration of gunpowder weaponry into battlefield tactics, Selim achieved overwhelming victories and expanded Ottoman territory nearly threefold.

These accomplishments position Selim among the ranks of historical conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Timur. Like these figures, Selim demonstrated extraordinary strategic acumen and transformational leadership. Furthermore, his rise presents a striking challenge to one of international relations' foundational paradigms: the balance of power theory. His unchecked ascent, despite the presence of several rival states, invites inquiry into why the systemic balancing mechanisms postulated by the theory failed to constrain him. This thesis was thus conceived to address that central question: Why was Selim not balanced according to the expectations of balance-of-power theory?

According to the theory, states act to prevent any single power from achieving dominance by forming defensive alliances or enhancing their own military capabilities. In the case of Selim's rise, one would expect the Safavids, Mamluks, Dulkadirids, and European powers to increase their capacities or cooperate to contain the Ottoman threat. Yet such a coalition never materialized. Instead, the Ottoman Empire emerged as the unchallenged hegemon of the Middle East within less than a decade.

While the failure of balance-of-power mechanisms has been explored in various historical cases, none have yet focused on the Turkish-Islamic world. The influential book *The Balance of Power in World History* by Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth examines eight such cases across time and geography. However, the absence of an Ottoman case in this volume served as a primary motivation for selecting Selim's reign as the subject of this analysis.

Although Chapter Two of this study provides a general overview, it is useful to briefly revisit Selim's remarkable trajectory. Except for one early defeat against his father Bayezid's forces at Çorlu, Selim emerged victorious in virtually all subsequent

political and military contests. Despite being only the third in line among the plausible heirs, he managed to dethrone his father and eliminate his brothers. He crushed Shah Ismail of the Safavids at Chaldiran, decimated the Dulkadirids, and destroyed the Mamluk armies at the battles of Marj Dabiq and Ridaniye.

In 1512, the Middle East was characterized by three great powers: the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mamluks, with the Dulkadirids principality functioning as a semi-independent buffer state. Selim confronted each of these actors sequentially. Over just eight years and with what may be termed "three and a half wars," he dismantled the Dulkadirids and the Mamluks entirely, while decisively defeating and neutralizing the Safavid threat by expelling them from eastern and southeastern Anatolia.

In sum, Yavuz Sultan Selim's reign exemplifies a case in which traditional balance-of-power theory fails to account for the empirical reality of unchecked hegemonic ascent. His example compels a deeper inquiry into the structural, institutional, and ideological conditions that allowed for such rapid and uncontested expansion, making his reign not only historically significant but also theoretically instructive.

Table 5.1. Key Ottoman Military Campaigns and Territorial Gains Under Selim I

Year/ Period	Campaign/Event	Opposing Force	Territorial Gains/Outcome
1512	Accession and Consolidation	Bayezid II, Brothers, Nephews	Dethronement of Bayezid II, elimination of rivals, consolidation of Selim's rule
1514	Battle of Chaldiran	Safavid Empire (Shah Ismail I)	Decisive victory, annexation of Eastern Anatolia and Upper Mesopotamia, brief occupation of Tabriz
1515-1517	Turkmen/Kurdish Annexations	Independent Turkmen dynasties, Kurdish principalities	Incorporation of these territories into the Ottoman Empire
1516	Battle of Marj Dabiq	Mamluk Sultanate (Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri)	Decisive Ottoman victory, leading to conquest of Syria and Palestine
1517	Battle of Ridaniya, Capture of Cairo	Mamluk Sultanate (Tuman Bay II)	Decisive Ottoman victory, complete annexation of Egypt, end of Mamluk Sultanate

Table 5.1. (cont.)

1517	Consolidation of Middle East	-	Ottoman control of pilgrimage routes to Mecca and Medina, claim to Caliphate
1520	End of Reign	-	Empire size increased 3 times, Muslim majority empire

According to the balance of power theory, the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Yavuz Sultan Selim, in its pursuit of regional hegemony, should have been effectively counterbalanced by the Safavids, the Mamluks, and the Dulkadirids. Yet, these three political entities—or, more accurately, two and a half states—failed to halt Selim's rapid ascent. This failure raises several foundational questions: Did these powers attempt to balance and fail? Were they unwilling or unable to mobilize? Was Selim's rise so overwhelming that balancing mechanisms were inherently ineffective? Were the internal and external balancing strategies employed insufficient, or was their application fundamentally flawed? This thesis seeks to address these questions through a focused examination of the conditions that enabled Ottoman expansion without resistance sufficient to constrain it.

In previous scholarship addressing similar questions—namely, why certain powers were not effectively checked in their pursuit of hegemony—the answers often involve a complex combination of structural and contingent factors. For example, in response to the question "Why was Rome not stopped?", Daniel Deudney (2007) points to internal stability, military organization, and socioeconomic structures. Likewise, Victoria Tin-bor Hui (2007) explains China's endurance through statecraft, geopolitical strategy, and internal reform. Across such cases, explanations generally fall into two broad categories: factors intrinsic to the rising power and failures or vulnerabilities of rival states.

These explanatory factors can be categorized as follows. First, power accumulation and internal capacity, including self-strengthening reforms (economic and military),

power-building, military and economic superiority, administrative strength, and superior leadership.

Second, strategic tactics include divide-and-rule strategies, ruthless or calculated military campaigns, expansionist policies, and exploitation of diplomatic ambiguity.

Third, geopolitical and structural variables consist of geographic advantages, topography, system size and type, constitutional or institutional arrangements, internal cohesion or fragmentation.

Fourth, ideological and cultural tools, including religious or ideological legitimacy, cultural differentiation, and the manipulation of local rivalries and identities.

Fifth, systemic and international dynamics, including misjudgment of the hegemonic threat, bandwagoning, buck-passing, free-riding, failure to emulate, and lack of coordinated external support.

Sixth, collective constraints including internal elite divisions, collective action problems, and environmental or epidemiological disruptions.

From this broad inventory of possible causes, it becomes evident that identifying a single, dominant explanation applicable across all cases is both analytically reductive and historically inaccurate. Each historical instance of balancing failure reflects a distinct constellation of causal factors. Accordingly, this thesis adopts a process-tracing approach to assess the particular historical trajectory of Selim's rise, analyzing the mechanisms by which balancing failed in this specific case. Any attempt to universalize these findings across time and geography would constitute an oversimplification.

Given this, Chapter Two outlines the chronological progression of events. However, to fully explain why Selim could not be effectively balanced, a deeper comparative analysis is required. Specifically, it is essential to examine the political, institutional, and strategic conditions of the Middle Eastern system in the early 16th century. Understanding the internal dynamics of the Safavids, Mamluks, and Dulkadirids—both individually and relative to the Ottomans—will enable the construction of a two-

pronged argument: one that identifies the Ottoman advantages, and another that diagnoses the structural and strategic deficiencies of their rivals. Only by situating the Ottoman Empire within this broader regional context can we explain why the mechanisms of balance failed and how Selim succeeded in establishing uncontested hegemony in such a short period.

5.1. The Geopolitical Landscape of the Early 16th Century

The early 16th century unfolded within a dynamic and fragmented multipolar world order, defined by overlapping rivalries and shifting alliances across Eurasia. From the Iberian Peninsula to Turkestan, a constellation of regional powers—each with distinct strategic objectives—shaped the political environment in which the Ottoman Empire operated. The balance of power in this period was deeply influenced by the ambitions and constraints of actors such as the Habsburg Monarchy, France, Venice, the Safavids, the Mamluks, the Dulkadirids, and the Uzbeks. A geopolitical examination of the pre-Selim period provides the necessary contextual foundation for understanding the rise of the Ottoman Empire and the dynamics of Selim I's reign.

The Ottoman Empire was a small Anatolian principality when it was founded in 1299. However, it was rapidly expanded to the east and west thanks to conquests and institutional reforms, and reached the Balkans and deep into Anatolia. Mehmed the Second conquered Constantinople in 1453, and this was a transformative moment in the historical trajectory of the empire. The majority of Ottoman conquests were targeted at the western front until Selim the First. However, the eastern front faced a serious threat during the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512) because of internal rebellions and rising tension with the Safavids and the Mamluks. Selim the First was a provincial governor in Trabzon during these years, and he personally engaged in military confrontations with the Safavids because of their interventions in the eastern part of Anatolia, while his father, Bayezid II, also clashed with the Mamluks several times.

When Selim came to the throne, his strategic focus targeted the eastern front to suppress the internal revolts and neutralize the Safavid and Mamluk threats. The Ottoman Empire had technological advantages because of its early adoption of gunpowder weaponry on the battlefield. Ottoman superior artillery and organized

infantry formations were ensuring decisive victories and advantages on the eastern and western fronts. However, before Selim the First, the Safavids and Mamluks did not face a direct and full-scale Ottoman campaign against them because Bayezid II was more focused on internal issues of the empire. The long-term geopolitical objectives of the Ottomans were to seek dominance in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Indian Ocean and to control international trade routes. Before Selim the First, the majority of the Ottoman population was non-Muslim. Selim's expansion into the heartlands of the Muslim world was not just a spiritual or ideological campaign but also a strategic move to position the empire as the de facto and de jure leaders of the Muslim world.

The Safavid Empire emerged on the ruins of the Sunni Aq Qoyunlu dynasty in Iran in 1501. Its roots come from a Sufi order called the Safavid centered in Ardabil. Safavids gradually transformed into a theocratic state whose official religion was based on Twelver Shi'ism under the leadership of Shah Ismail. Shah Ismail came to power when he was twelve, a child, through a combination of charismatic leadership and ideological mobilization. He gained wide support from tribal and religious groups, mainly Qızılbaşs, because of his superior and sacred position stemming from their newly adapted religious understanding. Strategic use of musical legitimacy, as well as anti-Sunni and anti-authority rhetoric, expanded Safavid influence beyond their borders, including Ottoman Anatolia. This influence was clearly seen in pro-Safavid Shi'i groups' rebellions, including the Shahkulu and Celalî rebellions across Ottoman lands. Safavids challenged Ottoman territorial integrity and Sunni orthodoxy; however, they struggled to form alliances because of Sunni domination in the Islamic world and experienced strategic isolation. Their ideological position and geopolitical position, which was strained by two Sunni powers, Ottomans in the west and Uzbeks in the East, intensified this isolation. No doubt, Safavid expansionist ambitions also played a crucial role in this subject. Though Shah Ismail's charisma and sacred central authority allowed the Safavids to expand early, it created long-term strategic overextension that finally resulted in a strategic compulsion to focus on just one front, the eastern one. During these years, Safavid and Mamluk relations remained relatively quiet and calm.

The Mamluk Sultan governed the majority of the Middle East, including Egypt, the Levant, and the Hijaz from 1251 to 1517. It is a Sunni polity based in Cairo, formed

by slave-soldiers of primarily Turkish origin. The Mamluks' distinguished position in Islamic history relies on their victories against the Mongols and the Crusaders. Administrative coherence and military strength ensured a successful and powerful sultanate in the early years. However, internal power struggles, fiscal mismanagement, and geopolitical rivalries with isolation undermined the stability of the empire and led to its decline. Mamluks were the nominal leaders of the Islamic world because of the caliphate and their control of trade routes through the Red Sea. However, the rise of Portuguese naval power in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman competition weakened the Mamluk economy. Meanwhile, the Mamluk military weakly adopted gunpowder weaponry and could not modernize itself institutionally. Also, the competition among the beys deepened military weakness. This caused a fatal vulnerability that let Ottomans come to Cairo much faster and easier than anticipated.

The Dulkadiris were a small Turkmen principality located among the borders of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mamluks in southeastern Anatolia, like a buffer zone. Dulkadirids always shifted alliances to survive among these three powers. The leader of the Dulkadirids, Ala al-Dawla, was Selim's grandfather from his mother's side. This closeness also enabled him to establish a personal bond with the Ottoman Sultan Selim. However, rejection of support to Selim's Chaldiran campaign, though Selim's direct demands and Dulkadirids' alignment with Mamluks triggered irreversible damage to relations with the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, Selim the First dissolved the principality by deposing Ala al-Dawla and transferring the power to Shahsuvar Bey, a rival aligned with the Ottomans' strategic objectives.

The Uzbeks, under Muhammad Shaybani Khan, sought to extend their dominion into Khurasan from Central Asia, bringing them into direct and persistent conflict with the Safavids. This eastern front consumed much of the Safavids' strategic attention and prevented the full concentration of their military capacity against the Ottomans. The Uzbek threat was therefore a structural factor weakening any attempt to forge a robust anti-Ottoman coalition from the East.

In the European sphere, the Habsburg Monarchy under Charles V ruled over a vast and disparate collection of territories, including Austria, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire. While the Habsburgs viewed the Ottomans as a civilizational threat, their

resources were overstretched, and internal religious tensions—soon to erupt in the Protestant Reformation—precluded unified action. Meanwhile, France, under Francis I, was engaged in a bitter rivalry with the Habsburgs for dominance in European affairs. This competition drove France to adopt unorthodox diplomatic strategies, including an eventual alliance with the Ottomans, despite religious differences. Portugal had reached its maritime empire's peak under the leadership of King Manuel (1495-1521), known as "the Fortunate". Portugal's strategic focus was on controlling trade routes in the Indian Ocean and bypassing the Muslim-dominated overland commerce. Portugal's expansion raised competition with the Mamluks and Ottomans. The Republic of Venice, the dominant trade hub of the Mediterranean, whose strategic interest was preserving access to Eastern trade, had often been in tension with Portugal while having a complex and inconsistent relationship with the Ottomans. However, during the reign of Selim the First, the Ottoman and Venetian relationship was maintained in a positive way.

Table 5.2. Geopolitical Landscape: Core Identity & Governance (1512-1520)

Power	Leadership	Internal Dynamics	Key Characteristics
Ottomans	Selim I (1512-1520): Highly effective, ruthless, consolidated power, expanded empire dramatically.	United under strong central authority of Sultan Selim I, who eliminated rivals.	Sunni Islamic Empire, transcontinental, control over holy cities (Mecca, Medina) after 1517.
Safavid Empire	Shah Ismail I (1501-1524): Founder, unified Iran, proclaimed Shi'ism. Fell into depression after Chaldiran (1514).	Unified under Shi'ism, but Qizilbash factions could be disruptive, especially during succession.	Shi'ite Islamic Empire, strong Turko-Persian identity, located between Ottoman and Uzbek rivals.
Mamluk Sultanate	Qansuh al-Ghuri (1501-1516), Tuman Bay II (1516-1517). Leadership weakened by internal rivalries and failure to modernize.	Suffered from internal factional rivalries (Qaranisa vs. Julban), political difficulties, population decrease due to plague.	Sunni Islamic Sultanate, military caste rule, controlled Egypt, Levant, Hejaz.
Dulkadirids	Ala al-Dawla (1515), Weak Leadership	Competition among beys	Buffer Zone, Mamluk inclined

Table 5.2. (cont.)

Uzbeks	Kochkunju Muhammad (1512-1531), Ubaydullah Khan (1512-1540). Period of "confusion" and "strife" after Shaybani's death, leading to power struggles among clans.	Internal strife and power struggles among Abulkhayrid clans, appanages became hereditary dominions.	Sunni Islamic Khanate, Turco-Mongol origin, nomadic tribes, controlled Central Asia (Transoxiana, Khwarazm).
Habsburg Monarchy	Charles V (1516-1556 as King of Spain, 1519-1556 as Holy Roman Emperor). Inherited vast, fragmented empire, struggled to maintain integrity.	Vast, composite monarchy with distinct laws and institutions. Faced internal Protestantism, ethnic tensions, and administrative challenges	Sprawling European empire, first to be called "empire on which the sun never sets."
France	Francis I (1515-1547): Centralizing monarch, patron of arts, engaged in Italian Wars.	Growing central power, spread of humanism. Royal regime strengthened, but nobility could be disloyal.	Major European power, increasingly centralized monarchy, engaged in Italian Renaissance.
Portugal	Manuel I (1495-1521): "The Fortunate," supported exploration, royal absolutism.	Royal absolutism, centralized administration, but domestic economy stagnated.	Maritime empire, global reach, control over key trade routes, wealthy.
Venetians	Doge Leonardo Loredan (1501-1521). Doge's power limited, decisions by Great Council.	Political order characterized by checks and balances, aristocratic republic. Growing internal political conservatism.	Maritime republic, major trading power, strategic position in Mediterranean, control of Adriatic and Italian mainland.

Ottomans maneuvered with skill and aggression in this multipolar international system, where their rivals had fractured and overstrained positions, including geographic, ideological, or internal dissents. Under these circumstances, Ottomans under the leadership of Selim were positioning themselves to pose a hegemonic power in this environment.

The Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, and the Mamluk Sultanate were the three major empires that shaped the political landscape of the Middle East at the beginning

of the 16th century. Meanwhile, the Dulkadirids' principality was playing a buffer zone role as a diplomatically active but small power among these three empires. This political structure of the region reflects the characteristics of an anarchic multistate system where there is no single power that has overwhelming dominance in terms of military, economy, territory, or else. At this time, the Middle East manifests a clear scene for balance of power theory's assumed power relations.

Though the Ottoman Empire was in intense rivalry with both the Safavids and the Mamluks, the relationship between the Safavids and the Mamluks was minimal diplomatically and militarily. However, Dulkadirids were having very active relations with all to preserve their autonomy and existence. There was a balanced order until the Ottoman Empire's hegemonic ambitions came into play, concretely as campaigns against the Safavids and the Mamluks. During Selim's dynamic and intense eight-year reign, the Mamluk Sultanate and Dulkadirid Principality were defeated and devastated, while the Safavids recognized Ottoman superiority with significant territorial losses. During these years, the Ottoman Empire maintained peaceful relations with European states by signing non-aggression treaties with the Habsburgs and Venice. Thus, Ottomans neutralized the potential threat that may stem from the western front and threaten the strategic campaign of the empire in the eastern front.

This paper argues that Selim I's success in evading containment was the result of three interlocking factors: his exceptional leadership, the military-technological superiority of the Ottoman army, and the absence of a functional counterbalancing coalition.

Selim's leadership was central to this success. First of all, he had hegemonic ambitions that targeted establishing Ottoman hegemony, being the Alexandria of the time, and the de facto leader of the Ummah by uniting Muslims under Ottoman rule. He did not view its neighbors just as rivals but also as ideological and strategic obstacles against Ottoman supremacy. This was shaped by the Safavids' sectarian propaganda and interventions, and they portrayed themselves as heretic adversaries of Sunni orthodoxy. Mamluk's symbolic role, the Caliphate, in the Muslim world, its entitlement as Hadimul Haramayni Sharifayn (the servant of holy cities), and strategic and profitable territorial holdings were attracting Selim's attention on his way to reach his ambitions. Dulkadirids were seen as a local obstacle to Ottoman consolidation

despite familial ties. Secondly, Selim was an authoritarian figure in his internal governance, who systematically and intentionally concentrated the power of the Sultan among other power centers in the empire structure. He explicitly refuses any alternative power center inside the empire, especially among the military and bureaucratic elites, including Janissaries and Pashas, and Viziers. Selim ensured that all apparatus of the empire were loyal only to his authority through various strategic appointments and purges, institutional centralizations, and rewards and punishments. Third, his leadership was characterized by discipline, decisiveness, and rapid execution of policy. He was severe on insubordination, unprecedently swift on military campaigns, and strictly controlled all operations and administration. These features enabled him to prevent any potential resistance stemming from his dynastic rivals, imperial power centers, or external rivals.

The Ottoman military superiority enabled the Ottoman army to acquire decisive victories against its rivals, as in the Chaldiran, Marj Dabık, and Ridaniyya. This superiority mainly relies on using gunpowder weaponry, including artillery and musketry, war tactics, logistics, social integration, and resource mobilization, ensuring a significant advantage to Ottomans. These superior forces were not used before against the Safavids and Mamluks on this scale because of Bayezid II's political focus and imperative priorities. While the Safavids and Mamluks were weak in adopting the use of gunpowder-based war tactics in their armies, Ottomans had already and effectively integrated firearms into their war doctrine, providing tactical superiority on the battlefield.

In contrast to these two advantages, the rivals of the Ottoman Empire could not materialize an influential counterbalancing coalition against Selim. While the Ottoman Empire explicitly was targeting their security, they could not succeed in establishing a coalition. There are various reasons behind this absence. First, the lack of meaningful Safavid and Mamluk coordination was partly because of leadership, divergent religious ideologies, and geographic separation and distance. Second, Selim's strategic speed stemming from his leadership and the military superiority of the Ottomans denied his rivals the time and capacity to establish a coalition. His campaigns were realized so rapidly that they left no room for the emergence of effective diplomatic engagements. Paradoxically, while Selim has not faced an anti-Ottoman coalition, he

actively consolidated a coalition to facilitate his campaigns. He cooperated with the Sunni Shafi Kurdish nobles through Idris-i Bitlisi, an important Kurdish scholar, against the Safavids. He supported the Shahsuvar Bey, who was a rival to Ala ad-Dawla for the Dulkadirids' leadership. He coordinated with different dissident Mamluk commanders, including Canberdi Gazali, against the Mamluks and the hard geographic conditions of the unknown deserts. All these personal or tribal partnerships helped in both military victories and the establishment of Ottoman governance structures in the newly conquered lands. These partners were generously rewarded with political positions, thereby preventing the reconstitution of the defeated states.

The absence of a counterbalancing coalition was not just the failure of Ottoman rivals but the success of the active involvement of Selim the First. Selim's use of strategic diplomacy, ideological framing, and military decisiveness ensured this success. His ability to dismantle a major and a small power and subordinate the second power in less than a decade exemplifies a hegemonic rise that challenges the balance of power theories' expectations.

5.2. The Ottoman Colossus: Leadership and the Architecture of Hegemony

Selim the First's reign is characterized by internal power consolidation, which set an easier stage for external conquest. His ruthless and decisive leadership differentiated the Ottoman Empire from its rivals, who were often challenged with internal obstacles, including leadership, elite division, or power competition.

5.2.1. Ruthless Elimination of Dynastic Rivals

When Selim came to the throne, he started a brutal and systemic purge campaign against all his dynastic rivals who might intend to come to the Ottoman throne. Through these campaigns, he profoundly secured his sultanate. Selim became the first non-firstborn Shahzada (Sultan's son) to dethrone the Sultan from his position, forcing his father, Bayezid the Second, in 1512. Immediately after this, Selim embarked upon a walk over his two big brothers, Ahmed and Korkud, and executed them with seven nephews in 1513. These drastic measures prevented any alternative leaders from rising, opposition from coalescing, and ensured exceptional dynastic stability.

This exceptional level of internal power consolidation, with speed and determination, precluded significant domestic challenges to Selim's authority. Selim was well aware of the case of Cem Sultan, who was an alternative dynasty member to Bayezid II. During his childhood, Cem Sultan became a threatening factor and a source of income at the hands of Ottomans' rivals to negotiate with Bayezid the Second. Therefore, Selim did not want to witness any similar case. He was aware of how such a dynastic rivalry could weaken the empire. However, the absence of internal threats ensured that Selim could project his maximum to the external without any distraction from domestic dissent, a sharp distinction compared to the fragmented and weak Mamluk leadership or the internally challenged and questioned Safavids. This internal cohesion allowed Ottomans to operate all their campaigns as unitary actors in the international state, a significant leverage for a revisionist state striving for hegemony.

5.2.2. Suppression of Internal Power Centers

Selim the First imposed his ruthless assertion of authority on core state institutions and elites to guarantee complete loyalty and bureaucratic efficiency. He was determined to reward or punish Pashas or viziers whom he perceived as disloyal, incompetent, or in power competition with other pashas, thereby undermining the effective functioning of the state apparatus. He was notorious for his brutality in bureaucracy, often executing his viziers because of their incompetence or power competition. In these eight years of ruin, he had six different grand viziers, including Koca Mustafa Pasha, Hersekzade Ahmed Pasha, Dukakinzade Ahmed Pasha, Hadim Sinan Pasha, Yunus Pasha, and Piri Mehmed Pasha. These names were either executed or punished several times, including being sent to jail, beaten, or publicly humiliated. Hemdem Pasha, Selim's childhood friend, was executed for conveying the grumblings and discontentment to the Sultan while going to the Chaldiran in 1514. Sadi Pasha was sent to jail because of his role in Mardin's fall to the Safavids. Vizier Iskender Pasha, Kazasker Tacizade Cafer Çelebi, and Sekbanbaşı Balyemez Osman Pasha were executed because of their involvement in the Janissaries rebellion in Amasya. When Selim learned that Sinan Pasha was lobbying, he chased him with a sword and beat him among soldiers. Hersekzade and Piri Paşa were sent to jail because Mehmet Pasha was defeated by the Safavids in Diyarbakır. There are various examples like this that show how Selim was active in punishment. Therefore, some pashas were even

reluctant to be vizier of Selim, as Hersekzade's reluctance, though Selim wanted to appoint him as Grandvizier (Emecen, 2010, p. 178). This atmosphere created a climate of fear and obedience among pashas and provided absolute loyalty to the Sultan.

Janissaries were actively involved in Selim's progress to the throne against Bayezid in favor of Selim. Their support of Selim leveraged him to gain the Sultanate. Janissaries publicly criticized Bayezid's failures and surprised Shahzade Ahmed's sympathizers in Istanbul during the process of the throne struggle. Through the power of the Janissaries, Selim quickly asserted absolute control over the empire. However, Selim did not position himself as a Sultan who ruled the empire under the shadow of the Janissaries' power and control. He also suppressed Janissaries severely when he saw insubordination. When Janissaries revolted at Amasya and Aras Rivers, Selim identified the instigators among the Janissary corps and viziers through detailed investigations and executed them. This was Selim's determined effort to bring the powerful Janissary corps under his authority and gain loyalty. His efforts made Janissaries more disciplined and loyal to orders in time while preventing them from becoming an independent or autonomous power center. Selim was aware of the Janissaries' destabilizing power and role in the previous Sultans' reigns.

However, this ruthless leadership is balanced with a pragmatic strategy in administrative appointments. Piri Mehmed Pasha (though he had no traditional palace education and came from being a provincial judge) was appointed as grand vizier thanks to his intelligence, comprehension, and his ability to protect state secrets. Selim was deploying a strategy based on meritocratic principles, which promotes different positions for qualified individuals, though this is against the Ottoman bureaucratic traditions. He was deploying qualified soldiers to the army, rather than just using Janissaries, even from his Shahzade times. This was not just part of meritocratic appointments but also neutralizing any other power centers' influence in the empire. Furthermore, he strategically grants certain privileges to Kurdish tribal leaders or Mamluk beys in newly acquired territories to secure their loyalty and gain their military support.

This systematic oppression over traditionally internal power centers inside the empire, like Janissaries and viziers, and strategic meritocratic appointments was crucial to

establish Selim's centralized administration and unquestioning obedience to the Sultan at a substantial level. This ensured rapid decision-making and efficient mobilization, which produced a significant advantage for Ottomans compared to fragmented, inexperienced, or decentralized rivals.

5.2.3. Selim's Broader Strategic Vision and Hegemonic Ambitions

Selim followed a more aggressive and expansionist foreign policy, sharply contrasting with Bayezid's vision, which was more cautious and diplomatic. While Bayezid was busy with internal divisions and rebellion, Selim chose to attack the source of this rebellion and follow offensive realist campaigns. Selim's vision was more than an effort for territorial acquisitions. He wanted to establish a universal sovereignty (to be the Alexander the Great of his time) and to be the *de facto* and *de jure* leader of the Ummah, while also being the servant of the holy cities and protector of Sunni orthodoxy.

These ambitions were not just symbolic but also ensured a powerful "justification" or "intention" for his harsh campaigns against the Safavids and the Mamluks. When Selim launched a campaign against the Safavids, he positioned himself as the protector of Sunni Islam while the Safavids were considered infidels and heretics. Safavids not just intervened in the Ottoman internal issues but also corrupted the religion. Therefore, Selim was calling Shah Ismail to abandon these heresies. While expanding Ottoman borders over Mamluk territories significantly increased the Ottoman lands, Ottomans were also gaining control of the Holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina. These gorgeous achievements paved the way for adopting the title of "the servany of the two holy cities" (*Hadimul Haramayni Sharifeyn*), a title leveraged the Ottoman prestige and changed religious and political hierarchy in the Islamic world in favor of Ottomans. This element profoundly rose Ottoman legitimacy among Muslims while changing Ottoman identity as well. Ottomans were no longer a frontier ghazi state but also recognized as the leader of the Ummah by gaining the Caliphate role. This was hindering any conventional balancing act from other Muslim powers; indeed, the *de facto* power of the Ottomans was also a deterrent for such a balancing act. Even Safavids, seen as infidels by Selim and his fetwas, recognized this elevated status and referred to Selim as "Shah on the throne of the caliphate" and "caliph of God and of

the Prophet Muhammad". This recognition, even from rivals, underlines the new geopolitical and religious reality he created.

Selim's interest in global politics is seen by his engagement with Piri Reis's world map, which details the discoveries of the Portuguese in the New World. This was indicating a broader awareness of global geopolitics rather than just focusing on regional conflicts. He was aware of the significance of international trade routes, especially those crossing over the Indian Ocean. These routes were possible wealth channels for Ottomans and Portuguese treasuries. Thus, a competition between Ottomans and Portuguese erupted over time in the Indian Ocean, where established trade networks worked well.

5.3. Ottoman Military Superiority

During the Ottoman classical period (1452-1606), the Ottoman military was recognized as a formidable and disciplined force that significantly affected both European and Middle Eastern military dynamics and geopolitics. This era was the peak of the Ottoman Empire's territorial expansion and military victories, mainly characterized by innovative tactics, advanced weaponry, and a supreme organizational structure that set a standard for the following centuries. The Ottoman military during Selim the First had unparalleled superiority thanks to its mastery of gunpowder technology and innovative war tactics. This military superiority was a multiplier force that ensured decisive victories, altering the regional balance of power in favor of the Ottomans.

5.3.1. Advanced Gunpowder Technology and War Tactics

One of the key reasons behind the Ottoman military's dominance was its early and skillful use of gunpowder weapons. The Ottomans became experts in artillery, employing powerful cannons not only during sieges but also in open battles. The Ottoman infantry —most notably the elite Janissaries— were armed with handheld firearms such as tufenk (the harquebus), which played a significant role in the battlefield effectiveness of the Ottoman army. At the same time, the integration of gunpowder weapons by Ottomans fundamentally altered the nature of warfare.

In the Battle of Chaldiran, when the Ottoman army faced the Safavid army, the usage of heavy artillery and Janissaries equipped with firearms behind the protective chained wagons provided huge decisive firepower for the Ottomans, while the Safavids lacked artillery and consisted mainly of cavalry. This ensured a decisive victory on the battlefield. In the same way, Ottomans overwhelmingly put the same firepower in operation during their campaigns against Mamluks. Mamluks' reliance on traditional cavalry made them vulnerable against the Ottoman army, which had musketeers in the center and artillery placed on the flanks at Marj Dabiq and Ridaniya.

These military technological advantages that produced a power imbalance between Ottomans and their rivals were not overcome quickly by the rivals. Mamluks were more prone to use older cavalry tactics and were slow to adopt gunpowder weapons, while Ottomans advanced the use of firearms with a great supply stemming from Ottoman gunpowder factories. Though Mamluks tried to integrate firearms into the army, they were importing from Europe, but Ottomans already had their own factories. Ottomans were developing a sophisticated and diversified arsenal of firearms and artillery, not just adopting gunpowder technology. They had siege guns (kale-kob (fort-smasher), şayka, and balyemez) that fired massive projectiles. Also, lighter and mobile field guns like Kolunburna were deployed for dynamic battlefield maneuvers.

Use of wagon tactics, known as tabur jangi, was as important as the use of gunpowder technology. This innovative war tactic was creating makeshift fortifications by using carts and wagons and forming a mobile fortress behind the Sultan and his special forces. In this way, Sultan and his forces safely and effectively positioned their artillery and infantry. This combination of infantry wielding firearms, mounted archers, and these mobile defenses gave rise to various military victories for Ottomans from 1444 to the seventeenth century. The success of these tactics inspired other empires, including the Safavids and the Mughals, to adopt similar strategies (Uyar & Erickson, 2009, p.51)

As a result, Ottomans' innovative and advanced military, including superior technology and tactical advancements, produced a unique and victorious war machine that consistently surpassed its contemporaries.

5.3.2. The Janissaries

The elite Janissary corps served as the core of the Ottoman infantry. Unique for their era, the Janissaries were considered a “modern standing army” and are often regarded as the first infantry force in history to be systematically equipped with firearms. Renowned for their strict discipline, strong internal unity, and absolute loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan, they stood apart from other military units of the time.

Unlike temporary or mercenary forces, the Janissaries were professional soldiers who received regular pay, lived together in barracks, and were prohibited from marrying or engaging in trade until reaching a certain age—measures designed to ensure their full commitment to military duties. This professionalization gave them shock troop capabilities unmatched by most contemporary armies. Their permanent status and rigorous training meant they were far more skilled and reliable than village militias or mercenaries, who were often poorly trained and unfamiliar with advanced weaponry. The Janissaries not only excelled in combat but also mastered the use of emerging war technologies and firearms, making them a formidable force on the battlefield.

5.3.3. Superior Logistics and Remarkable Campaign Speed

The Ottoman military’s success extended beyond superior battlefield technology to include remarkable logistical capabilities that allowed for rapid and sustained campaigns over vast territories. Although pre-modern warfare was often hindered by slow troop movements, fragile supply lines, and challenging terrain, the Ottomans developed an efficient and sophisticated system to overcome these difficulties. At the heart of this system was a network of grain depots and menzilhane—strategically placed waystations stocked in advance along key routes, ensuring a steady flow of supplies without relying on opportunistic foraging or pillaging, which was common among European armies of the time and often destabilized local populations. While traditional means such as ox carts and pack animals were still used, the Ottomans also made strategic use of waterways to transport heavier loads, improving both speed and volume of supply delivery. These logistical advancements gave the Ottomans a clear military edge. For instance, Selim I’s rapid march from Trabzon to confront his brother, Ahmed, followed by swift campaigns through Syria and Egypt, was only

possible due to their ability to move and sustain large forces efficiently. This capability consistently outpaced their opponents, preventing effective coordination or mobilization of defenses and thereby securing Ottoman strategic dominance.

5.3.4. Exceptional Social Integration and Resource Mobilization

One of the main successes of the Ottoman administration was the pragmatic incorporation of people and elites of newly conquered lands into the empire's political structure. Ottomans appointed local elites to important political and military positions through strategic relationships among the Sultan, Pashas, and elites to effectively integrate local identities into the state apparatus, aiming for long-term political stability and security. These appointments are based on the strategic interest of the Ottomans and meritocracy.

Selim the First expanded this policy of co-optation with various local figures among Kurds to secure the long-term priorities of the empire in the close lands to the Safavids. He was closely consulted by İdris-i Bitlisi, a Kurdish scholar and statesman, to ally with Kurdish beys through the strategic use of Sunni orthodoxy, a common point for Kurds and Ottoman Turks, as a unifying force against rising Safavid Shi'ism. Bitlisi's efforts were transformative in the peaceful incorporation of Diyarbakır, Urfa, Mardin, and Mosul into Ottoman lands, preventing extended military confrontations. In contrast to earlier Ottoman strategic use of military conquest, Selim the First chose diplomacy and alliance-building. Similarly, Selim the First integrated Mamluk elites and commanders into the Ottoman hierarchy by appointing them as bey or governor. For example, Khayr Bey, the Mamluk governor of Aleppo, and Canberdi Gazali, an important Mamluk emir, were appointed as governor of Egypt and Sanjak-bey of Sofia. This rewarding extension of autonomy secured those people's loyalty to the Sultan's authority and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the influence of the empire was increased in the newly conquered lands, and the risk of internal dissent that may be exploited by external forces was decreased. Also, these integration policies reduced the possibility of local rebellions by attaching defeated people who sought to maintain their previous positions and capacities in the empire. Even if Selim the First could have been successful in integrating Tumanbay earlier, there could have been no war at

Ridaniyya. However, Tumanbay's political environment did not allow him to accept Selim's continuous integration offers.

Table 5.3. Comparative Military Strengths of Major Powers (c. 1512-1520)

Power	Primary Military Branch	Firearm Adoption & Integration	Artillery Capability	Tactical Approach	Superior Logistics and Remarkable Campaign Speed
Ottoman Empire	Janissaries (Infantry), Provincial Cavalry	Extensive/Decisive	Advanced/Mobile	Combined Arms/Tabur Jangi	Highly organized, efficient administrative backup; specialized corps for roads, tents, provisions, ammunition; extensive use of camels; meticulous planning; enabled rapid, decisive campaigns over vast distances (e.g., Sinai Desert crossing). ¹
Safavid Empire	Qizilbash Cavalry	Limited/Ineffective	Limited/Siege-focused	Traditional Cavalry Charges	Significant logistical challenges due to vast, mountainous terrain, making heavy artillery transport difficult. Initially decentralized polity led to less unified and efficient logistical system.

Table 5.3. (cont.)

Mamluk Sultanate	Mamluk Cavalry	Gradual/Reluctant	Basic/Stationary	Traditional Cavalry Charges, Defensive Fortifications	Severe manpower shortages, ill-trained conscripts. Lack of robust, centralized, efficient supply chain. Logistical limitations due to horse maintenance and single mounts. Plagued by internal discord and betrayal.
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As a result, the Ottoman military's superior technology, particularly its advanced firearms and artillery, represented a qualitative advantage that transcended mere numerical superiority. Their ability to produce and tactically deploy these weapons, combined with the disciplined Janissary infantry, fundamentally transformed warfare in the region. This technological and tactical superiority, when coupled with Selim's logistical capabilities and the sheer speed of his campaigns and efficient human mobilization, created an overwhelming force. This military transformation meant that any traditional military strengths, such as the Mamluk or Safavid cavalry, became largely obsolete against the concentrated Ottoman firepower. Consequently, even if other powers had the desire to balance against Selim, their military means were often inadequate to pose a credible challenge.

5.4. Lack of Powerful Counterbalancing Coalition

Selim's ascent to hegemony has not faced a powerful counterbalancing coalition from its rivals. Neither Middle Eastern powers nor European powers could establish an effective coalition that targeted the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. There are various reasons behind this. First, the weaknesses of Ottomans' rivals, second, the

inability to construct a coalition, third, there was no time for it because of the swift progress of Selim the First, which did not allow anyone to do it.

5.4.1. The Middle Eastern Context: A Failure to Balance

Historically, the Middle East has been characterized by multipolar or bipolar systems, where states competed without one achieving lasting dominance, excluding rapid and transient invasions like those of the Mongols and Timurids. The early 16th century saw a multipolar rivalry between the Ottomans, Mamluks, and Safavids. However, this system failed to balance against Selim's rise.

5.4.1.1. Safavid Empire's Vulnerabilities

The Safavid Empire under Shah Ismail, though ideologically assertive and territorially ambitious, was structurally and militarily ill-equipped to balance the rising power of the Ottomans. The Safavid Empire was lacking institutional depth and administrative centralization because it was a recently consolidated polity. It relied mainly on a decentralized tribal military elite known as Qizilbash. Qizilbash's loyalty was significantly bound to the religious charisma of Shah Ismail, rather than aiming for bureaucratic cohesion of the Safavids. The Safavids' underdeveloped administration, military, and state apparatus severely limited their capacity for prolonged military operations, especially against a technologically advanced, logistically sophisticated, and administratively well-structured adversary, the Ottoman Empire.

This asymmetry was exemplified in the Battle of Chaldiran. While the Ottoman army deployed a combination of field artillery, musketeers, and well-trained Janissary infantry, which already integrated gunpowder technology in their war machine and doctrine, the Safavids were using lightly armored cavalry forces that operated in traditional tactical paradigms. Safavids' perception of cannon as siege tools and their inexperience with musket use in combat left them strategically and tactically unprepared in the face of the devastating effects of Ottoman firearms. The Chaldiran defeat is not just about the material inferiority of the Safavids, but also shows a general failure to adapt to the changing war paradigm, the use of gunpowder. This gunpowder gap—a profound divergence in military doctrine and technology— was crucial in

Ottoman victory and undermined the Safavids' substantial counterbalancing measures.

The Safavids' ideological foundation profoundly complicated their strategic position. Making Twelver Shi'ism the Empire's official religion alienated Safavids from mainstream Muslim worlds and possible Sunni allies like Mamluks, though it has leveraged the internal mobilization of Qizilbash tribes. This usage of the Sunni-Shi'i division under the leadership of Shah Ismail produced a theological dimension in the Safavid Ottoman competition in the region. However, this theological tension was not ended as anticipated by the Safavids; on the contrary, Selim the First masterfully used this division by framing Ottomans as the defenders of Sunni orthodoxy and the Safavids as heretical groups that target the real Islam. This narrative was also used against rebels inside the Empire. Safavid early ideological enthusiasms functioned as an instrument of mobilization and territorial and political expansion as exemplified in the Şahkulu Rebellion in Anatolia; however, it ultimately backfired and isolated them diplomatically and limited their strategic alliance opportunities, though it was in severe need.

Post-Chaldiran, the consequences of defeat for the Safavid regime were intense. Shah Ismail, the sacred leader of Qizibashs, deeply affected by the defeat, retreated from military and administration and fell into excessive alcohol consumption and gradually retreated into political and social isolation. This created a leadership vacuum and a lack of central authority. It intensified tensions between tribal elements and limited state capacity for a unified military response or to pursue strategic realignment. Although modernization reform efforts, including the creation of the tufenkçi corps and the adoption of artillery, were eventually undertaken, these were reactive measures to catastrophic defeat and too late and insufficient to give immediate strategic benefits. This was stemming from the absence of a robust institutional structure.

In addition to military and ideological constraints, the Safavids were strategically encircled from the east and the west. To their east, the Shaybanid Uzbeks posed a constant threat, forcing Shah Ismail and his successor, Tahmasp I, to divert significant resources to the defense of Khurasan. To the west, the Ottoman Empire under Selim's

leadership was looking for more expansion and, if possible, total destruction or subjugation. This two-front dilemma significantly undermined Safavid strategic coherence and weakened Safavid military planning while making confrontation with Ottomans unsustainable and impracticable. The need to prioritize the eastern frontier over western confrontation significantly diminished their capacity to act as an effective counterweight to Ottoman expansion. As a result, any hypothetical anti-Ottoman coalition would have been undermined not only by religious discord but also by the strategic imperative of containing the Uzbek advance.

In sum, the failure of the Safavids to balance Ottoman power was rooted in a complex of factors including structural fragility, doctrinal rigidity, technological inferiority, and geopolitical overextension. While the Safavids represented a potent ideological challenge to the Ottomans, their lack of modernized military capacity, limited institutional coherence, and strategic isolation rendered them incapable of checking Ottoman dominance in the early 16th century.

5.4.1.2. Mamluk Sultanate's Systemic Collapse

The relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Mamluk Sultanate can be framed as a complex combination of competition, cautious cooperation, and ultimately direct conflict and war. Historically, adversaries—as seen in the 1485 and 1491 wars—their diplomatic interactions during the last years of Bayezid II (1491–1512) transformed to a cautious equilibrium phase, reflecting a pattern of ad hoc cooperation. This tenuous peace was primarily motivated by shared external concerns and threats rather than a genuine alliance, mainly Portuguese rising activities in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade routes, and the Safavid expansionist threat. These pressures forced Ottomans and Mamluks to follow a dual pragmatic diplomatic relationship despite historical tensions.

Consistent political contention between Ottomans and Mamluks was the Dulkadirid principality, a semi-autonomous buffer zone in southeastern Anatolia. Ala al-Dawla, the leader of the Dulkadirids, successfully and skillfully managed his loyalty between Cairo and Istanbul, intensifying Ottoman concerns regarding the Dulkadirids' intervention. The Dulkadirids were a Mamluk proxy in the eyes of Selim the First;

therefore, they should be eliminated to secure the eastern front. This elimination was crucial because of both broader imperial ambitions and the future anti-Safavid campaigns' security. Selim's campaign against Ala al-Dawla ended with the dethronement of Ala al-Dawla, with Shahsuvar Bey, and the execution of Ala al-Dawla, with his head sent to the Mamluks. This was a clear and brutal signal from Selim that he would threaten the Mamluks and wanted to change the existing balance of power in the region.

Selim's perception of Mamluks was also shaped by his dynastic rival, his brother Korkud, who had taken refuge in Mamluk territories before. Coupled with Mamluk tolerance for Safavid sympathizers and agents, these developments provided Selim with both symbolic and practical grounds for war. The Mamluks miscalculated the likelihood and scale of Ottoman aggression despite a shared Sunni identity and common concerns over the Safavid and Portuguese threats. Ultimately, Selim regarded the Mamluk Sultanate as an obstacle to his imperial objectives, and the Safavids' alliance failed to stop Selim's expansionist drive.

Militarily, the Mamluks were famous thanks to their expertise in mounted warfare, embodying the furusiyya tradition at its zenith. Their rigorous training emphasized horsemanship, archery, and close-quarters combat, producing formidable warriors mounted on resilient Arabian horses. However, this strength also fostered strategic rigidity. Rooted in past triumphs over Mongol and Crusader forces, the Mamluk elite were resistant to adapting to emerging gunpowder technologies and innovation in war tactics.

Although firearms appeared in Mamluk arsenals by the mid-fifteenth century, the Mamluk army was inadequate both technically and in experience with the use of firearms. Arquebusier units were limited, and the Mamluks neither developed the necessary industrial capacity nor embraced doctrinal reforms to fully integrate gunpowder weapons, especially within their cavalry-dominated tactics. This put them at a disadvantage against the Ottomans, who revolutionized warfare by deploying disciplined infantry armed with muskets alongside heavy artillery. The decisive Ottoman victories at Marj Dabiq and Ridaniye revealed the fundamental shortcomings of traditional Mamluk military doctrine.

In addition to technological shortcomings, the Mamluk political system suffered from elite fragmentation, too. Built on slave-soldier allegiances to individual patrons rather than centralized state authority, the system was prone to chronic instability. Succession crises often triggered assassinations and factional struggles among emirs, undermining military unity and coherent leadership. These internal fractures critically weakened the Mamluk capacity to mount an effective defense against the Ottoman advance.

Selim's campaigns unfolded with such speed and precision that the Mamluks were unable to organize counterbalancing alliances or resistance. The rapid collapse of their state left external powers with neither the time nor the incentive to intervene. Therefore, the failure of the Mamluk Sultanate to check Ottoman expansion was not merely a matter of battlefield defeat, but rather the culmination of structural deficiencies—including military conservatism, political factionalism, and strategic missteps—that made them ill-prepared for the challenges of early modern warfare.

5.4.2. The European Context: Misaligned Priorities and Disunity

The sixteenth-century European geopolitical landscape was profoundly fragmented, plagued by unending international conflicts, with the competing strategic interests of each state preventing the establishment of a collective counterbalancing effort to the Ottoman rise. Instead of forming a unified front against Ottomans, Europe was characterized by a fragmented landscape of small principalities and frequently contentious rival city-states, bound by dynastic rivalries and lack of institutional coherence. The main source of the division was the prolonged rivalry between the Habsburgs and the Valois, as Charles V, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, and Francis I of France competed for supremacy across the continent. This intense power struggle absorbed considerable attention and resources, drawing focus away from the external challenge posed by the Ottomans as they extended their control into the Arab-Islamic territories (Mikhail, 2020).

This fragmentation was further deepened by the advent of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation introduced profound theological and political divisions within Christendom, contributing to a landscape of fragmented loyalties and sectarian conflict in the early sixteenth century. The combination of dynastic competition and religious

schism produced what may be termed an internal “balance of weaknesses,” wherein no single European state possessed the capacity—or the consensus—to rally others in a coherent response to the Ottoman advance. Domestic unrest and regional ambitions consume the continent’s major powers overwhelmingly and make them strategically immobilized and incapable of counterbalancing Selim’s rapid campaigns.

Widespread concern over Ottoman military successes occasionally sparked renewed calls for Crusades across Europe, yet these appeals rarely materialized into coordinated action. The reaction of Pope Leo X—who is said to have fled the Vatican in alarm following unverified reports of Ottoman naval movements—reflects both the intensity of the fear and the ineffectiveness of Europe’s response. In reality, crusading rhetoric often served more as a means of internal political signaling or religious posturing rather than as a genuine mobilizer for collective defense. The fledgling balance-of-power framework within Europe was primarily focused on maintaining continental equilibrium, and thus proved ill-equipped to address the external Ottoman threat.

Furthermore, the strategic priorities of many European powers were increasingly influenced by interests beyond the continent. With expanding investments in Atlantic exploration and colonial ventures in the Americas, the Ottoman Empire was frequently viewed as a secondary concern rather than an immediate danger. This tendency extended to an underappreciation of the economic consequences stemming from Selim’s conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate, which brought crucial trade routes in the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea under Ottoman control. European states, absorbed by their own domestic and colonial ambitions, failed to fully grasp the long-term ramifications of this geopolitical shift on East–West commerce.

Adding to the complexity, several European actors pursued pragmatic, at times contradictory, alliances with the Ottomans. France’s collaboration with the Ottoman Empire, motivated by a desire to counterbalance Habsburg dominance, exemplifies how realpolitik often trumped religious or civilizational loyalties. Similarly, Portugal, alarmed by Ottoman advances in the Indian Ocean, escalated naval confrontations and even cooperated with the Safavids to challenge Ottoman maritime supremacy. These “alliances of convenience” illustrate how intra-European rivalries hindered a unified

resistance and, paradoxically, in some cases, facilitated Ottoman expansion by fracturing potential opposition.

In conclusion, the lack of an effective European counterbalance to the Ottomans' Middle Eastern campaigns stems from the convergence of structural weaknesses and strategic miscalculations. Internal political fragmentation, ideological divisions, technological conservatism, and a narrow strategic focus prevent a cohesive European response to the rising Ottoman challenge. The failure to recognize and respond adequately to the geopolitical importance of Selim's conquests—most notably the annexation of the Mamluk Sultanate—enabled the Ottomans to consolidate extensive new territories without facing substantial Western opposition. This permissive international context was a decisive factor in enabling Selim's rise to regional hegemony.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: SELIM I'S ERA AS AN ANOMALY IN BALANCE OF POWER DYNAMICS

Why could Selim the First not be stopped according to the balance of power theory? This was the research question behind this thesis. The purpose of answering this question was actually to test the balance of power theory by a non-Western case study focusing on the Ottoman Empire. The thesis has revealed that the rise of the Ottoman Empire during Selim the First's reign (1512-1520) contradicts the assumptions of the balance of power theory. Selim the First, in just eight years, made the Ottomans the hegemonic power of the Middle East. During this process, the Mamluk Empire, one of the biggest empires in Islamic History, was destroyed, and its lands were taken under control. The Safavid Empire was forced to accept Ottoman supremacy, and the Safavids' Anatolian activities were terminated, and significant lands were seized in the eastern front of the Ottomans. Also, the Dulkadirids were erased from the historical scene. Ottomans got the Caliphate and were titled Hadimül Hayremeyni Şerifeyn. In these eight years, the Ottoman rise could not be balanced by the Safavids, the Mamluks, the Dulkadirids, and the European Powers. According to balance of power theory, such a rise should have been countered by rival states through internal and external balancing mechanisms, including military measures and the establishment of a counterbalancing coalition. However, there could not be an efficient balancing coalition against the Ottoman Empire. Ottomans managed the campaigns well and succeeded in establishing their hegemony in the Middle East.

To analyze this unique historical case, this thesis employed a single case study and used process tracings as methodology. This study tested the balance of power theory's explanatory power in a non-Western historical context by treating Selim the First's reign as a deviant and least likely case. Selim's reign is not the only deviant case in world history, no doubt. The Balance of Power in World History book has already explained eight other cases; however, there was no Ottoman case study there, as

mentioned. Selim the First's reign is deviant because the main assumptions of the theory are well seen in the political structure of the Middle East at that time. There were three main powers in the Middle East, with a few other powers in Europe as part of an anarchic international system. While Ottomans are rising, mainly the Safavids and Mamluks, other European powers were also assumed to balance them. However, no one could balance it. That is why assumptions did not overlap with reality. To explain this, this study has three independent variables, including Selim's leadership, Ottoman military superiority, and lack of counterbalancing coalition. The thesis examines the causal mechanism behind these three independent variables through detailed historical analysis by using process tracing. The primary and secondary sources, together with contemporary pieces, were used in this study. This thesis not just reveals a complex sequence of events and decisions with historical lines but also exposes the balance of power theory in accounting for unit-level and contextual dynamics while challenging the universality of the theory.

The research question of this thesis was "Why could Selim the First not be stopped according to the Balance of Power Theory?". This thesis explains that Selim the First's success is attributed to three interrelated factors: Selim's exceptional leadership, the military superiority of the Ottoman army, and the inability of his rivals to construct a cohesive counterbalancing coalition.

Central to Selim's leadership was his decisive elimination of all plausible claimants to the throne within the Ottoman dynasty. Through the execution of his brothers and nephews, he ensured there were no alternative centers of dynastic legitimacy. Furthermore, Selim systematically subordinated all military and bureaucratic elites—most notably the Janissaries and viziers—transforming them from autonomous political actors into loyal instruments of his centralized authority. By neutralizing intra-state rival power bases through a combination of coercive purges and strategic appointments, Selim consolidated power and positioned himself as the singular locus of executive control. This absolute concentration of authority enabled him to personally oversee and direct state affairs with remarkable efficiency, fostering a more responsive and effective administrative apparatus.

The military superiority of the Ottoman army was rooted not only in its quality of manpower but also in its advanced integration of gunpowder weaponry into battlefield tactics. Key to its operational success were the implementation of the **tabur jangi** (battalion warfare) formation, the disciplined and skilled corps of professional soldiers, and the utilization of a superior logistical infrastructure. The empire's extensive logistics network and extraordinary campaign speed, alongside its capacity to effectively mobilize human resources, enabled the Ottoman army to maintain rapid and sustained operations that consistently outmaneuvered opponents and preempted coordinated defenses.

On the other hand, the failure of Ottoman rivals to establish an effective counterbalancing coalition stemmed from both systemic and structural weaknesses within each polity. The Safavid state was hampered by structural fragility, doctrinal rigidity, technological inferiority, and geopolitical overextension. These vulnerabilities were compounded by its limited institutional coherence and strategic isolation. Similarly, the Mamluk Sultanate suffered from deep-rooted military conservatism, factional fragmentation, and a persistent pattern of strategic miscalculation. European powers, though aware of the growing Ottoman threat, were plagued by internal political fragmentation, ideological division, and strategic myopia—conditions that rendered collective action unfeasible. Their nascent balance-of-power framework remained focused on intra-European dynamics rather than external threats.

Consequently, no unified or robust counterbalancing coalition could be formed against the Ottomans. The inability of rival states to overcome their internal contradictions and collaborate effectively left Selim's military campaigns largely uncontested on a systemic level. As a result, Yavuz Sultan Selim succeeded in laying the foundations of Ottoman imperial hegemony in the Middle East.

This thesis shows that the predictions and assumptions of realist balance of power theory are not valid in all cases. By showing the gap between historical reality and theory, the theory's universality claim is targeted. As a result of this case study, it is seen that some of the main assumptions of the balance of power theory were not met by historical reality. First of all, the main assumption of the theory is that when a power

risers with hegemonic ambitions, others would balance the would-be hegemon. However, in Selim's case, there has not been effective counterbalancing. No coalition emerged against the Ottomans. There is no substantial Mamluk or European support for the Safavids in the process leading up to the Chaldiran war. In the same way, there is no substantial European support for the Safavids during the Ottomans' Mamluk campaign. Even though there was time and opportunity to support Mamluks one way or another, it is seen that Shah Ismail, the leader of the Safavids, devoted himself to alcohol and women, spent time hunting, and experienced serious disappointment and psychological breakdown after the crushing defeat in Chaldiran. Therefore, the assumed structural mechanisms of the balance of power regarding state behaviors could not work as anticipated because of the strong position of leadership in the state. Indeed, the discussion of leadership led to the second point, which is the balance of power, a traditionally structural-oriented theory in which leadership variables are neglected. However, one of the core explanations of Selim the First's success lies in his leadership, while another explanation regarding the lack of a strong counterbalancing coalition is also very much related to Shah Ismail's leadership. English schools' criticism of the realist understanding of the theory that the balance of power is automatic, structural, and unitary actorhood of rational state gains more importance and becomes more visible. This study claims that leaders' leadership, strategic choices, and political capabilities have explanatory power despite the theory generally abstracting away from unit-level variables. So, the balance of power is not automatic but realized through human hands, and leadership is an explanatory variable. Another critical point about the structural orientation of the theory is the role of domestic factors. The theory relies on the idea that systemic pressures determine state behaviors, not domestic factors. However, elite division, power competition, and administrative stagnation in the Mamluks and internal political and psychological shaking of the Safavids significantly affected their state behavior and efficiency toward the Ottomans. One of the three arguments of the thesis about Selim's success relies on Selim's power centralization efforts. Selim does not allow any elite rivalry or political fragmentation but imposes pressure on the power centers inside the Ottoman Empire. Related to these critiques, the third assumption states that states are rational unitary actors. Mamluks were fragmented and inefficient in decision-making, and post-Chaldiran Safavids were in a political vacuum and uncertainty because the Shah's sacred status was damaged. If states were unitary and

rational, the Safavids would have helped the Mamluks after the Chaldiran defeat because of the need to stop Selim's further expansions in the regions and ambitions to establish his hegemony. At the same time, Mamluks under Kansu Gavri's leadership could help the Safavids before the Chaldiran war; however, there was no unitary foreign policy nor true calculation. The fourth assumption of the theory is that threats are recognized in time and states take preventive measures. These measures are internal and external mechanisms. In this case, both Mamluks and European powers miscalculated Selim's hegemonic ambitions and the outcomes of his campaigns. European powers were in internal competitions while Selim the First was advancing toward regional hegemony that would target Europe during his son's reign. Mamluks were also distracted by internal fragmentation during the Ottoman threat. If Mamluks could truly judge the Ottoman threat, they would have helped the Safavids before the Chaldiran campaign. Another important and fifth assumption was that free riding is not anticipated when the existence of states, their security is at stake; however, all rivals of Ottomans, including small ones like Dulkadirids, choose to free ride. Safavids fought alone against Ottomans and were defeated. When Mamluks fought against Ottomans, they were alone as well. No coalition or substantial aid was realized among the Ottomans' rivals. As a result, the Mamluks and the Dulkadirids were erased, and the Safavids came under control.

As a result, while this study focused on the Ottoman case, there exist myriad examples across different regions and historical periods that can further test and refine the balance of power theory empirically. The dynamics observed in Selim I's reign highlight the importance of incorporating leadership, domestic politics, and contextual factors into analyses that have traditionally prioritized structural systemic pressures. This thesis serves as a starting point for more nuanced, historically grounded research that challenges universalist claims and calls for expanding theoretical frameworks to better capture the complexity of international relations across diverse settings. Future studies should continue to explore deviant and least-likely cases to deepen our understanding of when and how balance of power dynamics operate—or fail to operate—in practice.

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