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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SULTAN MURAD II'S POLITICAL STRATEGIES IN CONSOLIDATING THE OTTOMAN SULTANATE

Ammalina Dalillah Mohd Isa¹, Anwar Muttaqin¹, Mohamad Zulfazdlee Abul Hassan Ashari¹, Nurliyana Mohd Talib² and Afeez Nawfal Mohd Isa³

1. Research Centre for Arabic Language and Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.
2. Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Perlis Branch, Campus Arau, 02600 Arau, Perlis.
3. Faculty of Art, Sustainability and Creative Industry, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjung Malim, Perak, Malaysia.

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Abstract

This study examines the political strategies implemented by Sultan Murad II in consolidating the Ottoman Sultanate during his reign. Sultan Murad II's rule marked a pivotal phase in Ottoman history, during which he successfully unified the empire and restored its political stability after facing threats of power struggles, civil wars, internal rebellions, and external interventions. This study employs a qualitative approach through historical research design and content analysis. The data for the study were collected through document analysis and subsequently analyzed using thematic methods. The analysis reveals that, in the process of consolidating power, territory, and political stability within the Ottoman Sultanate, Sultan Murad II adopted a strategy that went beyond simply relying on the peaceful policies upheld by his father, Sultan Mehmed I. He also employed a measured military strategy, practicing a limited offensive approach. Additionally, the centralization policy of his grandfather was reinstated, albeit in a more effective and tolerant manner.

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Introduction:-

Sultan Murad II's reign over the Ottoman Sultanate lasted nearly three decades, from 1421 to 1444 and again from 1446 to 1451, marked by significant events and challenges. As noted by Doukas (1975), "Murad Beg [II, 1421-1451] came to power in a time of trouble and confusion, and he received the crown of wild olives with tremendous tumult and terrible devastation," indicating that the Ottoman Sultanate was still in an unstable condition, despite having been reunited during the reign of Sultan Mehmed I. Inalcik (1973) further emphasizes that the most critical period in Ottoman political affairs occurred shortly after Sultan Murad II's enthronement, during which his authority was challenged for three consecutive years. Upon his accession to the throne in Bursa in 1421, Sultan Murad II faced formidable opposition from rival claimants, particularly his uncle Duzme Mustafa and later his brother Kucuk Mustafa. This internal conflict was exacerbated by external actors, including Ottoman vassals, the Byzantine Empire, and various Anatolian princes, who sought to exploit the internal divisions within the Sultanate to weaken its suzerainty and potentially precipitate its dissolution.

Corresponding Author:-Ammalina Dalillah Mohd Isa

Address:- Research Centre for Arabic Language and Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

The Byzantine Empire notably supported Duzme Mustafa's rebellion by providing military assistance, while the rulers of Germiyan and Karaman incited Anatolian principalities to declare their independence from the Ottoman Sultanate and encouraged Kucuk Mustafa to stake his own claim to the throne in Bursa (Doukas, 1975; Asikpasazade, 2003). Additionally, the Ottoman vassal state of Wallachia seized the opportunity to challenge Ottoman sovereignty, exacerbating the internal turmoil. The existential threat posed by these challenges endangered the very survival of the Ottoman Sultanate, as multiple forces converged to destabilize the empire. The imminent risk of territorial disintegration and the collapse of central authority necessitated swift and decisive measures to preserve the Sultanate's integrity. Therefore, swift action from Sultan Murad II was imperative. This period of consolidation was not merely about securing his own position; it was essential for safeguarding the integrity and sovereignty of the Ottoman state. Through his decisive actions, Sultan Murad II demonstrated a keen understanding of the political dynamics of his time and adeptly navigated complex power struggles, ensuring the survival and continued dominance of the Ottoman Sultanate.

The Political Strategies of Sultan Murad II in Consolidating the Ottoman Sultanate

According to Machiel Kiel (2009), Sultan Murad II's efforts to consolidate the Ottoman state and his rule took approximately four years, spanning from the beginning of his reign in 1421 to 1425. This period was marked by multiple simultaneous crises, including a succession struggle with his uncle, Duzme Mustafa, in Edirne (1421–1422), followed by another with his younger brother, Kucuk Mustafa (1422–1423). These conflicts coincided with uprisings by Anatolian principalities such as principality of Germiyanid, Isfendiyar, and Aydin (1422–1425), the Byzantine Empire's intervention in support of his uncle and brother (1421–1423), attacks from the newly ascended ruler of Wallachia along the Danube border (1423) backed by Hungary, and threats from Venice targeting his vassal, Despot Stefan Lazarević of Serbia's region in Albania (1423). Despite these challenges, Sultan Murad II successfully quelled these crises, thereby consolidating his authority as the Ottoman Sultan (Doukas, 1975; Chalkokondyles, 2014; Asikpasazade, 2003; Zachariadou, 1983; Fine, 1996; Inalcik, 2010).

In achieving this consolidation, Sultan Murad II implemented a range of political strategies that can be categorized into four main themes: diplomatic approaches, military strategies, and central administrative policies.

Sultan Murad II's Diplomatic Approaches

An analysis of Sultan Murad II's actions in resolving these crises reveals that he adopted a diplomatic appeasement approach, similar to that employed by Sultan Muhammad I (Uyar and Erickson, 2009). According to Doerr (2018), "appeasement is a diplomatic strategy by which a state attempts to conciliate a potential aggressor or rival by making concessions through negotiations."

While facing succession crises shortly after his coronation, triggered by the disruption caused by his uncle, Duzme Mustafa, who was supported by the Byzantine Empire, Sultan Murad II implemented this policy to prevent the Byzantine Empire from interfering in the internal conflict. In this scenario, Sultan Murad II sent his vizier, Bayezid Pasha, to dissuade the Byzantine Emperor from supporting Duzme Mustafa. During the negotiations, Bayezid Pasha conveyed the concessions that the sultanate was willing to make. These concessions included placing 12 children from Ottoman noble families under Byzantine custody, paying 200,000 akces, and ceding several territories around Gallipoli (Kilic, 2013). When the Byzantine Emperor rejected these offers, Sultan Murad II dispatched another vizier, Chandarli Ibrahim Pasha, to continue efforts to appease and persuade the Byzantine Emperor (Chalkokondyles, 2014).

In his efforts to consolidate his reign and fortify the Ottoman state, Sultan Murad II strategically employed targeted diplomatic engagements with foreign powers. Recognizing the vital importance of maintaining favorable relations with neighboring states and regional actors, he sought to establish strategic alliances that would strengthen the empire's position. This diplomatic approach was aimed at securing external support to enhance military capabilities and address specific threats to the stability of his rule. A notable example of this strategy occurred during the succession crisis involving his uncle, Duzme Mustafa. Sultan Murad II forged an alliance with the Genoese colonies, which provided the necessary support for his forces to cross the Dardanelles and reach Gallipoli. This manoeuvre allowed him to pursue his uncle, who had fled to Edirne, and ended his uncle's the threat to his throne (Doukas, 1975).

Another diplomatic strategy employed by Sultan Murad II to consolidate his power and strengthen the Ottoman Sultanate was the adoption of a reconciliation strategy. He consistently demonstrated a willingness to accept peace

proposals from both domestic and international adversaries when they sought resolution. This approach is evident in his actions during the Wallachian invasion of 1423, where he accepted a peace treaty proposed by the voivode (Zachariadou, 1983). Similarly, following his conflict with Isfendiyar Bey of the Isfendiyarids, after suffering two defeats, Isfendiyar Bey sought peace, and Sultan Murad II agreed to accept, stabilizing the region and reinforcing Ottoman authority. Furthermore, Sultan Murad II accepted peace agreements from other rulers in the Aegean coastal region, including those of Mytilene, Chios, and Rhodes. According to Halil İnalcık, on 22 February 1424, Sultan Murad II signed a peace treaty with the Byzantine Empire, a strategic move that significantly expedited the process of consolidating the Ottoman Sultanate (Inalcik, 2010).

Military Strategy of Sultan Murad II

Unlike his father, Sultan Murad II did not solely rely on peaceful strategies but also adopted a military approach that bore similarities to the aggressive tactics of his grandfather, Sultan Bayezid I, as observed by Julian Chrysostomides (2009). However, according to Uyar and Erickson (2009), Sultan Murad II employed a limited offensive strategy, which marked a significant departure from his grandfather's preference for fully offensive campaigns. The U.S. Army Field Manual on Operations, cited by Fruhling (2009), describes offensive operations as those that aim to "seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to defeat the enemy decisively." Sultan Murad II, however, tailored his strategy to achieve specific and targeted goals, such as ensuring the security of Ottoman borders and maintaining influence within his sphere. To this end, he incorporated defensive elements into his offensive strategy to "fend off attacks," rather than launching large-scale campaigns aimed at the complete destruction of his adversaries (Gholz et al., 2019).

Sultan Murad II consistently defended his empire against external threats and internal uprisings but refrained from pursuing further military actions once his objectives were achieved. This approach is evident in his responses to various conflicts, including the suppression of Duzme Mustafa's forces at Ulubad in 1422, Kucuk Mustafa's forces at Iznik in 1423, Isfendiyar Bey's forces at Borlu and Sinop in 1423, and the Wallachian invasion of the same year (Doukas, 1975; Asikpasazade, 2003; Zachariadou, 1983; Inalcik, 2010). In each of these cases, Sultan Murad II terminated military operations once his aims were accomplished, such as neutralizing rival claimants to the throne, re-establishing the loyalty of rebellious figures like Isfendiyar Bey, and securing Ottoman frontiers along the Danube through peace treaties initiated by the voivode of Wallachia.

This strategic approach also facilitated the successful reconquest of several Anatolian territories lost after the Battle of Ankara (1402). Under his leadership, the Ottomans regained control over Anatolian principalities such as principality of Aydin, Mentese, and Hamidili, further consolidating the empire's territorial integrity (Uyar and Erickson, 2009; Inalcik, 2010). In the Balkans, this strategy played a crucial role in establishing a vassal state in Albania. By intervening in the dispute between Venice and Serbia, the Ottomans facilitated the conclusion of a peace treaty in August 1423. This agreement not only resolved tensions but also secured the recognition of the Arianiti and Kastriot families, who governed significant territories in Albania, under the sovereignty and dominance of the Ottoman Sultanate (Fine, 1996). This limited offensive strategy helped restore Ottoman suzerainty in the region, while also demonstrating to European states, such as the principality of Wallachia, and the Serbian and Hungarian kingdoms, that the Ottoman Sultanate remained a formidable and influential power under Sultan Murad II's rule.

Central Administrative Policies

The final strategy employed by Sultan Murad II in consolidating his government and the Ottoman Sultanate was the centralization of administration. According to Jefferson (2012), this centralized policy aimed to strengthen the sultan's control over both civil and military bureaucracy. This strategy had been actively pursued by his grandfather, Sultan Bayezid I, though it nearly led to the downfall of the Ottoman state (Sugar, 1996). Sultan Bayezid I launched full-scale military campaigns to consolidate Ottoman vassals and allied states under direct Ottoman rule. For example, he annexed the Bulgarian Empire of Turnovo in 1393 and later Vidin, formally declaring them Ottoman provinces. Sultan Bayezid also used military force to incorporate various Anatolian principalities, a policy that ultimately contributed to his defeat at the Battle of Ankara in 1402 (Sugar, 1996).

Sultan Murad II adopted a distinctive approach to implementing his policies during his reign, employing a range of strategies tailored to the specific context to avoid the same result of his grandfather. One method was following the traditional Ottoman practice of gradual conquest, whereby vassal or allied states were absorbed incrementally rather than through immediate full-scale aggression (Jefferson, 2012). For example, Murad applied reconciliation policies

and limited military actions to bring the Anatolian principalities, such as the principality of İsfendiyar under the Ottoman sovereignty. However, he also resorted to more aggressive tactics akin to those of his grandfather, as seen in the consolidation of Aydınoğulları principality and the Menteşe principality, under direct Ottoman control (Doukas, 1975; Asikpasazade, 2003).

In addition, Sultan Murad II strengthened his rule by enhancing the capabilities and influence of the Janissary Corps. According to Rhoads Murphey, this restructuring was part of his broader centralization policy, aimed at reducing the power of the Turkish marcher lords (Murphey, 2008). By expanding the Janissary forces, Sultan Murad II reduced the state's reliance on frontier lords and instead empowered palace appointees. He also strategically placed capable military generals and trusted viziers of Janissary origin throughout Ottoman territories to curtail the dominance of the marcher lords and consolidate his authority across the empire (Asikpasazade, 2003).

Conclusion:-

Sultan Murad II's political strategies were pivotal in consolidating the Ottoman Sultanate during a time fraught with internal strife and external threats. His diplomatic strategies, including appeasement and reconciliation, were integral to securing peace with both internal and external adversaries, particularly during succession crises and territorial disputes. Sultan Murad II's ability to balance military action with diplomatic negotiation allowed him to effectively neutralize rivals and strengthen his position without engaging in prolonged conflicts. His military strategy, marked by a limited offensive approach, demonstrated a pragmatic application of force aimed at restoring Ottoman authority rather than pursuing unnecessary territorial expansion. The success of this strategy is evident in the regaining of Anatolian principalities and the consolidation of Ottoman power in the Balkans, where he established vassal states and reasserted Ottoman suzerainty over key territories. Sultan Murad II's approach also highlighted the importance of alliances, such as with the Genoese, and his adeptness at leveraging peace treaties to solidify his territorial control.

In conclusion, Sultan Murad II's reign illustrates the efficacy of a comprehensive political strategy that integrated diplomacy, military tactics, and administrative reforms. His "understanding of the political situation of the times" and ability to navigate a complex political landscape, which included internal succession conflicts, foreign interventions, and regional uprisings, were key to restoring and consolidating Ottoman power, making him an able statesman, as noted by Babinger (1978). The centralization of authority, particularly through the expansion of the Janissary Corps, served to reduce the influence of frontier lords, thereby strengthening the sultan's direct control over the empire. Furthermore, Sultan Murad II's approach to diplomacy and limited military action not only ensured the stability of the Ottoman state but also established the foundation for its continued expansion. By skillfully balancing military aggression and diplomatic engagement, Sultan Murad II fortified the empire's position in the region, setting the stage for future Ottoman dominance. His successful consolidation of power underlined the importance of strategic flexibility and political pragmatism in safeguarding the empire's integrity and future growth.

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