

# Fooling the Sultan: Information, Decision-Making and the “Mediterranean Faction” (1585-1587)

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*Sultanı Kandırmak: Bilgi, Karar Alma ve “Akdeniz Hizbi” (1585-1587)*

Öz ■ Bu makale 16. yüzyıl İstanbul’unda bilginin siyasi bir araç olarak kullanılmasını konu almaktadır. Çalışmamızda, “Akdeniz hizbi” adını verdiğimiz, Osmanlı imparatorluk sistemine sonradan dahil olan korsanların faaliyetlerine yoğunlaşmak suretiyle, çıkar gruplarının Osmanlı karar alma ve strateji oluşturma süreçlerini kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda nasıl manipüle etmeye çalıştıklarını göstereceğiz. Osmanlı imparatorluk elitleri ile korsanlar arasındaki işbirliğinin ekonomik mantığı İstanbul’un donanmaya yatırım yapmasını ve Batı Akdeniz’de savaşçı bir siyaset gütmesini gerektirmekteydi. Bu agresif siyasetin gerçekleşmesi için, Akdeniz hizbi elindeki bütün imkanları seferber etti. Bilgiyi tahrif etmek bunların arasında en etkilisiydi. Kendi hükümetlerini Batı Akdeniz’de olanlardan habersiz bırakmak ve Batı Akdeniz’e yapılacak bir donanma seferini hak edecek ölçüde bir düşman tehdidi algısı oluşturmak için Akdeniz hizbi asılsız söylentiler yaymaktan, sahte tanıklar üretmeye, aldatıcı mizansenler sahnelemekten, önemli bilgileri hükümetten saklamaya ve hatta yurtdışından gelen elçileri getirdikleri harac ile birlikte alıkoymaya kadar çeşitli yöntemlere başvurmaktan geri kalmadı.

Anahtar kelimeler: İstihbarat, Dezenformasyon, Karar Alma Süreci, Strateji, 16. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Deniz Siyaseti, Hizip Siyaseti, Osmanlı Korsanları, Osmanlı – Habsburg Rekabeti, Osmanlı – Venedik İlişkileri, Kuzey Afrika’da Osmanlılar

## I. Introduction

In a letter to the Venetian Senate, dated May 14, 1585, Venetian bailo Lorenzo Bernardo related an incident which took place in the imperial Arsenal (*Tersane-i*

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*Amire*) on the right bank of the Golden Horn, revealing the twisted relationship between war, money and politics in sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire:

During one of the usual meetings (*divan*) between the Ottoman Grand Admiral, chief superintendent of finances, *başdefterdar*<sup>1</sup> (*Defterdar Grande*), and Arsenal officials, all of a sudden a Greek priest (*Papasso Greco*) arrived, anxious to narrate the following story. Sailing between Rhodes and Istanbul, his ship was attacked by Christian corsairs and he was captured near Chios. The entire crew, Turks and Greeks alike, was put to oars. Moreover, Christian corsairs inquired the whereabouts of Grand Admiral Uluc Ali<sup>2</sup> and upon learning that he was in the Black Sea with the Ottoman fleet, they “expressed great joy” (*fecero grandissima alegrezza*), telling him that with Uluc Ali away from Mediterranean waters, they could expect to fare better this year. Fortunately, “with God’s grace”, the priest managed to escape from his captors and arrived in the Ottoman capital, only to run to the Arsenal and warn the Grand Admiral.

Intensifying Christian corsair raids had already become a source of concern in the Ottoman capital. Uluc Ali, a former corsair himself, urged the Sultan and the Grand Vizier Mesih Pasha several times to take action and invest more heavily in the navy. However, as the Ottomans were stuck in a lengthy and costly confrontation in the East with their Shi’ite nemesis, the Safavids, his admonishments fell on deaf ears; Mesih Pasha had more pressing concerns than Christian piracy. Discontented as he was, Uluc had little to do. He told the priest that he could not go to the Grand Vizier with this story as he would accuse him of making all these up in order to “go out with the Navy”. He was praying to God that these galleys sailed as far as Istanbul, for otherwise the Ottomans would not take any measures against these corsairs, he sarcastically added. In an angry mood, he dismissed the priest. After this theatrical scene was over, however, he secretly ordered

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- 1 Also *Rumeli Defterdari*, the most senior of the four *defterdars* in 1584 in the Imperial Council.
  - 2 Born as Giovanni Dionigi Galeni in a small village in Calabria, named Le Castella, Uluc Ali (d. 1587) fell captive to Ottoman corsairs when he was a young boy. After a couple of years as a slave rower in corsair galleys, he converted to Islam and rose quickly through the ranks of Ottoman corsairs operating in the Western Mediterranean. His naval and administrative skills first brought him the governor-generalships of Tripolitania (o. 1565-1568) and Algeria (o. 1568-1572) and then the Grand Admiralty (o. 1572-1587). There are several works on this enigmatic figure of the frontier, but the most diligently researched one is Emilio Sola Castaño’s *Uchalí: El Calabrés Tiñoso, o el mito del corsario muladí en la frontera* (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2011).

him to go and relate this story to Mesih Pasha without forgetting to tell how he was dismissed by an annoyed Grand Admiral.

The priest left and repeated his story in front of the Grand Vizier who listened without responding. He just called his men and asked them to bastinado the priest (*dare bastonate*) 50 times in order to understand whether he was telling the truth. Under torture, the priest admitted his story was a lie. He knew nothing of these Christian corsairs; it was Uluc Ali's men who made him show up in the Arsenal and tell an invented tale! The story is not so surprising because we know that after he was forbidden to leave the Dardanelles even with a small fleet of ten galleys as was agreed before, Uluc Ali had already started spreading false rumors: a Christian corsair fleet composed of 13 galleys and a galleon were ravaging the Aegean Sea. As will be seen below, it was neither the first nor the last time when Uluc Ali and his men disseminated false information; it was just this time that they went a little bit further and wanted to "color" (*colorire*) their story by staging this innovative, yet controversial, *mise-en-scène*. The fact that the Greek priest provided exactly the same numbers for the size of the Christian fleet he encountered (13 galleys and a big galleon) suggests a concern for consistency and demonstrates the link between the false rumors and the theatrical scene staged in the Arsenal.

Upon his confession, the Grand Vizier Mesih Pasha released the priest and confronted Uluc Ali. Warning him that this was not the way to treat the Sultan (*quelli non erano termini da usare con il gran Signore*), he nonetheless added that he would not take the issue to Murad III because doing so would cause disorder (*perchè haveria potuto causar qualche disordine*). Uluc Ali should not continue like this, however, for otherwise he "could face his own ruin even earlier than was perhaps expected" (*potria veder più presto la sua rovina di quello che forse si crede*). The intransigent corsair-cum-Grand Admiral with a notorious short temper was not someone who would easily back down, however. On the one hand, he denied responsibility and challenged the priest's statement that his men were behind the invention of this story and the staging of the priest's act. On the other hand, however, he relied on the priest's fabricated story to protest against Mesih Pasha's unwillingness to act against Christian corsairs. What he said about Uluc Ali's involvement was definitely a lie, but the priest's claim that the Christian corsairs were attacking everywhere was in fact right, argued the Grand Admiral. The Sultan did not heed to his warnings and he could not be held responsible for the harm that these corsairs would cause.

Uluc pressed on and took his protests one step further. Via his allies in the court, *Şeyhül-İslam* Çivizade Hacı Mehmed Efendi, the royal tutor (*Coza, hâce-i Sultan*) Hoca Sadeddin Efendi, and Şeyh Şücaüddin, a Sufi sheikh and the Sultan's spiritual guide (*Scief*), he communicated to the Sultan his desire to leave his post as the Grand Admiral and be demoted to the Governor-General of the whole Maghreb for life. In exchange, he was offering to send a hefty tribute every year. When the same allies argued that it would not be wise to lose a valuable man such as Uluc Ali, the Sultan refused and sought to appease his veteran Admiral with the permission to leave for the Mediterranean with the afore-mentioned small fleet and the promise of a large navy for the next year.<sup>3</sup>

What does this story in which a high-level Ottoman official tried to disinform and manipulate his own government tell us regarding the realities of Ottoman political culture? What does it teach us about Ottoman decision-making and strategy formulation? Why did Uluc Ali and his men insist on a belligerent policy while Mesih Pasha remained negligent in the face of a naval threat? Which factors urged Uluc Ali and his men to undertake such a risky operation? Was it an isolated example or part of a more systematic strategy? If the latter was the case, what other methods did they employ? How should we interpret the fact that when he was caught red-handed the Grand Admiral did not back down, but instead accused Mesih Pasha of leniency towards Christian corsairs? Why did Mesih Pasha tell Uluc Ali that he would not relate this incident to the Sultan? Why did he miss this opportunity to strike a political opponent who proved himself a constant nuisance? What kind of "disorder" did he anticipate? If he did tell the Sultan, why did the almighty ruler of the Ottoman Empire not punish his unruly *kul*, but rather chose to placate him? Why did three leading spiritual and political figures of the era intervene on Uluc Ali's behalf?

This essay seeks to answer these questions in an attempt to shed light on the twisted relationship between war, money and politics and underscore the interplay between information, strategy and corporate interest. By concentrating on the actions of a marginal political faction that pushed its own political agenda at the expense of the state's, it seeks to demonstrate how power groups used information as the most efficient tool in manipulating the Ottoman decision-making process.

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3 Archivio di Stato di Venezia [hereafter ASV], Senato Dispacci Costantinopoli [hereafter SDC], fil. 21, cc. 240r-242r (14 May 1585).

### A New Approach for Studying Ottoman Corsairs and Decision-Making

Two historiographical trends have dominated scholarship on early-modern Ottoman corsairs. European historians have distinguished privateers from the emerging early modern state and studied the Mediterranean *corso per se* with a special focus on its particular social (impact on coastal societies, social background of corsairs), economic (raiding economy, slavery and ransoming, influence on coastal economies), technical (routes and methods, life aboard corsair ships, composition of crews, division of the booty) and technological (types of corsair ships, defense systems employed against corso) history.<sup>4</sup> While these non-state aspects remain of utmost importance for students of Mediterranean privateering, it should still be noted that European historiography long neglected the relationship between these self-made entrepreneurs and the central authorities under whose aegis they operated. Such a relationship becomes even more important while studying Ottoman corsairs whose cooperation with Istanbul was more lucrative and complex than the one between Christian states and their corsairs. While their Christian colleagues in the Western Mediterranean exercised only marginal influence on central governments, Ottoman corsairs in the sixteenth-century rose to the most prominent positions in Istanbul. Moreover, they gained significant influence to orient imperial policy in accordance with their own corporate interests and political agenda, an unimaginable achievement in Christian Europe.

In contrast, Turkish historiography refrained from dissociating the trade of corso from what they considered “the Ottoman state”.<sup>5</sup> Two mistaken assumptions regarding Ottoman corsairs characterize their work: First, these entrepreneurial Mediterranean go-betweens with trans-imperial trajectories appeared as agents of a so-called Holy War, in the mold set forth by the *ghaza* paradigm, introduced

4 This tendency to treat Ottoman corsairs as mere agents of Mediterranean corso can best be observed in Salvatore Bono’s works, *I corsari barbareschi* (Torino: ERI-Edizion RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1964) and *Corsari nel Mediterraneo: Cristiani e musulmani fra guerra, schiavitù e commercio* (Milano: Mondadori, 1993).

5 This étatist attitude is most visible in the following works: Hans J. Kissling, “İkinci Sultan Bayezid’in Deniz Politikası Üzerine Düşünceler: (1480-1512)”, *Türk Kültürü* 84 (1969): 894-906, here 903-904; Halil İnalçık, “Osmanlı Deniz Egemenliği”, in *Türk Denizcilik Tarihi*, eds. Halil İnalçık and Bülent Arı (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık ve Denizcilik Müsteşarlığı, 2002), 49-65 and İdris Bostan, *Adriyatik’te Korsanlık: Osmanlılar, Uskoklar, Venedikliler, 1575-1620* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2009), esp. 17-21; idem, *Osmanlılar ve Deniz: Deniz Politikası, Teşkilat, Gemiler* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2007), 12.

by Paul Wittek in the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Despite heavy critiques of Wittek's account of the rise of the early modern Ottoman Empire, the paradigm has remained influential, especially in Turkey. Turkish historiography on Ottoman corsairs imported this paradigm without significant critique and presented Ottoman corsairs of diverse religious, ethnic and cross-cultural background, as Muslim sea *ghazis*.<sup>7</sup> In the case of corsairs, it has further caricatured the ghazi, in a total neglect of the academic debate that allowed a more inclusive understanding of the paradigm.<sup>8</sup> In this literature a ghazi corsair has emerged as a one-dimensional warrior motivated by religious zeal.

Secondly, Ottoman historiography saw Ottoman corsairs as state officers and considered corso as an activity regulated and controlled by the state. Such an approach that takes corsairs as a straight-forward extension of the state fails to recognize the independence given within the Ottoman administration and military to irregular forces such as *akıncıs* (irregular raiding forces whose exceptional role in the early Ottoman conquests in the Balkans produced the ghaza paradigm in the first place) and *levends* (corsairs), both operating in the anarchic world of the frontier far from the vigilance and control of central authorities.<sup>9</sup> It also projects backward a modern idea of state with uncontested monopoly on legitimate violence.<sup>10</sup> That characterization fails to address several critical

6 Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938). Wittek's work immediately sparked a lively academic debate. For an extensive bibliography see Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Batı Akdeniz'de Osmanlı korsanlığı ve gaza meselesi", *Kebikeç: İnsan Bilimleri İçin Kaynak Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 33 (2012): 173-204; here fn. 9 in 175-6. Two recent works are particularly relevant: Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

7 The problem lies not so much in using the term ghazi for Ottoman corsairs; fourteenth-century sources had already employed it in a maritime context. See. Feridun M. Emecen, *İlk Osmanlılar ve Batı Anadolu Beylikler Dünyası* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2012), 123-124, 137. The issue is how this term is defined by modern historiography. For an extensive criticism of the application of ghaza paradigm in the context of Ottoman corsairs, see Gürkan, "Batı Akdeniz'de Osmanlı korsanlığı ve gaza meselesi".

8 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 80-82.

9 For a treatment of the relationship between Istanbul and Maghreb, see Emrah Safa Gürkan, "The Centre and the Frontier: Ottoman Cooperation with the North African Corsairs in the Sixteenth Century", *Turkish Historical Review*, 1/2 (2010): 125-163.

10 Following the Weberian paradigm, Janice Thomson considered disarming non-state actors a necessary condition for the emergence of the "national" [I read modern] state.

historiographical issues regarding the gradual emergence of the modern state such as the rise of bureaucratic administrative structures, the transformation of the relationship between centrifugal and centripetal forces and administrative standardization.

A third historiographical trend has sought to deconstruct the monolithic Ottoman state by displacing any notion of a state interest driven by disinterested officials with a more realistic tapestry of corporate and personal interests conditioning imperial policy. A number of works focusing on the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries highlighted the political significance of power cliques and factions within the Ottoman government. Recent studies revealed the intricacies of politics in Istanbul by placing the rivalries between different factions and interest groups in clear relief.<sup>11</sup> Giancarlo Casale's treatment of an "Indian Ocean faction", for instance, demonstrated that such rivalries had far reaching consequences on Ottoman foreign policy because of the factions' attempts to manipulate decision-making processes and shape Ottoman strategy along the lines of their corporate interests and in accordance with their political and financial agenda.<sup>12</sup>

This article seeks to strike a middle ground between the first two historiographical approaches, while drawing inspiration from the third. On the one hand, it concentrates on corsairs *per se* rather than discussing what they meant for the embryonic central government. Refusing to reduce them to a mere extension of a supposedly omnipotent state apparatus, this analysis seeks to give agency to this

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The control over violence is a key distinguishing feature of this "national state" as opposed to the "traditional state" which included early modern polities such as the Ottomans and the Habsburgs. Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extra-territorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3-6. As she has very well demonstrated, however, this process which included the de-legalization of piracy and privateering occurred no earlier than the nineteenth century. See *ibid.*, 21-26, 44-54, 69-77, 107-118.

11 Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Günhan Börekçi, "Factions and Favorites at the Courts of Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1603-1617) and His Immediate Predecessors" (Ph.D. Diss., Ohio State University, 2010); Tülün Değirmenci, *İktidar Oyunları ve Resimli Kitaplar: II. Osman Devrinde Değişen Güç Sembolleri* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012); Emine Fatma Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013).

12 Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

oft-neglected political group of sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire by focusing on their economic and political priorities. On the other hand, however, it does not totally dismiss their function and place within the state. Instead, it situates these corsairs as a power group that operated both in Istanbul and North Africa and focuses on their political activities in the Ottoman capital as well as their relations with the Ottoman state and its imperial elites.

This inclusive approach enables a significant contribution to the third historiographical school, the study of internal divisions, political factions and power cliques within the Ottoman government. Past studies focused on capital factions such as the imperial family, imperial favorites, courtiers, Ottoman grandees (viziers, the *'ulema*, high-level bureaucrats, commander of the Janissary corps, etc.) and their households. The present work focuses on a rather marginal group of players in Ottoman factional politics, the Mediterranean faction, i.e. Muslim corsairs from the Western Mediterranean whom the Ottomans incorporated into their empire. It was only thanks to their military prowess that these self-made frontier entrepreneurs and outsider mercenaries were welcome in a foreign capital where they had no political capital and power base. Therefore, it was not surprising that they strove hard to keep themselves useful for their benevolent employers. Their efforts along these lines illuminated, in particular, the manner in which a political faction can advance its own political agenda at the expense of the state's, as well as other factions in the capital, by exaggerating military threats to the Empire.

In this regard, the main tool at their disposal was information. The following pages aim to delineate the relationship between information and decision-making in sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire by focusing on the activities of the Mediterranean faction in the Ottoman capital. Gábor Ágoston has previously scrutinized this dynamic, but what he has been trying to do is to accentuate the Ottomans' intelligence capabilities as the *condicio sine qua non* for the existence of an imperial strategy.<sup>13</sup> Here we take one step further and try to analyze how information was employed as a political capital, i.e. how it was used by political actors to reach their own political objectives and manipulate imperial decision-making and formulation of strategy.

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13 Gábor Ágoston, "Information, Ideology, and Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry", in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, eds. Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 75-103.

Following a rising interest in the political factions and interest groups in the Ottoman historiography, we instead argue that the Ottoman decision-making and strategy formulation could only be understood by concentrating on the priorities of the sub-state actors who shaped such policy. Until very recently, the dearth of information in Ottoman sources on these actors might have precluded that possibility; however, documentation in European archives provides us ample information, starting from the mid-sixteenth century, on internal divisions, political factions and power cliques within the Ottoman government. Hitherto unexplored sources (from an Ottoman point-of-view) located in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia (*ASV*), and Archivo General de Simacas (*AGS*), reveal the basic dynamics behind the functioning of a patrimonial empire such as the Ottoman, organized around households and home to fierce factional rivalries. These new sources unsettle any depiction of a rational decision-making process and imperial strategy formulated after objective calculations of long-term strategic objectives that would only benefit the state.

The first part of the article will focus on a power clique, the Mediterranean faction, comprised of corsairs employed, due to the exigencies of Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry, by Istanbul in various capacities. Next, the economic imperatives behind the cooperation between the Ottoman state and the Mediterranean faction, composed of self-made entrepreneurs and frontier elements, will provide the necessary context. Finally, the analysis will illustrate how these imperatives imposed upon Uluc Ali, the leader of the faction, and his lieutenants a different political agenda, one that favored investment in military action in the Mediterranean. The self-interested nature of this faction and the importance of their particular political agenda will push them as far as defying the Sultan's orders. In the second part, we will focus on the means by which the Mediterranean faction lobbied for this agenda. When powerful arguments and lavish presents did not convince the Ottoman decision-makers, Uluc Ali and his men capitalized on their function as the primary source of intelligence on the Western Mediterranean in order to shape the Ottoman decision-makers' perception and thus manipulate the formulation of imperial strategy in accordance with their corporate interests. In this case study of the incoming information between 1585 and 1587, we will demonstrate how corsairs went as far as fabricating rumors, producing false witnesses, staging *mise-en-scènes*, withholding relevant information and even detaining incoming foreign ambassadors to keep their government in the dark and convince them of an exaggerated Habsburg threat in the Mediterranean which justified military investment.

## II. A Mediterranean Faction?

The Ottoman Empire was a patrimonial empire as “a conglomerate of several households with that of the Sultan at the center.”<sup>14</sup> These households that were undertaking certain administrative and military functions on behalf of the state were “the building blocks of the Ottoman political edifice”,<sup>15</sup> and the basic units of Ottoman politics. If the state and the household were intertwined to such an extent, it was only natural that Ottoman grandees tried to take control of the government and use it in order to further the interests of their households and factions. In an empire of rampant nepotism where professional advancement was based on protection and favor, political actors had to operate through thick webs of political connections, a fact that strengthened the political relevance as well as the internal solidarity of grandee households and political factions. Such a concept of fragmentary state and layered political power allows us to locate personal and corporate interest at the center of rivalries between different power cliques and deconstruct Ottoman policy formulation and strategy making. In this context, the Mediterranean faction that comprised the Grand Admiral (*Kapudan-ı Derya*), his household, people of the Arsenal (*Tersane-i Amire halkı*) in Istanbul, governor-generals, governors, other frontier elites in North Africa, and sea governors (*derya beyleri*) dispersed along the Ottoman littoral in the Eastern Mediterranean will serve as a perfect case study for demonstrating how corporate interest could prevail over a purported state interest in sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire.

The key figure in the article is the Calabrian renegade, Uluc Ali, a self-made frontier man. This talented corsair was appointed as the Ottoman Grand Admiral after he survived the Ottoman defeat in the battle of Lepanto (1571) with his fleet intact. Even though the cooperation between North African corsairs and the Ottoman capital started in early sixteenth century, corsairs’ power in Istanbul waned following the death of the corsair-cum-Grand Admiral Hayreddin Barbarossa in 1546. Uluc’s success in warding off the post-Lepanto allied threat and conquering Tunis in 1574 consolidated the position of the corsair establishment in Istanbul once again. Following their leader, his lieutenants found several employment

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14 Metin Kunt, “A prince goes forth (perchance to return)”, in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honour of Norman Itzkowitz*, eds. B. Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 2007): 63-71, here 71.

15 Metin Kunt, “Royal and Other Households”, in *the Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 103-115; here 103.

opportunities and financial rewards in exchange for their services in the Ottoman Navy and the Arsenal.<sup>16</sup>

Enjoying the fruits of state employment, Uluc Ali and his corsairs had little reason to complain as long as the Ottoman fleet was active in the Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> First, war opened the doors of state employment; the central government offered numerous offices for these corsairs: some served as galley captains, some became officials in the Arsenal, others were appointed as *derya beys*, governors of the sea provinces that constituted the province of the Grand Admiral, *Cezayir-i Bahr-ı Sefid*. An alliance with the Ottoman capital helped corsairs attain important posts in North Africa as well: Most were appointed as *kajids*, provincial governors, while the most prominent became governor-generals of Algeria, Tunisia or Tripolitania.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the employment of the Ottoman military machine in the Western Mediterranean served the interests of the Mediterranean faction both economically (opportunities for plunder, slave raids and the like) and strategically (weakening of Habsburg defenses, occupation of strategic outposts such as La Goleta, the possibility of expanding into Morocco).<sup>19</sup> Consisting of outsiders with a limited range of skills (from the central government's point-of-view), the

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16 For post-Lepanto appointment records of numerous corsairs, see. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri [hereafter BOA], *Kamil Kepeci Tasnifi, Ruus Defterleri* 223. For those appointed after the conquest of La Goleta (Halkü'l-Vad) and Tunis (1574), see. *Ruus Defterleri* 227.

17 Baki Tezcan has recently demonstrated how wars could be means of enriching one's household and faction. Upon seeing their role in governing the empire becoming marginalized every day, viziers responded to Murad III's "attempts to create networks of power centered around the court" at their expense by lobbying for action in the Eastern front. Only away from the capital could they once again appoint and dismiss people, lay their hands on a number of provincial treasures, and extract money from the inner treasury at will. Apart from benefitting their dependents and followers, and thus satisfying the needs of their households and factions, commanders-general received gifts in exchange for such appointments. In short, they sold office. Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, 180-182. Thus leading troops to battle is a "lucrative business", as much for Ottoman viziers striving to achieve the command of the Ottoman army setting for the Eastern front as for Uluc Ali lobbying for a larger fleet in the Mediterranean.

18 It should not be a coincidence that when active cooperation between Ottoman corsairs and Istanbul ended, the political control of these provinces slipped out of the former's hands. In the next century, it would be the local janissaries, corsairs' rivals, who would rule Algiers, Tunis and Tripolis.

19 For a more extensive treatment of the rationale behind the cooperation between North African corsairs and Istanbul, see Gürkan, "The Centre and the Frontier", 133-147.

Mediterranean faction was less flexible than other factions in the capital. Their fixed profession and place within the Ottoman system meant that their fortunes were necessarily contingent on Ottoman policy in the Mediterranean. Their naval expertise was their stock-in-trade and action in the Mare Nostrum was their only chance. Uluc Ali and his corsairs were thus perennially anxious to learn the extent of the Ottoman commitment to naval action in the Mediterranean in preparation for the next sailing season.

Peace in the 1580s threatened the corsairs' position; those factors which rendered the alliance with the Ottomans useful began to lose their immediacy. First, the Habsburg threat in the Mediterranean diminished thanks to a combination of factors such as the Ottoman-Habsburg truce (1581), Spanish military difficulties in Flanders, new responsibilities imposed on Madrid by the acquisition of the Portuguese crown (1581) and economic difficulties following Philip II's third bankruptcy in 1575. Moreover, an exhausting war in the East against the Safavid Persia (1577-1590) not only drained imperial resources but also reduced the profitability of corsairs' operations. Carrying troops, victuals and war materials in the Black Sea presented scant occasions for booty. As long as the war in the East dragged on and there was no visible threat in the Mediterranean, they had to be content with the opportunities provided by a small fleet of 10-15 galleys that passed the Dardanelles each year in order to protect the Levantine coasts from enemy encroachments (*derya muhafazası*), mostly by Christian corsairs of St. John and St. Stephen. Yet, sailing in Ottoman waters with no possibilities of plunder and chasing hard-to-catch enemy corsairs were not as advantageous as participating in a large expedition in the Western Mediterranean. Such an expedition could provide corsairs and their households with opportunities of plunder as well as lucrative government jobs in the Navy and the Arsenal.

It was not only Uluc Ali and his corsairs who were anxious to learn about Ottoman military plans come next sailing season in April. The Venetian *bailo* [pl. *baili*], the diplomatic representative in Istanbul of a state that had a lot to lose from Ottoman aggression in the Mediterranean, provided his government with minute information regarding Ottoman naval preparations. The baili's reports clearly demonstrate the economic considerations at play in shaping Ottoman strategy and highlight the interplay between corporate interest, policy formulation and factional rivalries. Bailo Giovanni Correr, for instance, testifies to the fact that naval inactivity harmed Uluc Ali whose household included three thousand slaves. Even though he employed six hundred of those (surely the ones with technical expertise) in the Arsenal with 10 *akçe per diem*, he still had to feed the rest of

these “three thousand mouth on his shoulders” (*tre mille bocche che'l si trova sulle spalle*) from his own pocket.<sup>20</sup> Had there been a war, he could have imposed these slaves on state coffers as rowers and dispensed with the above costs.<sup>21</sup> In 1583, a year when few Ottoman galleys left the Dardanelles to protect its coast against corsair depredations, Uluc made a very clever move by explaining his failure to catch Christian corsairs by the fact that his rowers were outnumbered by the Christian ones: while his galleys had three or four rowers on each bank, those of the Christians had eight. If he was to catch them, more rowers should be made available. It would not be unreasonable to assume that these rowers would come from among Uluc Ali's slaves.<sup>22</sup>

As years passed without a major naval expedition, lavish court life seemed to have strained Uluc's finances further. The expenditure he had to make in his capacity as the godfather (*compare*) of the Sultan's daughter in her wedding with the influential courtier Ibrahim Pasha (reputedly more than 70.000 ducats) forced

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20 ASV, SDC, fil. 9, c. 353r (9 January 1576, *more Veneto* [hereafter m.v.]). According to the bailo, these three thousand slaves were the reason why he so fervently opposed the Ottoman-Habsburg truce. ASV, SDC, fil. 11, cc. 452r-452v (27 January 1577, m.v.).

21 Here it should be noted that the most immediate problem of a slave owner was to find a job for his slaves and thus reduce the burden imposed by the expenditures he had to make for their food and lodging in several *bagni* in the city. For instance Michael Heberer, a German slave who lived in Istanbul around the same time, described in detail how masters leased their slaves to others in the winter when they could not row in galleys. Heberer and his friends carried stones, tools and raw materials, cut marble panels, shoveled snow and did a wide range of domestic works. Michael Heberer von Bretten, *Osmanlı'da Bir Köle: Brettenli Michael Heberer'in Anıları: 1585-1588*, trans. Türkis Noyan (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2003), 192-195, 211, 214, 230. Also we know that Uluc Ali was twice ordered to supervise the construction of certain buildings in the Harem, in 1578-9 and 1585. According to Necipoğlu, he must have been given this duty because the construction was undertaken by galley slaves. Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1992), 167 and 172. Heberer was one of those slaves who worked in the Harem in 1585. Heberer, *Osmanlı'da Bir Köle*, 239. Needless to say, Uluc should have used his own slaves as well. ASV, SDC, fil. 12, c. 108v, 289r; Ernest Charrière (ed.), *Négociations de la France dans le Levant, ou, Correspondances, mémoires et actes diplomatiques des ambassadeurs de France à Constantinople et des ambassadeurs, envoyés ou résidents à divers titres à Venise, Raguse, Rome, Malte et Jérusalem, en Turquie, Perse, Géorgie, Crimée, Syrie, Egypte, etc., et dans les états de Tunis, d'Alger et de Maroc* (Paris: Impr. Nationale: 1848-60), vol. III, 743-744 and 810; vol. IV, 381.

22 ASV, SDC, fil. 18, cc. 202r-202v (29 November 1583).

him to offer the bailo the opportunity to ransom his slaves at a reduced price.<sup>23</sup> At the end of his life, after years of inactivity in the Mediterranean, he still had 2.000 slaves, 500 of which were employed by the state in the Arsenal.<sup>24</sup> Reporting Uluc Ali's death, bailo Giovanni Moro underlined how he always pushed the Sultan to send a large fleet to the Western Mediterranean, "for the profit he would extract from his slaves" (*per propria utilità che cavava dalli suoi schiavi*) and because of his natural inclination to be always in action (*per natural sua inclination che havea di sempre di star in moto*).<sup>25</sup> Ottoman unwillingness to invest in the Mediterranean imperiled the prosperity of Uluc Ali's lieutenants as well; with their own households filled with slaves to feed, they were in no better situation and no less *disperati*.<sup>26</sup> According to Lorenzo Bernardo in 1586, galley captains were liberating their slaves easily given that the Sultan had not authorized a large naval expedition for a long time. The bailo happily reported that the Sultan, Uluc Ali and his *re'ises* did not have half the number of slaves they had before.<sup>27</sup>

The following example amply demonstrates how important it was for a financially-strained Uluc Ali to reduce his expenses: In order to have the Sultan pay for a galley he built for himself, he came up with an interesting ruse. He built the galley near the Palace, "an invention", records the bailo Lorenzo Bernardo, "of the Grand Admiral for maintaining his workforce at the expense of the Sultan."<sup>28</sup> Most naturally, Uluc preferred a war that he did not have to pay for: according to the bailo, even though a long-awaited naval expedition was finally authorized in 1585, he was still disillusioned; because the costs of this new fleet were to be shouldered by the Ottoman dignitaries.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, it was Mesih Pasha, an

23 ASV, SDC, fil. 22, c. 381v (5 January 1585, m.v.).

24 ASV, SDC, fil. 25, cc. 413r-413v (27 June 1587).

25 Ibid.

26 ASV, SDC, fil. 9, c. 353r (9 January 1576, m.v.).

27 ASV, SDC, fil. 22, c. 381v (5 January 1585, m.v.).

28 "*invention del capitano del mare per trattenir le sue maistranze a spese di questo signor*", ASV, SDC, fil. 23, cc. 286v-287r (12 June 1586).

29 Pál Fodor demonstrated how Ottomans imposed on officials the military expenditures for the naval preparations in 1590-1, see Pál Fodor, "Between Two Continental Wars: The Ottoman Naval Preparations in 1590-1592", in *In Quest of the Golden Apple: Imperial Ideology, Politics, and Military Administration in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Pál Fodor (Istanbul, Isis, 2000), 171-190. This clever method of indirectly taxing the *'askeri* class, theoretically exempt from taxation, was applied before in the 1580s. It should be noted that financial registers record that in 1585 12 *bastardes*, 1 galley and 9 small ships (*kayık*) were built and 114 ships were repaired in *Tersâne-i Âmire*, the imperial Arsenal

opponent of war in the Mediterranean, who came up with this idea. When he realized he could not fend off Uluc Ali's schemes to start a war in the Mediterranean, he simply chose to eliminate the corsair's motive for lobbying for action in the Mediterranean: making money. While Mesih as the Grand Vizier had to equip ten galleys, Uluc had to equip five. His slaves remained still without pay. Even though disturbed by this novelty, it should still be noted Uluc was more eager than other pashas to equip his fair share of galleys.<sup>30</sup>

Whether in the capital or the frontier, Uluc Ali and his men needed war to sustain their households. Uluc Ali himself would confess to bailo Bernardo that a possible Ottoman-Venetian War would do him more good than harm (*receveria più utile che danno dalla guerra di questo Signore con quella Serenissima*).<sup>31</sup> The following comments clearly expose the twisted relationship between war, money and politics and demonstrate to us how employing irregular forces that made money from war could have negative strategic consequences, as was experienced by those who resorted to the services of the *condottieri* in fifteenth-century Italy.<sup>32</sup> Uluc Ali confessed to the bailo that, when Don Juan de Austria (the commander of the allied Christian fleet and the proud victor of Lepanto) captured one of his galleys, he sent it back with demonstrations of courtesy. The Habsburg prince wrote his colleague that they should not hurt each other (*fra di loro non si dovevano far male*) and that he prayed for Uluc Ali every day (*pregava ogni giorno Dio per la sua vita*), because it was thanks to him, Philip II of Spain (Juan de Austria's half-brother) had enemies. Without Uluc's aggression, the Spanish king, always short on funds, would not have invested in a navy with which Don Juan demonstrated his military prowess and displayed his grandeur.<sup>33</sup> Uluc's successor in Grand Admiralty, Hasan Veneziano (Uluc Hasan Pasha, o. 1588-1591), also a member of the Mediterranean faction, had a similar attitude. In one of his several friendly conversations with bailo Giovanni Moro, he confessed that "those who make his profession always wish for war and enjoy it more than sweet peace" (*chi fa la sua professione desidera sempre la guerra et gode più di essa che dolce pace*). When the bailo unsurprisingly

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in Istanbul. BOA, *Maliyeden Müdevver Defterler*, 852, p. 32-39 quoted by İdris Bostan, *Osmanlı Bahriye Teşkilatı: XVII. Yüzyılda Tersâne-i Âmire* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003), 6, 99.

30 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 322r-324r (12 June 1585).

31 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 282v-283r (12 June 1585).

32 Michael Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters: Warfare in Renaissance Italy* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), 6.

33 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, c. 283r (12 June 1585).

mentioned the merits of peace, he replied without hesitation: “I don’t agree, because I always would like to tire myself with war” (*non certo per me per ch’io sempre desiderarei con affatticarmi in guerra*).<sup>34</sup>

Evidently, the leaders of the Mediterranean faction had their own distinct political agenda, liable to clash occasionally with imperial policy, i.e. the political agenda of traditional power groups in the Ottoman capital. This could be best seen when Uluc Ali, the Governor-General of Algeria at the time, conquered Tunis in 1569 on his own initiative without any order or authorization from the central government which was preoccupied at the time with the preparations for the Cyprus expedition. No matter the extent to which Uluc Ali seemed to have blended well in imperial circles after several years in office,<sup>35</sup> his interest in North Africa never waned. Thanks to the efficiency of Habsburg intelligence, we know that he was in secret negotiations in 1583 with the Moroccan Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur for a joint expedition against the Habsburg *presidio* in Oran, *esta çibdad... muy perjudicante a los moros*.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the Venetian bailo reported in 1585 that upon hearing rumors of a possible Spanish descent on Algiers, Uluc wanted to return to Istanbul from Caffa where he was at the head of the Ottoman fleet. The Sultan was frustrated with the unruliness of his Grand Admiral and ordered him to follow his instructions and not return from Caffa without accomplishing his mission: carrying war materials and victuals for the Ottoman army fighting in the East. Uluc’s men sent for their master and urged him to return to Caffa and not come to Istanbul.<sup>37</sup>

The primacy of the corporate interest and the “subordination of political loyalty and ideology in the face of local self-interest” could more easily be observed in frontier regions as Bracewell demonstrated in his study of the Dalmatian borderlands.<sup>38</sup> Far away from Istanbul, North African corsairs enjoyed more autonomy

34 ASV, SDC, fil. 28, c. 265v (18 December 1588).

35 With time, this uproot self-made corsair blended into the Ottoman elite so much so that he was even considered worthy of an Ottoman princess’ hand, an honor generally bestowed upon pashas of *Enderun* origin. The marriage never took place. ASV, SDC, fil. 18, cc. 180r-180v (15 November 1583).

36 Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid [hereafter BNM], ms. 1453, fols. 42v-44v (H. Receb 991 / A.D. 21 July – 19 August 1583). The transcription of this letter, a Spanish translation of the original, can be found in D. Cabanelas, “Proyecto de ‘Ulûg Alî para la conquista de Orán”, in *Études d’orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), vol. II, 69-78; here 74-76.

37 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, c. 159r-159v (11 April 1585).

38 Catherine Wendy Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry, and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 183-184.

to formulate their own strategy. They continuously intervened in Moroccan affairs and their initiatives often shaped Ottomans' Western Mediterranean policy.<sup>39</sup> For instance, in November 1583, Uluc Ali handed the Sultan a collective petition (*arz*) signed by the Algerian janissaries (*tutta la militia di Africa*).<sup>40</sup> Janissaries asked the Sultan to grant them permission to attack Morocco and assuring him that they could undertake this easy expedition at their own expense. It sufficed that the Sultan dispatched Uluc to Algiers with 30 galleys. To make their case more compelling, they did not forget to send lavish presents to *Valide Sultan* Nurbanu and Grand Vizier Siyavuş Paşa.<sup>41</sup> The Mediterranean faction even sought to have the Moroccan Sultan involved in the affair; Uluc urged Ahmed al-Mansur to write to Murad III that he should dispatch the Ottoman navy to help with the expedition.<sup>42</sup>

The Mediterranean faction's intervention in Moroccan affairs was motivated by as much factional as personal interests. In 1587, Hasan Veneziano tried to secure for his step-son (*figliastro*) Ismail, a governorship (*sanzacato*) in North Africa, the one that the Ottomans had given before to Ismail's biological father, Abdulmelik I of Morocco, when the latter took shelter in Algiers.<sup>43</sup> Hasan hoped to have

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39 Gürkan, "Centre and the Frontier", 149-151.

40 Africa refers to Algeria in this context.

41 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 18, c. 149r (1 November 1583).

42 "escribir a nuestro amo e señor nos haga merced de embiar los dos exércitos de su armada venturosa para que con ella luego avaxemos a la conquista de Orán." BNM, ms. 1453, fol. 43r (H. Receb 991 / A.D. 21 July – 19 August 1583). Murad III had already agreed in 1580 to send his forces (*nuestros poderosos exércitos e de nuestras fuerzas e amistad*) against the Habsburgs and to engage in a *perpetua liga e amistad* con Ahmed al-Mansur. Two years later, a Moroccan ambassador returned from Istanbul with a letter that assured Murad III's good will towards Ahmed. BNM, ms. 7453, fols. 24v-27r. These two examples show that Ahmed's request for the dispatch of an Ottoman navy could carry a lot of weight in Istanbul. Still, it is interesting to note that the same Uluc Ali fervently opposed a Moroccan – Ottoman rapprochement in 1581 and even detained Moroccan ambassadors who were coming with tribute to Istanbul. See below for details.

43 Abdül-Melik I gained the Sa'adî throne in 1576, thanks to Algerian support. During his sojourn in Algiers, he got married with Zehra, the famous Cervantine character (Zoraida of *la historia del cautivo* and Zahara of *los baños de Argel*) and the daughter of a rich and influential power broker in the region, the Ragusan Hacı Murad. After Abdül-Melik died at the Battle of Alcácer-Quibir (1578), Zehra was married in 1580 with none other than Hasan Veneziano, then the Governor-General of Algeria. See Jaime Oliver-Asin, "La hija de Agi Morato en la obra de Cervantes", *Boletín de la Real Academia Espanola* XXVII (1947-1948): 245-339; María Antonia Garcés, *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive's Tale* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 51-54, 204-216.

this twelve-year old prince<sup>44</sup> first made a pasha and then perhaps even the Sultan of Morocco that was ruled at that moment by Ismail's uncle, Ahmed al-Mansur. According to the bailo, his ultimate aim was to secure the throne for himself.<sup>45</sup> Even though he was reported to have succeeded in securing the appointment,<sup>46</sup> the step-son was reported to have died one-and-a-half years later in Istanbul.<sup>47</sup>

In short, the Mediterranean faction had its own priorities; their political interests in the North African frontier and the Western Mediterranean dictated a belligerent policy. Yet, how could they ensure a constant state of belligerency? What kind of strategies did they pursue and what kind of tools did they have at their disposal in order to convince the Sultan and his ministers to employ resources in a large Ottoman navy destined for the Western Mediterranean? How far were they willing to go in pursuit of their corporate interest at the expense of that of the empire? What do their actions tell us about Ottoman decision-making, factional politics in Istanbul and Ottoman political culture?

### III. Lobbying for War

In the first part of the article, we have established the economic imperatives that pushed the Mediterranean faction to favor a belligerent strategy in the Mediterranean. This section will elucidate how they set about priming the Empire for continuous conflict. In the first instance, the corsairs relied on rhetoric and lavish presents to convince the Sultan and his ministers of their position. Where persuasion fell short, they used information as a political tool to manipulate decision-making in accordance with their own interests.

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On the career of Hacı Murad, a Mediterranean go-between who wore several professional hats (an imperial *çavuş*, an Ottoman diplomat, the Governor of Madiyyah – Ott. Midye), see. Jean Canavaggio, “Le ‘Vrai’ visage d’Agi Morato”, *Les Langues Néo-Latines* 239 (1981): 22-38; Emilio Sola and José F. de la Peña, *Cervantes y la Berbería: Cervantes, mundo turco-berberisco y servicios secretos en la época de Felipe II* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995), Chapter VIII; Güneş Işıksel, “Hacı Murâd (Agi Morato): An Elusive Algerian Dignitary”, *Journal of Ottoman Studies*, (forthcoming, 2015). This last article brings to light new documentation from BOA and sheds light on the activities of this enigmatic figure from the Ottoman point-of-view.

44 ASV, SDC, fil. 26, c. 297r (23 December 1587).

45 ASV, SDC, fil. 26, c. 254r (9 December 1587).

46 ASV, SDC, fil. 26, c. 265r (9 December 1587).

47 ASV, SDC, fil. 29, c. 358r (6 July 1589).

The turning point for the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry in the Mediterranean was the truce signed in 1581.<sup>48</sup> This truce denied the corsairs their strategic relevance to Istanbul. To regain their importance, they had no choice but to capitalize on the lack of trust between Istanbul and Madrid. Uluc Ali and his corsair network had already attempted to prevent the truce from being signed in 1581 and being renewed in 1584 and 1587. They went as far as insulting Margliani, the Habsburg envoy who was sent to negotiate the truce, and threatening the one-eyed diplomat with gouging out his remaining eye.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, they exaggerated the Habsburg military threat by distorting the motives of their diplomacy,<sup>50</sup> submitted numerous *‘arz* against the truce to the Sultan,<sup>51</sup> placed in the Sultan’s *bagno* a slave who would pretend to be a Habsburg spy,<sup>52</sup> and had an influential Jewish power broker working for the Ottoman-Habsburg rapprochement exiled.<sup>53</sup> Despite these elaborate machinations, their failure (except in 1587) was mostly due to complicity of Ottoman pashas (Sokollu Mehmed and Siyavuş) who had little to gain from a war in the Mediterranean at a time when the empire was engaged in a lengthy military confrontation in the East.

Still, the Habsburgs were not the Ottomans’ only enemy and there were other opportunities for a large-scale war in the Mediterranean. Bailo Paolo Contarini’s words display the unrelenting “hawkish” attitude of the Ottoman Grand Admiral; he wanted war and it seems that he cared little who the target would be. Contarini reported that Uluc was trying to convince the Sultan to authorize an expedition against Morocco on the one hand and to break the truce with the Habsburgs and the peace with the Venetians on the other. He added that “...because it [was] in

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48 For details of these forty-month long negotiations, see. Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris : Librairie Armand Colin, 1966), vol. II, 439-450; S. A. Skilliter, “The Hispano-Ottoman Armistice of 1581” in *Iran and Islam: in memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. C.E. Bosworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), 491-515; M. J. Rodríguez Salgado, *Felipe II, el “Paladín de la Cristiandad y la paz con el Turco”* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2004).

49 Charrière, *Négociations*, vol. III, 876.

50 See *infra*.

51 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 11, cc. 452r-452v (27 January 1577, m.v.).

52 Archivo General de Simancas [hereafter AGS], Papeles de Estado [hereafter E] 1338, fol. 59 (15 October 1580). Note that this plot took place a couple of months before the conclusion of the truce.

53 Sola, *Uchali*, 392. The power broker in question, Moses Benveniste, would return from his exile a couple of months later, ASV, *SDC*, fil. 19, c. 327r (19 June 1584).

so much his interest that the Ottoman navy [left] for some expedition that he would even be convinced to turn against one of his own sons.”<sup>54</sup> Regardless of the rhetorical exaggeration of Contarini’s words, they reflect an educated assessment on the strategic priorities of Uluc Ali and the Mediterranean faction.

Uluc Ali and the corsair axis between Istanbul and North Africa had a lot to gain from an Ottoman-Venetian war. The loosening of the strict Venetian control in the Adriatic Sea, the *Golfo di Venezia* that the Venetians considered their own, would bring great benefits to the numerous corsairs who used Ottoman ports to attack Venetian shipping, most of the time in cooperation with local authorities.<sup>55</sup> These attacks, clear infringements of international treaties, not only provoked Venetian protests but also created problems between the Ottoman officials in Istanbul who had to satisfy an indignant bailo and those in the provinces who simply could not refuse the financial benefits of corso, especially given that they operated in a system where one’s political fortune was determined by financial resources at his disposal.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Venetian possessions in Ottoman waters such as the island of Crete created security problems for the empire meanwhile whetting the Ottoman appetite for conquest. The Mediterranean faction knew how to exploit the above expertly, as the following example attests: in 1583, Uluc Ali told the Grand Vizier Siyavuş Pasha that Candia should not be left in the hands of the Venetians who maintained numerous armed galleys on the island. Moreover, the island functioned as a safe haven for Christian corsairs that were ravaging Ottoman coasts and attacking their ships. Following these “security” arguments, Uluc switched to provoking imperial ambitions by arguing that it would be an easy expedition given that local Greeks were discontent with the Venetian rule. Finally, he noted that the Venetians had 600 “Turkish” slaves on their galleys contrary to the capitulations.<sup>57</sup>

A second possible target was Morocco which fell within the Algerian sphere of influence rather than that of Istanbul. If they conquered the Sa’adî kingdom, corsairs would take control of the entire North African littoral except for a couple of Habsburg presidios such as Oran. The fact that Uluc Ali wanted to swap posts with his rival, Hasan Veneziano, and to become Governor-General of Algeria

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54 Eugenio Albèri (ed.), *Le Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto* (Firenze: Società Editrice Firoentina, 1839-1863), Serie III, Vol. III, 225.

55 Gürkan, “Centre and the Frontier”, 154-155; Bostan, *Adriyatik’te Korsanlık*, 35-60.

56 Gürkan, “Centre and the Frontier”, 152.

57 ASV, SDC, fil. 18, c. 204r (29 November 1583).

instead of Grand Admiral, reveals the importance of this “Forgotten Frontier”<sup>58</sup> for these military entrepreneurs.<sup>59</sup> Even though they could get the better of the Saa’dîs in the battlefield, North African corsairs knew that without Ottoman help they could not hold Morocco. This was why they considered it important to receive the Sultan’s permission for a military expedition against the Saa’dîs which they would undertake with their own money and why they did not hesitate to bribe the Ottoman grandees in order to secure the dispatch of an Ottoman fleet, no matter how small, to Algiers.<sup>60</sup> Even though uneasy with the idea of their hard-to-control vassals gaining too much power in a far-away frontier, the Ottomans invested in Moroccan expeditions, at least when their hands were not tied elsewhere. Still, the war with Persia drained their resources in the 1580s and they could support Algerians very little save for the 1581 expedition where the Ottoman fleet led by Uluc only reached Algiers and not its intended target, Morocco.<sup>61</sup>

Imperial capitals were not undisputed centers of attraction; frontier regions may have more to offer to military entrepreneurs such as corsairs in terms of autonomy and revenue. According to Venetian dispatches, Uluc Ali repeatedly expressed his frustration with sitting idly in the capital, forced to play the expensive game of giving presents in order to curry imperial favor and gain allies among the Ottoman grandees. His discontent forced him to accept what today would appear to be a demotion, i.e. an appointment as the Governor General of the

58 Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

59 Unable to come to terms with the fact that his authority and power within the Mediterranean was challenged by his former protégé, Uluc wanted to have Hasan Veneziano removed from the frontier. He could be called back to Istanbul and even better sent to Indian Ocean where Uluc calculated that Hasan would perish. ASV, SDC, fil. 22, cc. 546v-547v (19 February 1585, m.v.); fil. 23, cc. 404r-404v (28 May 1586) and 612r (6 August 1586). This strategy seems a bit misguided though as there were corsairs who aspired to fame in the Indian Ocean as well. Two-and-a-half years later, for instance, Hasan Veneziano’s rival for the Grand Admiralty and the former Governor-General of Cyprus, Cafer Pasha, was hoping to be appointed to Yemen where he expected to demonstrate his prowess. ASV, SDC, fil. 28, c. 444v (28 January 1588, m.v.). A year later, Hasan Veneziano, then the Grand Admiral, would make a similar case to that of Uluc Ali, stressing the importance of frontier for the bailo: he would not begrudge being dismissed as he would prefer to be in the Western Mediterranean where he could plunder as much as half a million gold pieces (*mezzo miglion d’oro*) given that France was in turmoil due to religious strife. ASV, SDC, fil. 30, c. 405v (3 February 1589, m.v.).

60 ASV, SDC, fil. 18, c. 149r (1 November 1583).

61 Aziz Samih İltar, *Şimalî Afrikâda Türkler* (İstanbul: Vakit Matbaası, 1936), vol. I, 163-164.

entire Maghreb for life. A self-made man like him had had enough with bribes and presents he had to give in the Ottoman capital for little return, while his main rival within the Mediterranean faction, Hasan Veneziano, was gaining fame and money by engaging in corso in the Western Mediterranean. To remain leader of the corsairs, he had to return to the frontier.<sup>62</sup> Uluc continuously demonstrated his desire to sail for the Western Mediterranean, going to great lengths in order to convince the Sultan. Seeking to capitalize on Ottoman fears and pride, he put forth several arguments. He exaggerated the Habsburgs' willingness to engage in naval warfare by reporting that Philip II was negotiating a holy alliance with other Christian powers or that he was preparing a large fleet that he claimed would target either Ottoman North Africa or France, the major Ottoman ally in Western Europe. Moreover, he accentuated the strategic and military importance of a Moroccan expedition and underlined the threat imposed by Christian corsairs who were sailing freely in Ottoman waters, sacking Ottoman coasts, attacking Ottoman ships and damaging the omnipotent Sultan's reputation as the protector of his subjects. He even tried to capitalize on his illness only a few months before his death. When the Sultan sent for his ailing Grand Admiral, Uluc Ali told his visitor that he should tell the Sultan he was like a fish. If out of water he would die; but he would immediately get better if the Sultan dispatched him on a mission in the Mediterranean.<sup>63</sup>

It was not only Uluc Ali and his lieutenants in Istanbul, but also corsairs in North Africa who lobbied for action in the Mediterranean. The presence of a large Ottoman fleet would serve economic (opportunities of plunder, the chance of rising through imperial ranks) as well as strategic (countering Habsburg pressure, helping North African, especially Algerian, objectives such as conquering Morocco) purposes. For instance, in February 1579, Hasan Veneziano, then the Governor-General of Algeria, wrote that the new Sultan of Morocco started assassinating leading Turks (*Turchi principali*) and had the intention to chase all the Turks [read corsairs and local janissaries] away from his kingdom. He was obviously trying to manipulate the Ottoman perception of new developments in Morocco at the aftermath of the Battle of Alcácer-Quibir where three kings died on the battleground, sparking a reorganization of North African politics. Breaking

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62 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 241v-242r (14 May 1585). Uluc Ali's years in the capital away from the frontier must have taken its toll. Just before Uluc's death, Hasan was reported to have excelled his former master not only in richness and the number of slaves, but also *in nome et autorita*, ASV, SDC, fil. 24, c. 216v (29 April 1587).

63 ASV, SDC, fil. 25, c. 271r (13 May 1587).

the news of a rebellion (*tumulti*) against the Ottoman rule in the Algerian countryside, Hasan asked for a fleet consisting of 40-50 galleys with which he would not only suppress this rebellion but also secure the Moroccan throne for the deceased Abdül-Melik I's son, the afore-mentioned Ismail, then in Algiers with his mother with whom Hasan was soon to marry. Unfortunately, the Ottomans rebuked him.<sup>64</sup> Years later in April 1585, a North African galiot arrived in Istanbul, bringing the news that the Habsburgs would send a large fleet against Algiers and asking for the dispatch of the Ottoman fleet to the Western Mediterranean. It also recorded that a battle (*fattione*) took place between the janissaries of Algiers and the Habsburg garrison in Oran. The Sultan should avenge the loss of so many of his janissaries by sending a fleet.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, Ottoman response was once again dismissive.<sup>66</sup> Needless to say, such dispatches were intended to exploit Ottomans' fear and suspicion of a renewed Habsburg offense in the Mediterranean at a time when they were tied up in a long, costly and indecisive battle against their nemesis, the Safavids.

When arguments and complaints did not suffice, corsairs resorted to gift-giving and bribery. In an early modern patrimonial empire run by households, personal relations not only secured strategic posts within the administrative-military structure but also shaped state policy, much to dismay of students of the rational state actor model who equate strategy with carefully and objectively calculated state priorities. As political success and financial means were interwoven, each feeding the other, bribes and presents were of cardinal importance for currying political favor for both individuals seeking lucrative offices in the state and factions striving to push their political agenda. In short, adroit gift-giving could influence Ottoman foreign policy directly. For example, when the Governor-General of Algeria Hasan Pasha (a different Hasan, the son of Barbaros Hayreddin, o. 1544-1551, 1557-1561, 1562-1567) asked for the dispatch of the Ottoman fleet to the Western Mediterranean in 1564, he was immediately reminded that he sent very few presents. When his predecessor Salih Pasha made a similar demand in 1555, he had sent 100.000 ducats as well as lavish presents for the pashas in the Imperial

64 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 12, cc.434r-435r (4 February 1578, m.v.).

65 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 21, cc. 145v-146r (9 April 1585).

66 They sent an imperial order (*hüküm*) to the dignitaries (*ayan ve eşraf*) of Algiers and Tlemsen that they should oppose the Spaniards and the local sheiks allied with them as much as possible. The order explicitly states that Istanbul could not send the navy as long as there was a war in the East. BOA, *Mühimme Defteri* [hereafter *MD*], LVIII, no. 230; Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 104.

Council, the *Divan-ı Hümayun*. The next year, Hasan Pasha would not repeat the same error of neglecting this essential rule of Ottoman politics and underestimating Istanbul's greed. Thus he would convince the Ottomans to send their navy to the Western Mediterranean and undertake the siege of Malta.<sup>67</sup>

Uluc Ali and his friends understood the rules of the game perfectly as they strove to swing the pendulum in favor of war by generous presents they gave the Sultan and other dignitaries. For instance in 1583, Algerian janissaries, who were lobbying at court for the permission to attack Morocco and the dispatch of the Ottoman fleet to the region, did not forget to back their arguments with presents for the *Valide Sultan* Nurbanu and the Grand Vizier.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in 1585 when the intransigent Grand Vizier Osman Pasha proved himself dismissive to Uluc Ali's call for a ghaza in the Western Mediterranean, the frustrated Grand Admiral wanted to secure an audience with the Sultan whom he hoped to convince that Christian corsairs were ravaging Ottoman coasts. The Sultan, however, refused him the audience and ordered instead that he should go to Caffa with his fleet that was entrusted with the unprofitable task of carrying victuals and troops. The shrewd corsair overcame this obstacle by asking for the powerful courtier Dogancı Mehmed Pasha's intermediation and sending the Sultan *presenti di molta importantia*. The audience succeeded in calming down the Sultan; however, it did not suffice to have a large Ottoman fleet prepared for next year. Even though the Sultan honored Uluc by sending valuable presents (15 golden plates filled with meat from the Sultan's own table) and granted him permission to leave the Dardanelles (*licentia di uscire*) with fifty galleys, the exigencies of the Persian War

67 Sola, *Uchalı*, 111. For an Ottoman *hükme-i şerif* sent to Hasan that informed him of the incoming naval expedition for the siege of Malta and ordered that he should organize a corsair fleet to help the Ottoman navy (*ol câniblerde olan gönüllü rü'esâ kullaruma gereği gibi istimâlet virüp gazâ-yı şerifüme terğib idüp hıdmetde ve yoldaşlıkda bulunanlar envâ'-ı ri'âyet-i şâhânemüze behre-mend ü ber-murâd olacakların i'lân idüp gemileri ve yat u yarakları ile hâzır u mübeyyâ idüp bir yarar i timâd itdügün âdemüni baş u buğ ta'yîn idüp nevrûz-ı mübâreke değîn hâzır u mübeyyâ kılup Donanma-i Hümayûnum inşâ'allâh ol cânibe vardukda gelüp mülâkî olup müşârun-ileyh vezîrüm vech ü [sic] münâsib gördüğü üzre hıdmetde ve yoldaşlıkda bulunalar.*), see. BOA, MD VI, no. 565 (H. 25 Cemaziyelevvel 972 / A.D. 29 December 1564); transliteration taken from Hacı Osman Yıldırım et al., *6 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri (972 / 1564-1565): Özet-Transkripsiyon ve İndeks* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), vol. I, 323.

68 ASV, SDC, fil. 18, c. 149r (1 November 1583).

meant that the Ottomans could not engage in a costly naval operation in the Western Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup>

### A Grand Admiral *disseminando: sparsa voce...*

If Cicero was right and money was the sinews of war, the Ottoman willingness to spend it on the navy fluctuated according to a careful deliberation of other strategic considerations. If information available to decision-makers could be controlled, such strategic calculations could have been manipulated. This was exactly what the Mediterranean faction sought to do.

Here, its function as information provider is of key importance. Unlike their Venetian and Habsburg counterparts, in sixteenth-century the Ottoman Empire lacked an intelligence organization that systematically gathered information under close surveillance of an emerging central bureaucracy. Military exigencies and technological shortcomings forced the central government to rely especially on provincial officials in frontier regions. Moreover, the afore-mentioned patrimonial nature of the empire meant that the Ottomans outsourced several administrative responsibilities to their dignitaries which would belong in a modern state to central governments. Intelligence was one of these responsibilities.<sup>70</sup> Ottoman dignitaries employed a wide network of spies as an extension of their household operations. Parallel information gathering networks that were employed by rival officers and factions fostered an environment wherein information functioned as a key political tool. As the nascent central government did not exert a strict control over the gathering of information, households and factions used the information they laid their hands on in order to push their own political agenda, i.e. to manipulate the Ottoman decision-making process and policy formulation.<sup>71</sup>

69 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 21, cc. 197r-197v (29 April 1585). The Sultan could not keep his promise and in a matter of days forbade Uluc to leave the Dardanelles not even with ten galleys, let alone fifty. ASV, *SDC*, fil. 21, c. 240r (14 May 1585). Only thanks to the *mise-en-scène* incident mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Sultan would revoke the prohibition.

70 Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Espionage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean go-betweens and the Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry" (Ph.D. Diss., Georgetown University, 2012), 364.

71 This political nature of information should be the reason why influential power brokers and courtiers of Christian and Jewish origin (Alvise Gritti, Joseph Nasi, David Passi, Alvaro Mendes etc.) also employed several spies. The information their spies provided not only helped these power brokers in their struggles as part of Ottoman factional

As the Ottomans delegated information-gathering to their provincial officials and dignitary households, the corsair axis in North Africa and Istanbul became the major provider of information regarding events that took place in the far away Western Mediterranean.<sup>72</sup> They skillfully used this role in order to push their political agenda and manipulate the Ottoman decision-making process. Spanish documentation confirms that as early as 1582 Uluc Ali and his Mediterranean faction fed their own government with false information in order to capitalize on Ottomans fears and suspicions of Habsburg aggression in the Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup> A more consistent dataset could be attained for the last three years of the Grand Admiral's career from the reports that the sharp-eyed Venetian baili regularly sent to Venice. For instance, with the arrival of an Algerian galiot on April 8, 1585, word got out, *ci e sparsa voce*, that Philip II ordered preparations for a naval expedition against Algiers. According to the bailo, Uluc Ali's men, *dipendenti*, were spreading such rumors in order to convince the Sultan to summon Uluc from the Black Sea and order him to equip galleys and leave for the Western Mediterranean immediately.<sup>74</sup> They seemed to have reached their objective since a few months later the Sultan was reported to have authorized the preparation of a large fleet for the next year; yet it would be funded by Ottoman dignitaries rather than the treasury, be it the outer treasury belonging to the state or the inner one belonging to the Sultan. Moreover, Uluc Ali told the Sultan that

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politics but also justified their unorthodox political role in the Ottoman capital despite their position *outside* of the Ottoman *askeri* class. Gürkan, "Espionage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean", 372-376, 377-387. For Jewish power brokers in sixteenth-century Ottoman politics, see Emrah Safa Gürkan, "Touting for Patrons, Brokering Power and Trading Information: Trans-Imperial Jews in Sixteenth-century Istanbul", based on the presentation "Mercantes de la informacion y jefes de los espías: Los cristianos nuevos en Constantinopla durante el siglo XVI", delivered at the workshop entitled *Detrás de las apariencias: Información y comunicación, espionaje (siglos XVI-XVII)*, held at the Universidad de Alcalá between 22-24 July 2014. The article will be published in 2015 in the proceedings of the workshop.

72 Their sole rivals were European diplomats in Istanbul who communicated the information they received from their capitals to Ottoman grandees. However, they did so only when leaking information served their political purposes and they chose carefully which information to remit and which perception to create in the minds of the Ottoman grandees. In short, they also sought to manipulate the Ottoman decision-making process.

73 AGS, E 1152, fol. 40 (6 April 1582).

74 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 145v-146r (9 April 1585).

Philip II went to Barcelona<sup>75</sup> to negotiate an alliance (*lega*) with other Christian princes.<sup>76</sup> Even though he could not provide the exact motive behind this alliance (it could be an anti-Ottoman alliance, it could aim to conquer the French littoral, or it could seek to unite Habsburg possessions in Italy and Spain), he convinced the Sultan that all the possibilities were prejudicial to his interests. It would not be wise to leave the Arsenal in such poor condition and resuming the Persian War might induce the Christian powers to unite against the Ottomans.<sup>77</sup> The French ambassador also supported the cunning corsair's efforts to make the Sultan jealous of Philip II's grandeur; in his audience with Grand Vizier Mesih Pasha, he corroborated Uluc's stories.<sup>78</sup> In August, Uluc was reported to be trying to reach

75 Philip II did in fact visit Catalonia and Aragon in 1585. Yet, the reason for this visit was not to sign an alliance as Uluc claimed. Philip II left Madrid on 19 January 1585 with his nine-year-old son, also named Philip, his eldest daughter Infanta Isabel, and his youngest daughter Catalina Micaela. The reasons for the royal visit were the prince Philip's taking his oath as the heir to the realms of the Crown of Aragon and the wedding between Catalina Micaela and the Duke of Savoy, Carlo Emmanuele. See: Teofilo F. Ruiz, *A King Travels: Festive Traditions in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012), Chapter 5; Luis R. Corteguera, *For the Common Good: Popular Politics in Barcelona, 1580-1640* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), Chapter Three; for an expanded version of the latter book, see idem, *Per al bé comú: La política popular a Barcelona, 1580-1640* (Vic: Eumo Editorial, 2005). The royal family reached Zaragoza on February 24 and Carlo Emmanuele first arrived in Barcelona on Giovanni Andrea Doria's fleet and then traveled on land to Zaragoza. It could be this naval voyage on Doria's fleet that drew Mediterranean factions' suspicions. The wedding took place at Zaragoza Cathedral on March 11 and only after the celebrations were over did the royal family leave Zaragoza (April 2) and arrive in the capital of Catalonia (May 7) from where the newly wedded couple would set sail to Italy (June 14) on, once again, Doria's fleet.

76 There is no mention of negotiations for an anti-Ottoman alliance in Henrique Cock's detailed account of the voyage and marriage celebrations, *Relación del viaje hecho por Felipe II en 1585, á Zaragoza, Barcelona y Valencia* (Madrid: Empronta, Estereotipia y Galv.<sup>a</sup> de Aribau y c.<sup>a</sup>, 1876). Moreover, the Ottoman – Habsburg truce had just been renewed in 1584 and the Ottomans were far from posing a direct threat to Philip. Nevertheless, it is still possible that the two monarchs talked about the Ottoman menace or the corsairs' depredations in one of many conversations they had during the days-long marriage celebrations. Even then, these conversations did not result in any joint military activity. Furthermore, an alliance between Philip and a minor prince such as Carlo Emmanuele would not make too much of an impact on the military balance of power in the Mediterranean.

77 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 322r-324r (12 June 1585).

78 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 382r-382v (22 June 1585).

the Sultan's and the Grand Vizier's ears by means of spies and slaves who spread rumors. France was in turmoil due to the Wars of Religion and the Habsburgs were preparing a fleet in order to conquer French ports. Once again Mesih Pasha was less than enthusiastic.<sup>79</sup> Still, in spite of this lack of interest and of the fact that the planned expedition did not take place the next year, Ottoman archival documents point to an extensive preparation in *Tersane-i Amire*.<sup>80</sup> In short, Uluc Ali's arguments must have seemed convincing enough to mobilize the fleet if not to dispatch it to the waters of the Western Mediterranean.

Even though the Ottomans did not send out a large Ottoman fleet in 1586, Uluc Ali continued lobbying. As in 1585, first signs of disinformation surfaced in April, the beginning of the sailing season in the Mediterranean. Recently ransomed from slavery, a galley captain informed the Porte that a large fleet composed of the Knights of St. John and St. Stephen had seized several ships in Ottoman waters and nobody could leave Morea out of fear. Needless to say, Uluc Ali was behind the propagation of this information, concluded the bailo Lorenzo Bernardo.<sup>81</sup> He reported two other instances of disinformation in June. First, striving to capitalize on the hatred and fear prevailing in Istanbul against Christian corsairs, Uluc spread the rumor that an English galleon that recently left Istanbul sank a "Turkish" ship and enslaved those on board. The English ambassador, with whom Uluc Ali was on bad terms,<sup>82</sup> quickly denied the Grand Admiral's "invention."<sup>83</sup> Still, this episode shows that the Habsburgs were not the only target of Uluc Ali's disinformation campaign. In a second incident, a North African galiot captured a Neapolitan frigate whose captain informed that there were "great preparations for a fleet for Tunis expedition" and that Spaniards had secret connections (*secretta intelligenza*) in the city: all Uluc Ali's *artificio*, according to the bailo.<sup>84</sup> In stark contrast to the enmity between Uluc Ali and English ambassador, French ambassador and Uluc Ali resumed close cooperation as both needed the Ottoman fleet in the Western Mediterranean. A leading *bey* from Yemen arrived in August, breaking the news of Habsburg naval aggression in the Indian Ocean and asking

79 ASV, SDC, fil. 21, cc. 549r-549v (9 August 1585).

80 BOA, *Maliyeden Müdevver Defterler*, 852, p. 32-39; Bostan, *Osmanlı Bahriye*, 6, 99.

81 ASV, SDC, fil. 23, c. 141r (5 April 1586).

82 ASV, SDC, fil. 22, cc. 536r-537v (18 February 1585, m.v.); fil. 23, cc. 30r-30v (4 March 1586), 63v (4 March 1586), 137r (5 April 1586), 248r-248v (20 April 1586) and 465r (25 June 1586).

83 ASV, SDC, fil. 23, c. 287r (12 June 1586).

84 ASV, SDC, fil. 23, cc. 503r-503v (25 June 1586).

for Ottoman help. As other news regarding the Habsburg penetration into the Red Sea intensified Ottomans' suspicion and fear, the French ambassador continued exploiting the Ottoman pride by describing a powerful Philip II, poised to attack Ottoman North Africa with his fleet in Sicily.<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately for the Mediterranean faction, Uluc Ali's schemes failed in 1586 as well. Nonetheless, the failure did not dissuade him; he still continued spreading false information in 1587, starting once again in the month of April. Rumors he spread shortly before his death, indicating that galleys in Messina would eminently go on corso (*corseggiar*) in Ottoman waters, convinced the Sultan to increase the number of galleys patrolling the Ottoman coasts.<sup>86</sup>

When rumors did not suffice, the Mediterranean faction produced false witnesses to boost the credibility of their claims. For instance, according to a Habsburg spy in the household of Uluc Ali, in 1580 Arnavud Memi<sup>87</sup> sent a Neapolitan captive from Valona as well as a letter written by Habsburg commanders. Uluc sent both the captive and the translation of the intercepted letter to the Grand Vizier Mustafa Pasha.<sup>88</sup> While the Neapolitan broke the news that Philip II conquered Portugal (this was in fact true) and he was planning to attack North Africa (not true), Uluc Ali used the Neapolitan's statement that all Habsburg ships were in Spain (and thus Italian coasts were unprotected) in order to convince the Sultan to give him permission to sail west with the Ottoman fleet.<sup>89</sup> Some teamwork, all in the name of frustrating the truce negotiations between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans. In a similar incident in 1585, a Spanish slave named Scipio corroborated Uluc Ali's afore-mentioned claim that an alliance was signed between Philip II and other Christian princes in Barcelona. He not only gave details regarding Habsburg naval preparations in Barcelona and other ports but also mentioned Philip II's zeal for an anti-Ottoman holy alliance, hoping to get support from the new pope, Sixtus V.<sup>90</sup>

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85 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 23, cc. 586v-588v (6 August 1586). Shortly after, Uluc Ali sent for him and the ambassador met with the corsair; regrettably, the bailo could not learn the content of their conversation. One could only guess.

86 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 25 c. 183v (16 April 1587).

87 The captain of the Algerian corsair fleet, Arnavud Memi had a lot to gain from a renewed Ottoman offense in the Mediterranean.

88 AGS, *E*, 1338, fol. 15 (30 June 1580).

89 AGS, *E*, 1338, fols. 19 (2 July 1580) and 20 (7 July 1580).

90 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 21, cc. 322r-324r (12 June 1585).

The incident mentioned in the opening of the article perfectly demonstrates how far Uluc Ali and his Mediterranean faction were willing to go in order to manipulate the Ottoman decision-making process. The fact that Mesih Pasha chose not to relate the incident to the Sultan – or if he did, that the Sultan did not punish Uluc Ali, demonstrates that Uluc Ali's attempt to disinform his government by staging a *mise-en-scène* was acceptable in the game of politics in sixteenth-century Istanbul. Had he believed that this would suffice to ruin the prestigious Grand Admiral, Mesih Pasha would not have hesitated to seize an opportunity to eliminate a powerful rival and a constant nuisance to his plans. Moreover, Uluc Ali's arrogant response to the Grand Vizier and his petition to be transferred to North Africa should be taken as a sign of his self-confidence in spite of the fact that he was caught red-handed. A justified feeling given that the Sultan chose to placate his admiral by allowing him to leave the Dardanelles with a small fleet and promising him a large navy for the following year. The advice of influential religious and political figures such as Çivizade, Sadeddin and Şucaüddin against replacing Uluc Ali with somebody new or little expert on naval affairs clearly stipulates not only that the Grand Admiral had influential allies in the Ottoman court but also that the Ottoman elite considered Uluc Ali's naval skills indispensable. With memories of the Battle of Lepanto fresh in their minds, the Ottomans needed a capable Grand Admiral.

But, would this be a sufficient explanation on its own? First, what good would a talented Grand Admiral do to the Sultan as long as there was no money to dispatch a fleet to the Mediterranean? Secondly, these courtiers were shrewd Grand Admiral's allies in the court and their positive evaluation might not have been shared by Uluc Ali's enemies who envied his lucrative position and already started to voice their criticism. According to the same bailo's reports from 1585, there were several contenders for the highest post of the Ottoman naval establishment, not only from outside, but also inside of the corsair establishment.<sup>91</sup> In the post-Sokollu period where factional rivalries were rife and the insecurity of tenure was the norm,<sup>92</sup> how come his rivals could not take advantage of Uluc's behavior and oust him from office?

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91 Ali, Koca Sinan and Yusuf Sinan Pashas were rumored to be interested in the position. ASV, SDC, fil. 21, c. 200v (29 April 1585), 212r (29 April 1585) and 548v (9 August 1585); Sola, *Uchalı*, 262. Among the corsairs, Uluc considered Hasan Veneziano a serious contender.

92 Note that after the assassination of the Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (o. 1564-1579), government offices were swapped quite often. Between 1579 and 1603,

Can we conclude from the Sultan's favorable treatment of Uluc Ali that the Ottomans were cognizant of his financial difficulties due to the empire's failure to pursue an active naval policy and that thus they were ready to overlook his "unorthodox" methods? The same trio of Çivizade, Sadeddin and Şücaüddin suggested the Sultan to give Uluc "some satisfaction so as not to make him live *disperato*", in despair. By treating him leniently, was the Sultan acknowledging his failure to create an opportunity for Uluc to provide for himself and his men? Was there an implicit agreement, a common understanding between the two parties, which gave Uluc a right to grievance when the Ottomans did not invest in naval action? After all, was he not Uluc Ali himself who bluntly told the Sultan that he was just like a fish and he could not survive out of water?<sup>93</sup> One can only speculate, but this much is evident: Uluc paid no price for his attempt of manipulation.

A strategy of withholding information complemented the fabrication of intelligence. Uluc Ali sought to monopolize the transmission of information between North Africa and Istanbul. This was why in 1586 he was so frustrated with one of his men, Ahmed Bey, who, instead of first talking with him, went directly to the Ottoman Grand Vizier as soon as he arrived from North Africa and told him that Christians did not prepare a fleet and everything was tranquil in the Western Mediterranean.<sup>94</sup> In another example, Uluc Ali made sure in 1581 that the Moroccan diplomatic mission set for Istanbul did not reach its target. When galiots carrying two ambassadors encountered the Ottoman fleet in Navarino, the Grand Admiral had them detained, in spite of the fact that they paid him due respect with presents. His aim was to keep the Ottomans in the dark and make sure that the Moroccans did not provide information regarding North Africa,

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the office of grand vizierate changed hands 21 times (Lala Mustafa Pasha who was a *Vekil-i Saltanat*, but not a *Vezir-i Azam* is left out) between twelve people. Koca Sinan Pasha occupied the post 6 times, Kanijeli Siyavuş and Damad İbrahim Pashas 3 times and Ferhad and Cigalazade Yusuf Sinan Pashas twice. This means that a Grand Vizier spent an average of 1.14 years in office, a stark contrast with Suleiman I's era: between 1523 and 1564, the office changed hands eight times, totaling to an average of 5.12. İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzablı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* (İstanbul : Türkiye Yayınevi, 1971), vol. 5, 15-28. We see a similar pattern of short term tenure also in bureaucratic appointments. Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986), 97-98.

93 ASV, SDC, fil. 25, c. 271r (13 May 1587).

94 Sola, *Uçhalı*, 458-459.

according to the bailo. Given the exchange of letters between the two monarchs in 1580, it is also fair to conclude that had the Sultan learnt that Ahmed al-Mansur sent him tribute, he would not have consented to the dispatch of a fleet against Morocco, the target in Uluc's mind.<sup>95</sup> When the Sultan later learned Uluc's scheme, he was "displeased" according to the bailo; yet the fact that he neither canceled the expedition nor acted against his Grand Admiral demonstrates once again that such maneuvers were usual in Ottoman factional politics, especially at this juncture when a prestigious veteran officer felt undermined by the government's failure to provide him with necessary resources to maintain his household and faction. Not only did Uluc Ali go unpunished but also the Sultan treated him with utmost care when he returned from this expedition which was canceled at the last minute due to the resistance of the disobedient janissaries of Algiers.<sup>96</sup> He was given an audience in the Old Palace, an exceptional favor with ostensible symbolic value.<sup>97</sup> When a second Moroccan ambassador arrived in Istanbul with a large tribute (fifty thousand *scudi*), he stated that his master always considered the Ottoman Sultan the *principal capo*, the "head" of the Muslims. Each year he was sending the due tribute, but following the example of his master, the Governor-General of Algeria Hasan Veneziano was detaining Moroccan diplomats and confiscating the presents they were carrying for the Sultan so that the Ottomans could not learn of his *male operationi* against an Ottoman vassal. Even though the Sultan reportedly aired his anger against Hasan, the corsair was not punished; on the contrary, in 1582 he recovered the position he had lost two

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95 After much effort, Uluc Ali had finally convinced the Sultan for a naval expedition against Morocco in 1581. He should be aware, however, that in 1580 the two monarchs exchanged letters and the Ottoman Sultan agreed not only to a military alliance against the Habsburgs but also to give his daughter to Ahmed al-Mansur. See two letters written by Murad III to Ahmed al-Mansur, located with their Spanish translations in BNM, ms. 7453, fols. 22v-27r and dated in H. 988 (1580). Both the original letters in Arabic and their Spanish translations can be found in Dario Cabanelas, "Proyecto de alianza entre los sultanes de Marruecos y Turquía contra Felipe II", *Miscelanea de Estudios Arabes y Hebraicos* VI (1957): 57-78. In short, for the Mediterranean faction, it was of utmost importance to detain these ambassadors.

96 They refused to embark on the Grand Admiral's fleet. They also sent to Istanbul a delegation and convinced the Sultan to order Uluc not to proceed with the expedition. Diego de Haedo, *Topografía e Historia General de Argel* (Madrid: La Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, 1927), vol. I, 393-395. Janissaries' opposition to Uluc Ali and his plan should be read within the larger framework of internal politics in Algiers which was dominated by an intense rivalry between janissaries and corsairs.

97 ASV, SDC, c. 253r (25 November 1582).

years ago and was appointed the Governor-General of Algeria.<sup>98</sup> In August 1582, Moroccans sent another ambassador who complained about Uluc Ali's machinations. His master sent four ambassadors with presents; however, all disappeared without a trace.<sup>99</sup> Could the Grand Admiral have them detained as well? Most probably, as the three afore-mentioned incidents recorded by the bailo suggest a pattern: no Moroccan diplomat should reach Istanbul. In close alliance, Uluc Ali and Hasan Veneziano would do their best maintain a diplomatic blockade against the Moroccan kingdom. When they failed, the price was a heavy one: An Ottoman-Moroccan rapprochement.<sup>100</sup>

The harmonious collaboration between the two leaders of the faction ended when the Grand Admiral and his one-time protégé fell out with each other during Hasan Veneziano's second term in Algiers. The open rivalry between the two jeopardized the unity in the Mediterranean faction. The more experienced Grand Admiral struck first, launching a full-scale political attack against his rival; he informed the Sultan that it was Hasan who detained Moroccan ambassadors and used the presents they were carrying for his own enrichment. This convinced the Sultan to authorize the confiscation of Hasan's property in Istanbul and his hidden treasure, containing 200.000 *zecchini* and much precious clothing, the whereabouts of which Uluc learned thanks to a young boy he stole from Hasan's household. False rumors had it that he also sent several men to Algiers to strangle the corsair who had just left Istanbul for his new post.<sup>101</sup> In an alternative version, the Ottoman historian Selanikî records that Uluc had stolen this eunuch boy named Ali from Hasan Pasha. Hasan complained to the Sultan who decided not only to dismiss the Grand Admiral but also punish him (*azl ile komayup ukûbet eylemek kasd eylemişlerdi*). However, the prudent Uluc found a way to dodge the

98 ASV, SDC, fil. 15, cc. 121r-121v (22 July 1581).

99 Sola, *Uchalı*, 353.

100 The Moroccan ambassador, who came to Istanbul in 1582 for the circumcision of the crown-prince Mehmed, made a good impression and returned with an imperial letter (*nâme*) to Ahmed al-Mansur that assured the Moroccan Sultan that as long as he maintained his loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan, he and his descendants could rule Morocco as an Ottoman vassal "...mâdem ki atabe-i 'ulyâmıza sadâkat ve muhâleset üzre olasız, bu sadâkat ve müvâlatta sâbit-kadem oldukça havza-i eyâletinize dâhil olan memleketleri alâ vefkû'l-merâm neslen bâde neslin ber vech-i eyâlet tasarruf kılub..." BOA, MD XLVIII, p. 31: (H. 23 Receb 990 / A.D. 12 August 1582); İlter, *Şimali Afrika'da Türkler*, vol. I, 163. After this date, the Ottomans would not follow an active policy in Moroccan affairs, leaving the Mediterranean faction in Algiers on its own.

101ASV, SDC, fil. 16, cc. 207v-208r (14 October 1582).

bullet: aware of “the Sultan’s inclination toward property” (*Pâdişâh-ı gerdûn-bestat hazretlerinin mâla meylini bilüp*), he learnt from the eunuch Ali who was Hasan Veneziano’s treasurer where the latter hid his treasure. Uluc defended himself in front of the Sultan with the excuse that the only reason why he got the eunuch from Hasan was to learn the whereabouts of Hasan’s treasure which he amassed by defrauding him when he was his servant. In this version as well, the Sultan had Hasan’s property confiscated.<sup>102</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

A year after Uluc Ali’s death in 1587, his former protégé-turned-rival, Hasan Veneziano assumed the post of the Grand Admiral. When he was ordered to leave Istanbul a few months later, he submitted a petition (*‘arz*) to the Sultan, urging him to send the fleet to Tunis because he was informed (*come era pervenuto a notizia sua*) that the Habsburg fleet under Giovanni Andrea Doria would attack the city and its garrison would most definitely surrender due to the poor conditions of the fortifications. According to the bailo Giovanni Moro, however, Hasan never received such information; he “introduced this suspicion of Andrea Doria” for his own purposes. As it was customary that the new Grand Admiral received presents both in Istanbul and in other places where he was to visit with the fleet, he simply wanted to get more tribute from his subordinates. As an expedition to the Western Mediterranean would mean more ports to visit, perhaps he calculated that he could milk his North African colleagues as well. Moreover, he was so concerned about his family and fortune that he decided to bring them from Tunis to Istanbul. Fearing that the new Governor-General of Tunisia could make a move against his property (and such moves against the property of former governor-generals were not unheard of),<sup>103</sup> he wanted to be present to make the necessary arrangements.<sup>104</sup>

Little changed after Uluc Ali’s death; information remained a political tool with which the members of the Mediterranean faction tried to manipulate the Ottoman decision-makers to act along the interests of their faction, households and persons. The control of information and consequently the shaping of the perception of events and thus of the imperial policy played a vital role in

102 Mehmet İpşirli (ed.), *Tarih-i Selânikî*, ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1999), vol. I, 172.

103 Gürkan, “Centre and the Frontier”, 159-160.

104 ASV, *SDC*, fil. 28, cc. 58r-58v (24 September 1588).

furthering corporate interest. In Istanbul, even fooling the Sultan was fair game; producing false information and witnesses, detaining ambassadors dispatched to Istanbul and confiscating presents sent to the Sultan was all part-and-parcel of Ottoman factional politics. The fact that nothing happened to Uluc Ali even after his involvement in fabrication of false information or the detention of Moroccan ambassadors clearly indicates that such political tricks were the norm in sixteenth-century Istanbul.

It was not only the protagonists of this article who established a large network of spies and used the information they brought for their own political ends. As I have demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>105</sup> the same documentation attests to similar political use of information by other Ottoman grandees. We concentrated on the case of the Mediterranean faction out of practical concerns. As the members of this faction were outsiders to Ottoman administrative-military structure and had stronger provincial concerns, their priorities presented a starker contrast to those of the Empire. This divergence of interest between Istanbul's educated imperial elite and self-made entrepreneurs who made their fortunes on the frontier rendered the manipulation of information more evident. Moreover, being that corsairs constituted a threat for European powers, their activities were extensively documented by European ambassadors and spies.

If the early modern Ottoman state was a conglomerate of power groups, then its policy reflected the interests of these groups. Trying to read the decision-making process and strategy formulation independent from the realities of factional rivalries would be to overlook the corporate interests at the heart of Ottoman politics. Those who shaped policy were a far cry from disinterested officials, formulating strategy as a result of careful and objective calculations of long-term strategic objectives. Struggling to expand the power of their households and factions, these decision-makers strove to channel the resources of the empire in a way that would suit their own interests. In an age of slow communications, information appeared as the most convenient tool to achieve their ends. Those who controlled the available information could shape perceptions in the Imperial Council, overcome the resistance of rivals and convince the Sultan; in short, they could run the empire.

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105 Gürkan, "Espionage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean", 362-368.

*Fooling the Sultan: Information, Decision-Making and the “Mediterranean Faction” (1585-1587)*

Abstract ■ This essay aims to show how information was used as a political tool in sixteenth-century Istanbul. By concentrating on the “Mediterranean faction”, i.e. Muslim corsairs incorporated into the Ottoman imperial system, it will seek to demonstrate how interest groups tried to manipulate Ottoman decision-making and strategy formulation process in accordance with their corporate interests. The economic rationale behind the cooperation between the Ottoman imperial elites and the corsairs required that Istanbul pursued a belligerent policy in the Western Mediterranean and thus invested in the navy. In order to make sure that this happened, the Mediterranean faction used every means at their disposal. Twisting information was the most efficient one. They fabricated rumors, produced false witnesses, staged *mise-en-scènes*, withheld relevant information and even detained incoming foreign ambassadors to keep their government in the dark, all in the name of convincing the Ottoman decision-makers of an exaggerated enemy threat in the Mediterranean which merited military investment.

Keywords: Information Gathering, Disinformation, Decision-Making Process, Strategy, Ottoman Naval Policy in the Sixteenth-Century, Factional Politics, Ottoman Corsairs, Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry, Ottoman-Venetian Relations, Ottomans in North Africa.

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