

## **Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire during the Reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807)**

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### **Abstract:**

During its later period, the Ottoman Empire experienced decline in several fields. The military sphere was the most important because it formed the backbone of the state. The government therefore adopted reform as a means of restoring its strength. Sultan Selim III was among the most prominent reformers. He confronted major obstacles and sought a comprehensive reorganization of the military establishment. He also created new units known as the Nizam-i Cedid, or New Order. Selim III devoted much of his reign to building a strong and cohesive army. He introduced reforms in military organization and combat training. He also sought to modernize weapons and artillery so that they could meet the requirements of the nineteenth century. These measures marked an important beginning of effective Ottoman military reform. They were later expanded under Sultan Mahmud II, who benefited from Selim III's experience and continued his reformist project.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire; military establishment; reform; Sultan Selim III.

### **1. Introduction**

The Ottoman Empire followed a changing course from its rise to its fall. During its formative and expansionist phases, it possessed a powerful military establishment headed by the Janissary corps. Over time, however, this institution weakened because it failed to keep pace with military change. This study examines the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807). It was a period in which the Ottoman state struggled with the weakness and repeated revolts of the Janissaries. The corps had become a major political force, whereas the sultan had once exercised supreme authority. The Janissaries frequently influenced the appointment and dismissal of grand viziers. They also pressured each new sultan to grant gifts and special privileges. More seriously, they eventually dared to kill the sultan himself. This development clearly reflected the deterioration of the institution and the state's inability to control it. The study therefore addresses one of the most important phases of Ottoman military reform. It also clarifies Selim III's role in reorganizing the army and directing it toward a more effective course. Before examining his measures, the study introduces this central reforming figure and raises the following questions:

- What were the most important reforms introduced to revive and modernize the army?
- Did the sultan limit himself to reforming the old military establishment, or did he create a new army?
- How did the political authorities and society respond to Sultan Selim III's reforms?

## **2. Sultan Selim III and the Circumstances of His Accession**

Sultan Selim III was born in 1175 AH/1762 CE. He ascended the throne in 1789<sup>1</sup>. His accession followed Sultan Abdulhamid I's fatal cerebral hemorrhage<sup>2</sup>. Selim was the son of Sultan Mustafa III. He was of medium height and had a long face, a dark auburn beard, and calm, graceful movements. He also practised engraving and ornamentation<sup>3</sup>. He was knowledgeable in Islamic sciences, wrote poetry, and was skilled in calligraphy. As a ruler, he was experienced, compassionate, and inclined toward reform. When he came to power, Koca Yusuf Pasha was grand vizier. Admiral Gazi Hasan Pasha the Algerian had also served for many years as commander of the navy, which offered the new sultan an important advantage. Selim later appointed Damat Melek Ahmed Pasha as grand vizier after Koca Yusuf Pasha. The two worked together to proclaim the New Order<sup>4</sup>. Selim remained on the throne until 1807, the year of his death at the age of forty-eight.<sup>5</sup> He inherited a tense political climate and an almost continuous war. At the beginning of his reign, the Ottoman army suffered defeat against the Russo-Austrian alliance. The allies captured Bender, most of Wallachia and Moldavia, and Bessarabia, while Austrian forces entered Belgrade. The war ended with the Treaties of Sistova and Jassy after heavy Ottoman losses<sup>6</sup>. Selim attributed the defeat to the army's weakness. He therefore began to consider a far-reaching reform of a military establishment that had fallen into a critical condition.

## **3. The Origins of Military Reform in the Ottoman Empire**

The concept of reform in the Ottoman Empire may be divided into two approaches. The first was traditional and prevailed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It called for preserving established Ottoman institutions, including the original military system. Its supporters rejected reforms imported from abroad and sought to keep foreign influence away from the army. The second approach favoured borrowing from the West. Military reform in this sense began as a response to Western superiority, especially after the Treaty of Passarowitz was signed with Austria in 1718.<sup>7</sup>

Ibrahim Muteferrika was among the leading reformers of the eighteenth century. He was of Hungarian origin and served the Ottoman state during the reigns of Sultan Ahmed III<sup>8</sup> (1703-1730)

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<sup>1</sup> Yusuf Bey Asaf, *History of the Sultans of the House of Osman from Their Origins to the Present*, introduced by Muhammad Zaynhum Muhammad Azab, 1st ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Madiuli Library, 1995), p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Yilmaz Oztuna, *History of the Ottoman State*, trans. Adnan Mahmud Salman, revised by Mahmud al-Afli, vol. 1 (Istanbul, Turkey: Faisal Finance Foundation, 1988), p. 643.

<sup>3</sup> Djamel Ben Ahmed Aissa, *The Development of the Ottoman Military Establishment in the Nineteenth Century*, master's thesis in Ottoman State Studies, 1463-1924 (Mustapha Stambouli University, Mascara, Algeria, 2018-2019), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmet Akgunduz and Said Ozturk, *The Unknown Ottoman State* (Istanbul, Turkey: Ottoman Research Foundation, 2008), pp. 427-428.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Farid Bey, *History of the Sublime Ottoman State*, ed. Ihsan Haqqi, 12th ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Nafa'is), p. 363.

<sup>7</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, *The Beginnings of Reform in the Ottoman Empire and the Influence of the European West, 1789-1807* (Alexandria, Egypt: Mansha'at al-Ma'arif, 2006), pp. 67-68.

<sup>8</sup> Sultan Ahmed III was born in Ramadan 1083 AH/1683 CE. He was the son of Sultan Mehmed IV and ruled from 2 August 1703 until 1730. The Treaty of Passarowitz was concluded during his reign. See Adnan al-Attar, *The Ottoman State from Birth to Fall*, compiled and prepared by Muhammad Qabbani, 1st ed. (Algeria: Dar al-Asala, 2010), pp. 107-108.

and Sultan Mahmud I<sup>9</sup> (1730-1754). Both rulers entrusted him with reform-related duties. He worked as a translator and diplomat. His assignments gave him close knowledge of European progress, especially in military affairs. He admired this progress and urged the Ottoman state to enter the reform process without delay. His position appeared clearly in the memorandum that he sent to Sultan Mahmud I in 1731, entitled *The Principles of Government in the Order of Nations*. He wrote: "An army committed to the service of the ruler and the state, properly commanded and organized through sound methods and the laws of war, and supplied with defensive and offensive weapons, is a principal source of state power."<sup>10</sup> During the same period, the Janissaries launched several revolts against Sultan Ahmed III and later against Sultan Mahmud I. They even compelled the latter to execute one of their leaders, Patrona Halil<sup>11</sup>. Another reformer emerged during Mahmud I's reign: Count de Bonneval. He developed a project for a new weapon design.<sup>12</sup> He also called for the Ottoman army to be modernized through French military expertise. His greatest success was with the artillery corps rather than the Janissaries.<sup>13</sup> Sultan Mustafa III continued this approach. He invited Baron de Tott from France and assigned him to reform the artillery corps. De Tott created a rapid-fire artillery unit. The Imperial Naval Engineering School was also established and became one of the most important institutions of Mustafa III's reign<sup>14</sup>.

The new reform movement therefore developed along three main lines:

- Most models adopted by the reform movement were inspired by French military practice.
- Reform efforts focused on improving military training, methods, organization, and weapons.
- These reforms could provoke strong opposition in Ottoman society, especially among those who viewed them as measures borrowed from non-Muslims<sup>15</sup>.

#### **4. Sultan Selim III's Reforms of the Military Establishment**

Sultan Selim III drew inspiration from the reform efforts of his father, Sultan Mustafa III.<sup>16</sup> His reform programme became more visible after the Treaty of Jassy in 1792. The treaty exposed the fragility of the Ottoman army and showed that reform and development were unavoidable.<sup>17</sup> Selim also received reports that called for military change. One was submitted in 1792 by Morali Osman, the superintendent of the imperial arsenal. He argued that the Janissary system had declined because its members felt neglected by the state, which appeared to favour the modern artillery and rifle units.

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<sup>9</sup> Sultan Mahmud I was born in 1108 AH and ascended the throne in 1143 AH at the age of thirty-five. His reign lasted twenty-five years. See Ibrahim Bey Halim, *History of the Sublime Ottoman State: al-Tuhfa al-Halimiyya*, 1st ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Cultural Books Foundation, 1988), p. 166.

<sup>10</sup> Yusuf Abd al-Karim Taha al-Rudayni, *The Ottoman Military Establishment, 1299-1839: A Historical Study*, 1st ed. (Amman, Jordan: Dar al-Hamid for Publishing and Distribution, 2014), pp. 210-211.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>13</sup> Abd al-Rahim Mustafa Ahmad, *The Foundations of Ottoman History*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Shuruq, 1986), p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, *The Ottoman State: History and Civilization*, trans. Salih Saadawi, vol. 1 (Istanbul, Turkey: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1999), p. 407.

<sup>15</sup> Abd al-Rahim Mustafa Ahmad, previously cited work, p. 172.

<sup>16</sup> Sultan Mustafa III was the son of Sultan Ahmed III and was born in 1129 AH. He supported reform and sought the progress of his country. He succeeded Osman III, who died at about sixty years of age. See Muhammad Farid Bey, previously cited source, pp. 328-329.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, pp. 35-36.

Muhammad Khaki Bey, an Ottoman commander, offered another explanation. He believed that the military system had deteriorated because the army was dismissed every winter. Enemy victories over the Ottomans often occurred during that season. He therefore proposed two sets of units, one for summer and another for winter. Each would serve for six months. The summer units would be drawn from Anatolia, while the winter units would come from Rumelia<sup>18</sup>.

Two other reports, prepared by D'Ohsson and Bertrand, examined the problem of foreign military experts in the Ottoman Empire. They argued that these experts had failed to cooperate effectively with Ottoman officials. The resulting misunderstandings created a gap that weakened the reform process.<sup>19</sup>

After studying these reports, Sultan Selim III decided that practical reform was necessary, especially within the Janissary corps<sup>20</sup>. The Janissaries remained a central pillar of the Ottoman state, yet they rejected the reform movement. Some viewed it not as reform but as Westernization. The Jewish orientalist Bernard Lewis described the new force as "the first armed force to pave the way for the modern West in the Middle East, the first shock to Islamic tolerance, and the first spark on the road to Westernization and reform in the Middle East."<sup>21</sup> Despite this opposition, Selim III continued his programme. His reforms focused on the following branches:

#### **4.1 The Land Army**

##### **a. Infantry**

Sultan Selim III ordered all Janissary commanders to ensure rigorous training and to establish a stable system of military instruction. A supervisor was appointed to each unit. These supervisors managed administrative and financial matters and conveyed the soldiers' concerns. This arrangement allowed the agha<sup>22</sup> to concentrate on military duties such as recruitment, training, and leading units in war.

The number of Janissary units was also to be reduced by almost half so that the remaining troops could receive advanced training. The sultan ordered the regular payment of wages and the rebuilding of barracks. A renewed recruitment law limited admission to unmarried men under the age of twenty-five. Marriage was permitted only for those who held higher ranks. Soldiers who had not completed their training were given one or two additional years. Training took place five days a week, while

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<sup>18</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, pp. 139-140.

<sup>20</sup> Janissaries is the plural of Janissary. The Ottoman term derives from *yeni ceri*, meaning "new army." It was applied to the corps established by Sultan Orhan, the second Ottoman ruler, in 1326, on the advice of his elder brother, Grand Vizier Ala al-Din, and the military judge Kara Halil. The first recruits were prisoners of war. The system later developed so that families supplied sons for service. The corps was connected with the Bektashi order, named after the Sufi sheikh Haci Bektas, and its members were originally forbidden to marry. See Nimah Mustafa Ahmad, *The Military System in the Ottoman Empire, 1298-1908*, supplementary research for a master's degree in modern history (University of al-Neelain, Sudan, 2017), pp. 35-36.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Ghali Gharbi, *Studies on the History of the Ottoman Empire and the Arab East, 1258-1916* (Ben Aknoun, Algeria: Office of University Publications, 2007), pp. 147-148.

<sup>22</sup> Agha is a Persian term meaning "master" or "lord." The Ottomans used it for several offices, especially Janissary officers. See Suhayl Saban, *The Encyclopedic Dictionary*, reviewed by Abd al-Razzaq Muhammad Hasan Barakat (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd National Library, 2004), p. 15.

Tuesday and Friday were reserved for rest. Severe penalties, including dismissal, were imposed on those who failed to attend training<sup>23</sup>.

**b. Artillery**

The sultan established two formations: rifle-bearing units and artillery units. Each received a distinct uniform. They underwent continuous training under French officers, including General Menant and Lieutenant Lawrence. They were also assisted by the English officer Campbell, who was known as Mustafa Ingiliz.<sup>24</sup> Selim III issued several regulations for these troops. Artillerymen were taught engineering, gunnery, and the manufacture and use of firearms by skilled instructors. Separate barracks were built for them, and they were examined regularly. Any soldier who failed to show ability and readiness could lose his salary<sup>25</sup>.

**c. The Sipahis<sup>26</sup> or Cavalry**

The sultan also sought to reform the timar-holding Sipahi formations.<sup>27</sup> He withdrew their existing title deeds and issued new documents. The state required them to reside in the sanjaks where their timars were located<sup>28</sup>.

Selim III also linked the weakness of the Ottoman land army to the poor quality of its weapons. He replaced heavy firearms with lighter and more advanced rifles that infantry and cavalry soldiers could carry more easily. The army also possessed heavy cannon that could not be transported on warships, so the sultan imported lighter artillery from France. The French observer Gomilan reported to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "The Ottomans still use bronze cannon in all branches of their forces. Their furnaces and metal foundries are in a deplorable condition, and the projectiles used by their artillery are extremely old."

The sultan therefore established several arms factories through Ottoman-foreign partnerships. Celebi Mustafa Reshid supervised them with the assistance of a Spanish mechanical engineer named Fola, who was known for his enthusiasm. The largest gunpowder factory was built on the European side of Istanbul and placed under the direction of an Italian named Francesco<sup>29</sup>.

**4.2 The Navy**

The Ottoman Empire possessed extensive forests that supplied shipbuilding timber. It also controlled many ports along its long coastline. These natural and geographical advantages created a close relationship between the Ottomans and the surrounding seas. By the sixteenth century, this relationship had produced a fleet<sup>30</sup> that surpassed those of many other states. The period also produced important writings on navigation and seafaring, including the works of Piri Reis and Seydi Ali Reis.

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<sup>23</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, pp. 140-142.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> The term Sipahi derives from sipahi, meaning cavalryman. The formation was established by the vizier Demirtas Pasha during the reign of Sultan Murad I (1360-1389). Its banners were red. The troops were also known as cavalry units and received timar lands. See Muhammad Farid Bey, previously cited source, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Timar is a Persian word whose original meaning refers to the provisions and care given to a patient, an animal, land, or plants. In the Ottoman context, it referred to state lands granted to cavalry soldiers for their livelihood. See Muhammad Farid Bey, previously cited source, p. 132.

<sup>28</sup> Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, previously cited work, p. 401.

<sup>29</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, pp. 161-163.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

The fleet weakened during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One cause was the appointment of commanders who lacked naval knowledge and could not be compared with Hayreddin Barbarossa or Kilic Ali Pasha. The Ottoman navy also failed to keep pace with developments in shipbuilding.<sup>31</sup> The French observer Gomilan described the problem in his memoirs: "Among the Ottoman ships anchored in the Black Sea, only about six hundred Ottoman men deserved to be called sailors. The others may never even have seen the sea. If the Ottomans defeated the Greeks in earlier times, this was due to Greek weakness and the collapse of their state. I do not deny Ottoman courage and boldness, but they lack proper training and weapons suited to modern military methods."<sup>32</sup> The ships themselves reflected these weaknesses. They were heavy and bulky, with high sterns and excessive rigging, and could anchor only in deep ports. Sailors slept on deck and prepared their own food. The vessels therefore became crowded with small shops and cooking stoves, which caused many fires on board<sup>33</sup>.

As a result of this naval decline, Sultan Selim III assigned the Kapudan Pasha, Kucuk Huseyin Pasha, to build new ships. He also ordered the reform of the Imperial Naval Engineering School and the resumption of teaching there. In 1804, he created the Ministry of Naval Affairs to administer maritime activity.<sup>34</sup> External pressures at the beginning of the nineteenth century nevertheless disrupted these reforms. Adnan al-Attar writes: "On 12 Dhu al-Hijja 1221 AH (20 February 1807), the British admiral Lord Duckworth passed through the Dardanelles. His ships suffered little damage from the fortress batteries. He reached the roadstead of Gallipoli and destroyed all the Ottoman warships anchored there<sup>35</sup>."

## **5. Sultan Selim III and the Establishment of the New Order**

The state performs two basic functions:

- First, it preserves justice throughout the country and protects the rights of its citizens.
- Second, it defends the country's borders against external enemies.

During Selim III's reign, the first function was weakened by the spread of the provincial notables' administration across the empire. The state was also unable to fulfil the second function after the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca. The sultan therefore began with radical reform, and he regarded the reorganization of the army as the most urgent measure<sup>36</sup>. Reforming the old military establishment was not sufficient, especially because the Janissaries opposed the programme. The historian Ahmed Cevdet stated that they initially tried to become trained soldiers, but they soon resisted the new system. The Sipahis followed a similar course<sup>37</sup>.

This opposition led Sultan Selim III to create a new infantry force that could restrain the Janissaries, who were the principal centre of resistance to reform. He announced a new formation called the Nizam-i Cedid, or New Order. The term also referred to a broader set of measures intended to reform both military and financial administration<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, previously cited work, p. 421.

<sup>32</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, pp. 38-39.

<sup>35</sup> Adnan al-Attar, previously cited work, p. 129.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmet Akgunduz and Said Ozturk, previously cited work, p. 371.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>38</sup> Yusuf Abd al-Karim Taha al-Rudayni, previously cited work, pp. 228-229.

The new army emerged after the Treaty of Jassy between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in 1792. Celebi Mustafa Reshid submitted a plan for a new army stationed near the capital. After considering the proposal, the sultan issued an imperial decree establishing a camp at Levend Ciftligi, also known as the Naval Farm. It was an isolated area a few miles north of Istanbul, on a plain overlooking Besiktas and the Bosphorus. The project was organized in complete secrecy. The grand vizier gathered one hundred Ottoman men from the streets of Istanbul to provide the first recruits<sup>39</sup>. Ahmed Cevdet wrote: "When the number of these soldiers reached several hundred, Sultan Selim III inspected their training. Their coordinated movements, like one body and a solid structure, won his approval."<sup>40</sup> The force eventually reached about one thousand soldiers. The sultan then issued its military regulations in a kanunname. Sheikh al-Islam Muhammad Arif Efendi strongly supported the New Order<sup>41</sup>.

In 1796, special barracks were built for the new troops at Scutari, opposite Istanbul. French, English, and Prussian experts trained them according to modern European methods. They were required to wear European-style uniforms and use modern weapons<sup>42</sup>.

Ottoman military reform proved useful when the new troops successfully defended Acre against the French attack of 1799. They also defeated bands and robbers who had devastated parts of Bulgaria and Romania. They even overcame Janissary forces assembled by the governors of those provinces<sup>43</sup>.

The sultan ordered provincial governors to establish New Order units in their territories. Abd al-Rahman Pasha, governor of Karaman, and Mustafa Bayraktar in Ruscuk received the order enthusiastically. Kadi Pasha assigned relatives and friends to recruit soldiers and spent large sums of his own money on the units. Within three years, he had formed eight units on the modern model<sup>44</sup>.

These reforms did not end peacefully. The Janissaries inflamed public opposition and repeated the saying, "Whoever imitates a people becomes one of them." Many ordinary people therefore rejected the New Order. Several revolts followed, the most important of which was the Kabakci rebellion<sup>45</sup>.

## **6. Sultan Selim III Confronts the Opponents of Reform**

Before examining society's response to these reforms, it is necessary to mention the interpretation offered by historians such as Yilmaz Oztuna and Enver Ziya Karal. They assumed that the proposal aimed to renew all Ottoman laws, that reactionaries opposed it, and that revolutionaries supported it. This interpretation is entirely inaccurate<sup>46</sup>. If historians could be drawn into this view, ordinary people were even more likely to accept it.

The military establishment had reached a dead end. It was no longer capable of effective action and refused any reform of its training and educational methods. With such an army, the Ottoman state could not take a positive step forward.<sup>47</sup> A Turkish proverb states: "However beneficial a new scholar

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<sup>39</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, p. 149.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, p. 150.

<sup>42</sup> Yusuf Abd al-Karim Taha al-Rudayni, previously cited work, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>44</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, pp. 154-155.

<sup>45</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, pp. 40-41.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmet Akgunduz and Said Ozturk, previously cited work, p. 372.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

may be in an old village, ordinary people reject him because they remain attached to their old habits." Many people therefore viewed the New Order as a new evil and an imitation of non-Muslims. They began to campaign against it.

Ottoman society consequently divided into supporters of the New Order and supporters of the Janissaries. Four main factors made the situation worse:

- First, some officials used the New Order as a means of increasing their wealth. Funds collected for the army were spent on houses and palaces. These men belonged to the sultan's close circle and were sometimes called the tutors of the sultanate.
- Second, the sultan was gentle and reluctant to harm anyone. He was also indecisive and often followed the advice of those around him.
- Third, the sultan's associates occupied the principal offices of state and pursued excessive luxury.
- Fourth, the Janissaries incited opposition to the supporters of the New Order and declared them unbelievers. The sultan did not punish them, so they became more defiant. Prince Mustafa also adopted a hostile position toward Selim III<sup>48</sup>.

The religious scholars also withdrew from the reform programme after initially supporting it. They did not remain neutral but joined the Janissaries. Their position was linked to corruption within their leadership and to the privileges that many scholars enjoyed. The situation became especially serious after the death of Sheikh al-Islam Velizade, a close friend of Selim III, at the beginning of 1807<sup>49</sup>.

Together, these factors produced several revolts, the most important of which was the Kabakci rebellion. It began while the Ottoman Empire was at war with Russia. The new Sheikh al-Islam, Ishaq, supported the uprising and claimed that the new army was an unbelieving force because its soldiers wore trousers instead of the shalwar, a wide garment covering the lower body. Janissary auxiliaries rebelled and placed a soldier named Kastamonulu Kabakci Mustafa at their head.<sup>50</sup> He prepared to enter Istanbul. On the morning of 27 May 1807, he and his irregular soldiers entered the capital. About two hundred sailors and eight hundred Janissaries joined them. The rebels gathered at the place known as At Meydani and established their headquarters there. When the sultan learned of the revolt, he ordered the abolition of the New Order.<sup>51</sup> He then placed the army under the command of his opponents in the hope of satisfying them. By doing so, he deprived himself of the strongest force that supported him. The Janissaries had resisted every change. They claimed that the saint Haci Bektas had blessed their corps when it was founded and had prayed for its permanent victory. In their view, his blessing and prayer made military training unnecessary. They also gathered around religious figures who argued that Islam had never known formal military training, that the Islamic conquests had been achieved without it, and that the New Order was an unlawful innovation. They further claimed that it was borrowed from non-Muslims and that the Islamic principle "Whoever imitates a people is one of them" prohibited its adoption.<sup>52</sup> The rebels did not stop there. They demanded Selim III's deposition and the enthronement of Sultan Mustafa IV<sup>53</sup>. Selim appealed to Mustafa Bayraktar

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 375-378.

<sup>49</sup> Nahid Ibrahim al-Desouki, previously cited work, pp. 285-286.

<sup>50</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> Yusuf Abd al-Karim Taha al-Rudayni, previously cited work, pp. 235-236.

<sup>53</sup> Muhammad Farid Bey, previously cited source, p. 393.



to rescue him. Sultan Mustafa IV,<sup>54</sup> however, sent a group of his own men. They entered Selim III's quarters and stabbed him to death. His body was brought to Mustafa Bayraktar, who wept when he saw it. Bayraktar then deposed Mustafa IV and placed Sultan Mahmud II on the throne<sup>55</sup>. Selim III died at the age of forty-eight after a reign of about twenty years<sup>56</sup>.

Sultan Mahmud II appointed Mustafa Bayraktar as grand vizier after Bayraktar protected him from assassination. The new grand vizier attempted to revive the New Order. Conservative opponents and Janissaries soon conspired against him and killed him. Disorder returned, and Mahmud II devoted himself to completing the military reforms begun by Selim III<sup>57</sup>.

Sultan Selim III may therefore be regarded as the heir to the Ottoman reformers of the eighteenth century because he devoted much of his reign to military change. His programme nevertheless lacked an essential foundation. European industrial progress had emerged from social, economic, and political transformations that had continued since the Renaissance. Ottoman life as a whole required reform. Military change had to be connected with economic and educational reform and with the modernization of law<sup>58</sup>.

## **7. Conclusion**

Selim III's reform attempts were not an individual initiative. They rested on political planning and were driven by the need to confront military defeats. Although many Western and Eastern historians consider his experiment a failure, it produced several positive results.

Sultan Selim III laid the foundations for resistance to the power and domination of the Janissaries within the Ottoman state. Sultan Mahmud II later succeeded in ending the Janissary corps. He was still young during Selim III's reign, but he witnessed the reform experience and learned from it. This continuity shows that Selim III played the decisive pioneering role.

Although the New Order did not replace the Janissaries, part of its military legacy survived. During Mahmud II's reign, its trained elements and the artillery corps helped suppress the Janissary revolt and eliminate the institution.

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<sup>54</sup> Sultan Mustafa IV was the son of Sultan Abdulhamid I and was born in 1193 AH/1779 CE. He instructed the mufti to inform Selim III of his deposition. He ruled for thirteen months, was then removed, and was killed shortly afterward in his palace in 1808. See Muhammad Farid Bey, previously cited source, pp. 394-397.

<sup>55</sup> Sultan Mahmud II was the younger son of Abdulhamid I and an ancestor of the later Ottoman dynasty. He ascended the throne at the age of twenty-three and became the thirtieth Ottoman sultan. His mother was Naksidil Valide Sultan. He also used the literary name Adli and held the title of ghazi from 1813. He was a poet, composer, and calligrapher. See Salma Shlihi and Amina Nahhal, *The Ottoman Empire during the Reign of Sultan Mahmud II, 1808-1839: The Political and Military Systems as a Model*, master's thesis (University of 8 May 1945, Guelma, Algeria, 2015-2016), p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Ben Ahmed Aissa, previously cited work, p. 42.

<sup>57</sup> Yusuf Abd al-Karim Taha al-Rudayni, previously cited work, pp. 237-238.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

2. Yilmaz Oztuna. History of the Ottoman State. Translated by Adnan Mahmud Salman and revised by Mahmud al-Afli. Vol. 1. Istanbul, Turkey: Faisal Finance Foundation, 1988.
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