

SHEIKH UBEYDULLAH'S MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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In 1880, a group of Ottoman tribes attacked land held by Persia. As a result, the whole area to the west of Lake Urumiye was affected. The extent of the attacks reached even the city of Tabriz. The leading figure in this movement was an Ottoman Naqshebendi Sheikh named Ubeydullah. His movement is considered to be the first Kurdish uprising that had national aspirations. The stance of the Ottoman Empire towards this movement had various considerations that shall be evaluated in the context of the depressed time, an era in which pressures toward the empire's dissolution were keenly felt. The aim of the present study is to understand the nature of the sheikh's movement and how it was shaped by international conditions, especially the Ottoman involvement in it.

Key words: 1877-1878 Ottoman- Russian War, Sheikh Ubeydullah, Naqshebendi Order, Eastern Question, Kurdish Movement.

ÖZET

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1880 yılında bir takım Osmanlı aşiretleri İran topraklarına saldırdılar. Sonuç olarak Urmiye Gölünün batısındaki tüm topraklar etkilendi. Saldırıların tesiri Tebriz şehrine bile uzadı. Şeyh Ubeydullah adındaki Osmanlı nakşibendi şeyhi, bu hareketin başını çekiyordu. Hareketi milliyetçi istekleri olan ilk Kürt ayaklanması olarak değerlendirildi. Osmanlı imparatorluğunun bu harekete karşı tavrını, içinde bulunduğu kötü zamanlarına göre değerlendirilenecek türlü fikirler oluşturdu. Uzun zamandan beri imparatorluk üzerinde çözülme etkiliydi. Bu çalışmanın amacı, şeyhin hareketinin yapısını, uluslararası şartların bu hareketi nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve özellikle de bu harekette Osmanlı'nın rolünü incelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1877-1878 Osmanlı- Rus Savaşı, Şeyh Ubeydullah, Nakşibendilik, Doğu Sorunu, Kürt İsyanı.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. MKT. MHM.	Saderet Mektubi Mühimme Kalemî Evrakı
A.MKT. UM	Saderet Umum Vilayetler Tahriratı
HR.SYS.	Hariciye Nezareti Siyasi Kısım
Y. A. Res.	Yıldız Saderet Resmi Maruzat Evrakı
Y. A. Hus.	Yıldız Sadaret Hususî Maruzat Evrakı
Y. EE.	Yıldız Esas Ve Sadrazam Kâmil Paşa
Y. PRK A...	Yıldız Saderet
Y. PRK. ASK.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Askerî Maruzat
Y. PRK.AZJ.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Arzuhal Ve Journaller
Y. PRK. BŞK.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Mabeyn Başkitabeti
Y. PRK. ZB	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Zaptiye Nezareti Maruzatı
Y. PRK. EŞA	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Elçilik, Şehbenderlik ve Ataşemiliterlik
Y. PRK. HR.	Yıldız Perakende Hariciye Nezareti Maruzatı
Y. PRK.KOM	Yıldız Perakende Komisyonlar Maruzatı
Y PRK ML	Yıldız Perakende Maliye Nezareti Maruzatı
Y. PRK. TKM.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Tahrirat-ı Ecnebiye ve Mabeyn Mütercimliği
Y. PRK.UM.	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Umum Vilayetler Tahriratı

Sheikh Ubeydullah's

Movement

Introduction

This study tries to analyze the Sheikh Ubeydullah movement of 1880. As a Naqshebandi-Halidi sheikh with an important position in the order, his movement seemed to be instigated by the religious differences between the Ottoman and Persian Empires. Until this time, both states had been trying to settle their borders and unfortunately the sheikh had some estates that straddled both sides. The recent increasing interest in the Kurdish problem made his movement the most cited example of the first Kurdish arising with national aspirations. Thus the most-quoted letter of Sheikh Ubeydullah to William Abbot, the British consul-general in Tabriz, delivered by Dr. Cochran: “The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different [from that of others], and their laws and customs are distinct The Chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two Governments [Ottoman and Qajar], and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments having understood the matter, shall inquire into our state. We also are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our own hands. . . .”¹ These words were also shocking for the Ottoman central government. In fact, the Ottoman government spent considerable time trying to establish the authenticity of the letter. The state did not find evidence of his conspiracy based on the letter, but when it began to believe that the sheikh would not use his influence in favor of the Ottoman government, he was exiled.

His movement did not seem to have a political agenda. As a movement, which suddenly appeared in the midst of such a sensitive period, it received great attention. The Armenian issue after the Treaty of Berlin brought the allegation that the sultan had tried to create a Kurdish problem in order to curtail “reforms” for the Ottoman Empire’s Christian

¹John Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors*, pp. 109-10.

subjects. The nationalism of the sheikh should be reconsidered in light of this. Although the sheikh always insisted that he had his own land problem with the Persian Empire, he was not reluctant to pursue other problems on behalf of the Kurds. His opponents charged that he had other intentions beside the return of his estates. However, to date no Ottoman documents have been examined towards clearing up this issue. The present study will try to address this gap.

Another point that makes this study crucial is that establishing Hamidian regiments became a political decision after his movement; therefore one cannot comprehend them without first examining his movement. Initially, the study will focus on the roots of the sheikh's influence. His role in the 1877-78 Ottoman and Russian war has been neglected. The disaster of this great defeat makes this neglect even more glaring and lamentable. The international conditions that levered his carrier will be described in the following chapter. Next comes an attempt to explain the sheikh's charisma in the tribal context. Finally, the anatomy of his movement, covered in the final two chapters, will be examined to show what the sheikh's intentions truly were.

Chapter 1

Sheikh Ubeydullah's Role in the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War

At the beginning of 1877, political problems in the Balkan region caused the Ottoman Empire's involvement in military conflict with Russia. The empire was constantly pressed for what the Europeans called "reforms" for its Christian subjects, with much of the unrest in the Balkan provinces supported and encouraged by Russia. Under the guise of such "reforms," Russia was pursuing its pan-Slavic interests, hoping that the situation would give it a suitable opportunity to secure revenge for the Crimean War in both the Balkans and Transcaucasia, where it was using Christian ambitions for conquest to its own advantage. The policies of Czarist imperialism had altered the demographic ratios of the entire east and left local populations to be decimated by local hatreds. According to Richard Hovannisian, a historian of Armenian nationalist movements, "In 1838, after the influx of immigrants from Persia and Turkey, the Armenians constituted one-half of the province's (i.e. Armenian oblast in the Russian Caucasus) 165,000 inhabitants. Moreover, in the remainder of Transcaucasia lived more than 200,000 Armenians, some of whom, moving subsequently to Yerevan-Nakhichevan, contributed to the reestablishment of a Christian majority in the province."² The creation of an Armenian majority in the area left the Muslims as a persecuted minority, forcing the latter to flee to Azerbaijan and elsewhere. These demographic changes generally came after the wars, often through forced immigration. Once the population balance turned against them, the remaining depressed minorities simply resorted to flight due to lack of confidence in the central authority.

The growing tensions among the populace of Transcaucasia found a natural base among the mutual hatreds of local people. During the 1877 campaigns and before, the use of

²Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, p. 10.

local Christians on the Russian side was a significant policy for creating a Czarist hegemony and influence over them. Such a policy exacerbated the existing tensions.

The representatives of European states attended the conference of the powers held on December 23, 1876 at the Ottoman naval headquarters at the Tersane (Naval Shipyard) on the Golden Horn in Istanbul. The meeting was called because of the Ottoman refusal to accept the dictates of the powers following the Ottoman military movement toward Serbia and Montenegro at the end of October, which would have transformed the Ottoman victory into a diplomatic defeat. On the same day the gathering convened, the sultan proclaimed a new constitution establishing a constitutional monarchy for the empire and concluding that the “reforms” demanded by the powers were no longer necessary.

Although the Constitution of 1876 was put into force, there was no time to elect representatives to the provisional assembly, a body that would have the final authority to decide on the alternate proposals made by the Tersane Conference. A temporary General Assembly was called, therefore, to make a decision on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. It met on January 18, 1877, with 180 Muslim and 60 non-Muslim members and decided to resist the proposals and instead protest the Russian demands by declaring war. In the meantime, the Tersane Conference was suspended following proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution. Soon afterwards it met again in London, producing what came to be known as the London Protocol, which, however, also was rejected by the Ottoman General Assembly. Unable to secure its ends by diplomatic means, Russia responded by invading Ottoman territory on April 24, 1877, thus starting the Ottoman-Russian war.

The war went forward on two fronts, first the Balkans, and second in the east in the province of Erzurum, one of the Ottoman Empire’s largest, including the cities of Van, Muş, Erzincan, Bayezid, Kars and Oltu. The Russian Army selected Erzurum and Van as its main objectives, to be followed if possible by Ardahan, Kars and Beyazid. The province of

Erzurum was the headquarters of the Fourth Army and had to be defended if the Russians were to be prevented from occupying all of eastern Anatolia. The battles fought in this area between the Russian invaders and Ottoman defenders devastated the land and aroused its Christian minorities to rise up against their Muslim neighbors, and were, therefore, the main cause of the political, economic and social problems that affected the area for years after the war itself came to an end.

In fact the Ottomans were unprepared both financially and logistically for the war. The empire had been borrowing at very high interest rates since the start of the Crimean War in 1854 and was close to bankruptcy. Russia had far more foot soldiers and horsemen than did the Ottomans. The roads in the area were entirely inadequate to move soldiers, cannons, equipment, food and other materiel to the eastern Anatolian fronts. The Ottoman Army therefore had to rely mainly on irregular infantry and cavalrymen, who habitually refused to obey their officers and went home as soon as their desire for booty from friend and foe alike was satisfied. Furthermore, the regions in which most battles took place were comprised mainly of mountainous terrain, and involved very long winters and springs, which further hindered the Ottoman Army's maneuvers. Support from nearby citizens and especially the promises of notables therefore became critical.

The administrative weakness of the empire further hindered Ottoman military efforts. While the Ottoman government had been trying to eliminate the tax farming system, with its attendant abuses, since the early years of the Tanzimat reform movement, it had not yet been replaced in the eastern provinces in particular, despite Abdulhamid II's serious efforts to establish direct collection of taxes in order to create a strong, efficient bureaucracy. Many civilian offices were still linked directly to military positions. Most appointments to positions in both the bureaucracy and army were achieved by means other than merit, inevitably leading to considerable abuse of the subjects of the sultan, who therefore were far from willing to

assist the empire's war effort. Just as the taxes were farmed to those who placed the highest bid, most administrative offices were given to those who provided the greatest expectations in return. Before the Russian onslaught, thus, most positions of civil government had been given to those who promised to conscript the most soldiers in return. For example Muhtar Paşa mentions that Erzurum Governor Kurt Ismail Paşa had promised to provide 32 regiments of conscripts of Kurds and others living in his area.³

Mehmet Arif tells of regular Major (*nizamiye askeriye miralayı*) Ahmed Bey, who was assigned to organize the irregular cavalries at the Eleşgirt but failed to appear for this task and was not called to account,⁴ who might be one of the Bedirhani's sons.⁵

There were many administrative abuses. For example, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa tells in his memoirs of how when he was appointed commander of the Fourth Army and governor of Erzurum, he arrested 13 Kurds with the help of Nafiz Paşa, the governor of Muş. He wanted to exile them for attacking and torturing local Christians, but they were not found guilty because the victims were afraid to testify against them.

Taxes were collected arbitrarily and subject to the abuse of collectors. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa tells of the collecting of tithes in Kars. Strategically, he insisted that taxes for the year 1875 be collected in kind rather than in cash and that the collected tithes be stored in the citadel of Kars. Some of the taxes had been collected in kind until the Russian Consul Ignatiev gave a guarantee. Moreover, the need for cash forced the Ottoman government to accept taxes as payment in cash. Later when Muhtar Paşa was appointed the general commander of Bosnia and Herzegovina, these collected grains were sold to the Russians with the permission of Sami Paşa, who had replaced him.⁶

³ Gazi Muhtar Paşa, *Anadoluda Rus Muharebeleri*, p. 25.

⁴ Mehmed Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler*, p. 396.

⁵ Malmisanij, *Cizre Botanlı Bedirhaniler*, p. 99.

⁶ Gazi Muhtar Paşa, *Sergüzeşt-i Hayatımın Cild-i Evveli*, p. 105. During the Balkan crisis, Muhtar Paşa appointed as general commander of Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 5, 1875 therefore he left the Erzurum for a while. When Muhtar Paşa returned back to his position as the commander of Anatolian General Army,

Anatolian Army commander Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa was informed by General Kurt Ismail Paşa, the governor of Erzurum, that he had brought together 32 rows of soldiers from the provinces of Erzurum and Hakkari, and that in addition local religious leader Sheikh Ubeydullah would come with 50,000 horsemen, and that Circassian Colonel Musa Paşa would bring four regiments of horsemen conscripted from refugees and immigrants from the Russian Caucasus who had gathered in the area of the Samsun province. The chief of Staff told Ahmed Muhtar Paşa that 100 rows had been assigned to the Fourth Army, but Muhtar found that in fact there were only 57,560 soldiers, most of whom were not sufficiently trained to be effective fighters against the organized Russian Army. Muhtar further found that the supply services in the area were almost nonexistent and concluded that he would have to defend a frontier of more than 300 kilometers with no more than 48,000 soldiers.⁷

Sheikh Ubeydullah was leading a group of auxiliaries in this war. Various authors give different figures for their strength. For example, Garo Sasuni says that the Kurds entered the 1877 war with Russia in support of the Ottomans under the command of Sheikh Celalettin,⁸ Sheikh Ubeydullah and Sheikh Ubeydullah's young son Sheikh Abdulkadir, who altogether brought 50,000 soldiers centered at Beyazid. Garo Sasuni reports that during the Crimean War as well as the Ottoman-Russian War of 1828, the Kurds had openly allied with the Russians against the Ottomans in the hope of securing independence. He adds that the new governor of Van under Sultan Abdhamid II poisoned Sheikh Celalettin on the orders of the sultan, while

Sami Paşa was moved to Greece. Sami Paşa would later get a leading role as the commander of Fourth Army in establishing order during the Sheikh Ubeydullah movement.

⁷ Gazi Muhtar Paşa, *Anadoluda Rus Muharebeleri*, p. 24 and Dr. Rifat Uçarol, *Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Paşa*, p. 72. The information about the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War is taken from memoirs written after the war, especially those of Gazi Muhtar Paşa and Mehmet Arif. Muhtar Paşa, former commander of the Fourth Army, initially published his memoirs under the title "Sergüzeşt-i Hayatımın Cild-i Evveli," wherein he gave a general account of his life. Later he published "*Anadolu'da Rus Muharebesi 1876-1877*" as a history of the Anatolian War. The authors of both memoirs tried to refute accusations concerning the great defeat. Some commanders were sentenced for their errors after the war. The defeat had been good reason to blame the opposite faction among various cliques in the army. Their data about the general numbers of the army seems accurate because both of them held official positions and could provide documentation. Yet they both had a negative attitude towards the "irregulars." Both Arif and Muhtar's memoirs have subjective aspects, since after the war everyone looked for a scapegoat on which to lay blame.

⁸ Sufficient information about Sheikh Cemalettin is lacking. He might be another Naqshbandi sheikh from the Erzincan province.

Sheikh Ubeydullah was sent on pilgrimage to Mecca after his defeat by the Russians at Beyazid.⁹

Muzaffer İlhan Erdost states that Seyid İslam Geylani, in a personal interview, claimed that with Sheikh Ubeydullah he joined the Ottoman Army in the war with Russia with 40,000 irregular horsemen recruited from Diyarbakır, Rızaiye (Urmiye), Sulaimaniyah and Van.¹⁰ In his petition to the sultan, Sheikh Ubeydullah said that he had collected at least 40,000 cavalry and auxiliary soldiers and entered the war without any provisions or payment for seven months.¹¹

Gazi Muhtar Paşa's memoirs do not give any detailed information on the contribution of irregular soldiers to the Ottoman Army during the war with Russia. He does mention that one of the leading Ottoman generals, İsmail Hakkı Bey, and others were only able to collect a force of 15,000 soldiers 10 days after the war began, but that when the enemy attacked Ardahan, all of these troops fled.¹² Avreyanov, on the other hand, writes that İsmail Hakkı was the most industrious of the local commanders, a man who tried to influence the Kurds in favor of supporting the Ottoman army, but maintained his power through harsh and cruel methods. İsmail Hakkı was firmly devoted to the sultan and showed little mercy when dealing with Kurds. He was famous among them because he himself was a Kurd from Kars and former governor of Diyarbakır. His fame spread as a result of his success in suppressing local uprisings in the Egil, Ahcankent, Bohtan and Cezire areas. Arif claims that İsmail Paşa's family had substantial influence among the Karapapaks due to his father's stay in the district of Şüregel, thus claiming that he was not of Kurdish origin.¹³

Such methods seem to have caused the Kurds not to respond to Sami Paşa's December 1876 call for men from the provinces of Van, Bitlis and Muş. The tribes felt they were

⁹ Garo Sasuni, *15 yy.da Günümüze Kürt Ermeni İlişkileri*, p. 150.

¹⁰ Muzaffer İlhan Erdost, *Şemdinli Röportajı*, p. 40.

¹¹ Y. PRK. AZJ... 4/96 12 October 1881.

¹² Gazi Muhtar Paşa, *Anadoluda Rus Muharebeleri*, p. 49

¹³ Mehmed Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler*, p. 171.

exempted from military services so that not even previously trained soldiers were willing to report, nor did they even respond to calls for enrollment of irregular auxiliaries.¹⁴ Sultan Abdülhamit II therefore felt that appealing to the hearts of true believers was a better choice than ordering his oppressive commanders to conscript soldiers from among depressed and unwilling tribesmen.

Averyarov mentions Abdulhamid's declaration of holy war under the green flag of the Prophet, and considers it to have been effective to a certain extent, even though the Kurds felt the sultan was not a real caliph because he lacked direct descent from the Prophet, while most Kurdish sheiks claimed such descent. The Kurds of Botan, in fact, claimed to be descendants of the Abbasid Dynasty, and consequently used the Abbasid flag during their rebellions against the Ottomans. Avreyarov thus claimed that Sheikh Ubeydullah, leader of the small Oramar tribe of Hakkari, was a descendant of the Prophet's nephew, Hazret-i Khaled.¹⁵

According to Avreyarov, Sheikh Ubeydullah felt he was defending Islam rather than the Caliphate, and entered the war with 300 followers (*murid*) from his *tekke*. Avreyarov felt it was far more effective to call Kurds to battle in defense of Islam as such rather than the caliphate. In general the call was effective even though the tribes remained reluctant to contribute men to the Ottoman Army. The Kurds considered the military contribution a good opportunity for a probable general amnesty.¹⁶ The constant military actions for implementing central policies and administrative reorganizations wore away at local privileges. Their way of implementation, as seen in the memoirs, were at the root of the regional disobedience of the call to arms. Since the tribes were most affected by the process, they replied to the 1877 call by remembering the military exemption which they enjoyed in the old times.

Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Paşa tells of a telegram sent to him from Chief of Staff Mustafa Paşa, who pointed to the need to support the Anatolian Army in order to prevent Russian

¹⁴ Averyarov *19. Asırda Rusya, Türkiye İran Muharebeleri* p. 89.

¹⁵ *ibid.* pp. 89-90 Consequently Averyarov also mentions Russian's resort to the Kurdish auxiliaries.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 91.

invasion after the Alacadağ defeat. Therefore Sheikh Ubeydullah, whose appeal spanned from Süleymaniye to Bayezid, was appealed to for help. He was asked to provide and send at least 6,000 auxiliary cavalries to a place specified by Muhtar Paşa. Mustafa Paşa ordered Muhtar Paşa to reward the sheikh and declare these orders with a suitable tone. He further demanded that the conscripted and arriving armies should be treated kindly. In reply to the telegram, Muhtar Paşa said that these auxiliary troops had arrived without any provisions, which made the situation worse. Therefore, he requested necessary provisions from the center. Muhtar Paşa comments in his memoirs that he did not mention specifically Sheikh Ubeydullah in the telegram dated November 24,¹⁷ because before that, many messages were also taken and the necessary replies given. In one of them he related that the followers of the sheikh had loved him more while he was sitting in his lodge (tekke). “From the beginning of the conflict, the sheikh informed Istanbul via the governor about his promise to join them with a 50,000-strong cavalry. However he came to serve with only around 1,500, which observably caused harm rather than good. Later, citing as a pretext the disrespect shown him and the little care given his soldiers, the sheikh departed. When he realized his importance as stressed in the telegrams, the sheikh began to declare his intention to join the Persian side, since revenues from many villages and counties were his due as a privilege (arpalık) by the Iranian departed. He wrote to the Van governor that he must be told whether it was demanded of him that he refrain from this act [i.e., crossing to the Persian side, so that he could enjoy the benefits involved].”¹⁸

Averyarov gives details about the sheikh’s role in the 1877-78 war. He describes the secondary role given to Kurdish auxiliaries conscripted in Van so as to block Russia’s Yerevan forces in case they attacked. These auxiliaries were under the command of Faik Paşa. The notables of these forces were Sheikh Abdullah (Siirt), Sheikh Hamza (Siirt), Muslih

¹⁷ Gazi Muhtar Paşa gives the date according to the old calendar in *Anadoluda Rus Muharebeleri*, p. 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 142.

Efendi (Erzincan) and Mehmet Efendi (Bitlis) and other Kurdish chiefs. The most important role belonged to Sheikh Ubeydullah Efendi. Whether the Kurds would help truly help the Ottoman government very soon become unclear: “In January 1877, the sheikh moved to the province of Van. Although he began to conscript all the Kurds in the Van district, when Faik Paşa came to Van two-and-half months later – that is, on April 9 – he could find no Kurdish horsemen. Even though Faik Paşa tried to get take precautionary measures by sending his officers and sergeants to bring the auxiliaries, the formation of forces at Van became very loose and unsuccessful. During the war, forces under the command of Faik Paşa only approached 11,000-12,000 men. Other than sergeants and officers under cadre, most of Faik Paşa’s forces consisted of Kurds. Therefore Faik Paşa could not rely on regular Ottoman units and had to be satisfied with these auxiliaries.”¹⁹

Avreyarov attributed this failure to the inability of establishing and supplying a war center at Van on time and making necessary provisions and payments to Kurdish militias. “Each cavalry promised to be given 300 piastre (18 Russian ruble), which they could not get. Faik Paşa was lazy and not able to use stick policy as good as Ismail Hakkı Paşa. This fact, in turn, promoted the negative and rebellious behaviors of Kurds. The most important reason of all was that; Kurds were reluctant to enter the war before it began, since they would not be able to seizure and pillage in that case. Their army center was far away from the Russian frontier leaving them a little time for pillaging, because they had to carry the goods to their homes soon after their attacks. When regular soldiers were near, there was no way open for them to seizure in their own country.”²⁰

These ideas of the Russian officer reflected a sharp contrast with the Ottoman officer Arif, who said that the auxiliary forces could not be gathered on time, because it was very hard to supply and transfer them. Even if the war had not taken place, the problem of

¹⁹ Avreyarov, 19. *Asırda Rusya, Türkiye İran Muharebeleri*, pp. 97-98.

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 98.

provisions would have been a great burden.²¹ Mehmet Arif writes that Sheikh Ubeydullah joined the Eleşgirt regiment with 1,000-2,000 auxiliary horsemen and soldiers at a time two months later than expected, when he heard that the Ottoman Army had crossed the Russian frontier at Beyazid.²²

Avreyarov also points to the same difficult position of the Ottoman forces by citing one of the telegrams of Faik Paşa to Ahmet Muhtar Paşa. When the government recognized the disorder in the army, it asked for its exact condition and why the sheikh had not kept his promises. Faik Paşa replied that the demands of the sheikh had not been satisfied, which made the transfers slow and according to the sheikh, the militias were still en route from various remote regions. Some of these militias arrived only under constant pressure from Faik Paşa. In April, Faik Paşa moved to Bargiri (Muradiye) by the order of Ahmed Muhtar Paşa. According to Faik Paşa's report of May 20 to Ahmed Paşa, the militias promised by the sheikh had not yet arrived: "On May 10 Faik Paşa had 500 Kurdish cavalries, and by May 20 this force had reached 1,000. On May 25 it numbered 5,000, and on May 27 it was understood that a force of 7,000-8,000 men had been gathered. Later with the additions this force reached 12,000 men. Despite this, their attacks were very weak. The leading units were only able to reach the Aladağ passes on May 30."²³

On April 30, Russia's Yerevan forces had conquered Beyazid without encountering opposition. Beyazid was at the intersection of the Russian-Iranian frontier. Its geographical situation made it hard to defend against the Russians. Ottoman forces fell back to Bargiri without carrying general goods. The Russian Army occupied Beyazid with around 1,500 soldiers. When Ottoman forces at Eleşgirt attacked the Russians on the way to Diyadin, Ahmed Paşa ordered Faik Paşa to move towards Beyazid. He arrived with two regiments along with 3,000 irregular soldiers and ragtag horsemen which he had collected since the

²¹ Mehmed Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler*, p. 172.

²² *ibid*, p. 236.

²³ Averyarov, *19. Asırda Rusya, Türkiye İran Muharebeleri*, p. 99.

beginning of war.²⁴ Avreyanov gives the total as 15,000.²⁵ Two Russian infantry regiments had remained in one of the barracks in the center of town. After negotiations, the soldiers agreed to leave their guns and become prisoners of war. But while exiting the barracks in order to hand over their guns, they were attacked by Kurds, who killed most of them. With the help of Kurdish leaders, Faik Paşa tried to prevent the torture of the surviving soldiers. Seeing the inevitable treatment they would face, the soldiers ran back to the barracks and refused to submit. Seventy of the surrendered soldiers were robbed. Later these soldiers were dressed and sent to Istanbul by the way of Halep.

Faik Paşa then left two battalions of regulars under the command of Colonel Mehmet Münip Paşa. When Sheik Ubeydullah insisted, three cannons were given to these battalions. The Russian infantries remained under constant fire for 30 days. On June 13, the Russian Army sent 1,500 horsemen and soldiers to help, but they retreated after losing 40 of their number. The pinned down soldiers were only saved after General Ter Gukasov entered the city of Beyazid and retreated on July 2.²⁶ Later Faik Paşa was relieved of command due to this affair.

Arif tells of Kurds opening the graves of the Russian soldiers who were killed at the Halyaz battle in order to rob the corpses of their clothes.²⁷ In general, he criticized the Circassian and Kurdish cavalries' abuse and mistreatment of local peasants, especially the Armenians. Even the regulars were not supplied with sufficient foods and clothes during the war. Not surprisingly, serious epidemics struck the population and necessary medical treatment was scarce. Charles Ryan tells of seeing dogs eating human flesh in Erzurum where he served as a doctor under the Red Crescent.²⁸

²⁴ Mehmed Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler*, p. 376.

²⁵ Averyarov 19. *Asırda Rusya, Türkiye İran Muharebeleri*, p. 104.

²⁶ Mehmed Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler*, p. 378

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 378.

²⁸ Charles R. Ryan, *Kızılay Emri Altında Plevne ve Erzurum'da*, p. 200.

All the above information brings to mind the much-neglected role of Sheikh Ubeydullah in the Ottoman-Russian war. He played an important role in the conflict, which attracted a base that he would use later in his movement of 1880. How Sheikh Ubeydullah used his influence on the other sheiks is hard to determine, since their motives for entering the war are not available to us. In any case, one can expect that Sheikh Ubeydullah made good use of his spiritual charisma over the others by occupying a leading position in the Naqshbandi-Halidi order. One of the main causes of the war had been religious differences, which created an arena for the sheikh to wield his power.

The spread of diseases and famines due to the war was no less effective than the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order thoughts. The poverty-stricken population easily gathered around the sheikh to support his campaigns towards Tabriz and Urmiye. The defeated Ottoman soldiers left most of their guns in the field. Some of these guns had been directly distributed to the conscripted auxiliary horsemen. Arif says that the cavalries also demanded the Henry Martini rifles which they saw in the hands of the soldiers. These rifles were long and difficult to use on horseback. When the advantages of their longer firing range was recognized in a cavalry confrontation, some Henry Martini rifles were brought from the store of Kars and distributed to the horsemen. The horsemen had been using Winchesters, which have a shorter range than the Russian Berdan-type rifles.²⁹ It is easier to gauge the effects of these rifles in the hands of Kurds than to determine the teachings of Mevlana Khaled among the hearts of sincere believers. Thus Iskender Quryans³⁰ told how these guns changed hands after the defeat: “During the Russian and Ottoman war, Sheikh Ubeydullah, like the wolf spying his prey and hunting grounds clearly in the mist, with his son Sheikh Sadık and some other

²⁹ Arif, *Başımıza Gelenler* p. 417.

³⁰ Iskender Quryans, *Kiyam-e Şeyh Ubeydullah der Kurdistan*, p. 24. His book is an important source published in Persian in Ramazan 1298 giving detailed information about the sheik's movement towards Iran. He was an ethnic Armenian Russian citizen living in the city of Sawjbulak, and he had prejudices against the sheikh. A brief survey of the work will show that it is clearly a summary of Prince Nadir Mirza's "Tarih ve Cografya-i Daru'S-Saltanat-e Tabriz," in fact the latter book devotes an entire chapter to the sheikh movement. Ibid, p. 11 and *Tarih Cografya-i Daru'S-Saltanat-i Tabriz*, pp. 304-52.

sheikhs fought and conquered Beyazid on behalf of Ottoman concerns. After that, they promised the governor of Van they would collect 50,000 Kurdish units under the sheikh's order and fight with the Russians. The Ottoman state asked them to go to the capital city, but instead all of them sent only their spokesmen to Istanbul. The sheikh also appointed Reşid Beğ in his place. When these envoys reached Istanbul, they gave many inconsistent and unfulfillable promises and took some honorary medals before returning. When the sheikh was in Van, the governor told him that his stay there was necessary so that when they were faced with Russian attack, no siege would ensue. But the sheikh knew that he lacked reliable men to oppose the enemy in an orderly, disciplined way in a time of war. He was afraid of his corruption and fatigue and paid no heed to the governor's words. He returned to his place and after that, asked permission from the Porte to go Caucasia and wage war against the Russians, but no such permission was forthcoming. The mood of the sheikh and his followers, the brigand Kurds, was never at one with the Ottoman government, nor were they wholly obedient. During the last Russian and Ottoman war, initially the sheikh's followers united en masse with the Başibozuks during the war hoping for loot and booty, but when the Ottoman soldiers' defeat seemed imminent, they were in fact the first to pillage the Ottoman Army. They took expensive guns, among them Henry Martini rifles, from the hands of fleeing soldiers and took them to the Iranian frontier where they sold the guns cheaply." He also told of the militias under the sheikh's command plundering the 50 Armenian villages around Başkale and turning their military installations at Eleşgirt into a desert. They sacked the tomb of St. Bartholomew, an important pilgrimage place for the local Armenians, and razed it with the help of the son of Ali Han Şikaki. Quryans claims that later, the son of the sheikh came to argue with the son of Ali Han Şikaki over the booty, and some were killed.³¹ Here Quryans seemed to confuse the conflict between Ali Khan Şikaki's son Maşe and the sheikh's son

³¹ *ibid.* p. 25.

Abdulkadir. The conflict between them did not arise from the old dispute over the distribution of pillage booty as Quryans claimed, but rather from a different source entirely. According to Celile Celil, in the beginning of July 1880 the governor of Urumiye asked Abdulkadir to collect taxes from the Somai district and bring them to the government. Abdulkadir refused. Then the governor resorted to another notable Kurdish leader in the region to apply his divide-and-rule policy. Therefore Ali Khan sent his son to the Somai district. Sheikh Ubeydullah made preparations to send military help to Abdulkadir. Ali Khan grew frightened when he heard of these preparations, so he avoided carrying out the governor's orders. His son Maş visited the sheikh in order to show his loyalty. Ali Khan told the governor that he had had no opportunity to complete the assigned task due to the threat of a clash with the sheikh.³²

When the city of Beyazid was captured on June 9-11, the Kurds confiscated the property there, making no distinction between Muslims and Christians. The leaders ignored these injustices, because they were unable to keep their promises of stipend payments and so such acts by the militias were considered inevitable. After a short time, they scattered to the Beyazid plain and plundered even the local Kurdish villages. Averyanof tells of the invasion of Surp Ohannes, an Armenian Church by Kurdish militias on June 13 June. But a Russian Army major named Karapivi unexpectedly attacked them while they were still at the monastery. He set fire to it, and as a result 37 men were burned alive. Avreyanof claimed that most of them were important tribal leaders and sheikhs.³³

Basil Nikitine also points to the importance of these rifles in the initial confrontation of the sheikh with the governor of Azerbaijan. He puts the number of Ubeydullah's tribal conscripts who during the war were encamped around Van and Başkale at 70,000. They returned from the war empty handed, much to their disappointment. But they were able to procure much military materiel such as Henry Martini rifles with cartridges. This made the

³² Celile Celil, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri Kürt Ayaklanması*, p. 89. Later Ali Han Şikak with Timur Paşa committed excesses to suppress the villagers after the 1880 movement of the sheikh. Y. PRK. ASK... 5/70.

³³ Averyanov, *ibid.* p. 106.

frontier region attractive, and there were many incursions towards the border zone. Around that time Ahmed Mirza Mu'in Devle was assigned to the Urmiye governorship in order to administer and completely regulate the frontier affairs. When Major Ikbalu'd Devle was assigned to the same post to succeed him, he immediately prepared a report on the sheikh's dangerous intentions,³⁴ which however failed to get the attention it deserved. When Seyit Abdulkadir (the son of Sheikh Ubeydullah) invaded the Mergaver district with Hamza Ağa Mangur, and they attacked the Sawjbulak (Mahabad) district with powerful forces, his brother rushed to Somai Baradost with 4,000 cavalries and soldiers. Ikbal Devle left Urumiyeh with the Ninth Regiment of Khoy together with the Seventh and Eighth Afşar Regiments of Muhacir and Karacadağ. At that time, most of the new Afşar regiments under the command of Mehmed Bagir Han Suca Devle were at Horasan in order to protect the frontier, and the others were at Şiraz under the command of Bagir Han Sertip. The guns of the officers were the old models; there were only 400-500 of the new-type rifles. When Ikbal Devle met Sheikh Sıddık forces near the Kasalar and Badilbu region, there were substantial casualties and losses.³⁵

Chapter 2

International Conditions

A brief review of international conditions will be useful for understanding how the Ottoman naqshebandi sheikh's movement became a source of acute concern for powers in the region. The 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War ended with the catastrophic defeat of Ottoman forces as well as the Russian Army uncomfortably near Istanbul. When the British fleet appeared at the Dardanelles Straits, it became clear that the lion's share of the conditions would be determined by Russia and Great Britain. In this context a weak Ottoman Empire served the common interest of both powers, since its collapse would cause huge problems for the issue

³⁴ Basil Nikitine, "*Les Afsars D'Urumiyeh*" in p. 99 of *Journal Asiatique* XXXIV, (January/March, 1929).

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 101.

of partition. The Russian presence in the eastern Mediterranean was unacceptable for Britain due to the importance of the Suez Canal as its gateway to the Indian Ocean. A weak state on the Straits also meant the postponement of a decisive Russian blow until it could acquire the necessary power to realize its ambitions on Istanbul. Throughout the century the constant threat of Russia against European concert had been checked by coalitions spearheaded by Britain. In this struggle, the Near East and especially the Ottoman Empire were the foci of tensions. During the Crimean War, Russia came to realize its military incompetence, thus proving that its expansionist policies were not without cost. The monarchic empire was incompetent in dealing with persistent internal tensions and rather than suppressing reform demands in the continent, it had to face its domestic problems. Whereas maintaining the status quo had been the Russian Empire's classic international policy, after its Crimean defeat this policy turned from protecting and establishing reactionary monarchies on the Continent towards a basis of supporting nascent national states. Moreover, realizing that the Near East was blocked, Russia found in the Middle and Far East a new frontier in which to expand. In 1865-76 such petty khanates as Tashkent, Bokhara, Samarkand and Khiva, plus Kokand in the Middle East, were annexed to Russian territory.³⁶ In this period, Russia tried to strengthen its position in the Transcaucassia, and its central foreign policy concerns shifted from the Ottoman Empire to Iran.

The insecurity and misadministration in Persia created an unstable balance that could pave the way for foreign intervention. When Persia occupied Herat in 1856, Great Britain retaliated by landing an expeditionary force at Bushire. Persia was forced to evacuate Herat, but the incident showed that it was not impossible for Russia to establish a puppet government in Tehran through giving military support to a possible prince. When Nasreddin Shah realized that foreign intervention was unavoidable, he adopted a policy of encouraging foreign powers

³⁶ Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy* p. 169.

to invest in Persia in the hope that they would help spur development and prosperity.

Nasreddin had visited Europe three times, evidence of his leaning towards westernization, but the fragmented state of Persian society and the competition of powers and factions over concessions and monopolies led to the failure of his policies.³⁷

During the Balkan crisis a small frontier skirmish took place between Ottoman and Persian forces, thus indicating the potential future for the movement of the sheikh. In this incident some Persians attacked the border village of Kaşkabulak. When villagers asked the nearby garrison for help, a captain named Ahmed Ağa took 10 of his soldiers to protect the village. During the clashes, one Ottoman soldier was killed and the others were wounded, as the Persian soldiers outnumbered the Ottomans. Seven captured Ottoman soldiers along with their captain were taken to the city of Khoy. The Ottomans, however, had also captured a Persian captain and seven soldiers and claimed that they were captured during the clashes. The Persian ministry, for its part, depicted rather a different picture from the Ottomans. It declared that in an Ottoman attack on the Persian border its forces had captured a captain and seven soldiers, and claimed that when some Ottoman soldiers in the Khotour region heard of this, they invited a Persian captain and seven soldiers to breakfast as a ruse to capture them. Eventually the prisoners of this undeclared border clashes on both sides were exchanged.

It is useful to remember that the indefinite frontier and lack of communications at that time made such maneuvers possible for both sides, but the ratio between the captives makes the Persian account more credible in this particular event. The Ottoman ambassador, after stressing the empire's military might, said that although facing a crisis in the Balkans region, the empire's remaining territory was at peace, adding that the Erzurum and Baghdad armies were not affected by the existing conflict. After extending some diplomatic assurances, the Persian side asserted that such incidents happen in order keep the border secure and prevent

³⁷ Ann K. S. Lambton, *Kajar Persia*, p. 24.

aggression from the Ottoman tribes, insisting further that the reason for dispatching soldiers to the frontier was the Ushnu affair and provocation by Sheikh Ubeydullah. The Erzurum Governorship denied these claims, claiming that on the contrary, Sheikh Ubeydullah was holding back disorder.³⁸ This incident, in which the two sides' retaliation was both inconclusive and unproductive, underscores the persistently unsettled nature of the border dispute.

It was not only the sheikh's charisma that permeated through the weak border between Ottoman territory and Iran. The holy places of Najaf (Necef) and Karbala (Kerbala) were of the utmost concern to the Shiite sect. These places increasingly interested Iran's government during the last quarter of the 19th century. Through their control the Persian state tried to garner popular support. The holy shrines of the Imams are an important component of Shiite Islam. Together with the incursions of unsettled tribes on both sides of the border, the holy places and Iraq's Shiite minority was jeopardizing relations between the two empires. The tribes crossed the unsettled borders either because their traditional ways of pasturing forced them to do so, or because they simply wanted to benefit from lucrative trade or pillaging to supplement their standard of living. In this case the lip service each central government paid to allowing provocative acts by their subject tribes exasperated its counterpart, which then retaliated for the offenses committed.

The Persians followed a policy that attracted the Porte's attention. Shahzade (prince) Husame Sultane, the shah's uncle as well as a skilled, important top Iranian commander, had already declared his intention to occupy Baghdad were he ordered to do so. While he wanted to make a pilgrimage to Mecca with his retinue, he stated that such a task would be very easy and worth dying for, pointing to the opportunities realized during the empire's handling of the Balkan crisis. The official correspondence from the Ottoman Embassy in Tehran to the

³⁸ Y.A. Res 1,1 from the Ottoman Embassy in Tehran to the Foreign Ministry, 1293-9-21.

Foreign Ministry informs that 10,000 kiyye bullets were ordered from Qazvin to Tabriz to send to the border troops, and at the same time the Persian government assigned a special commission to buy artillery from the United States, choosing the same Henry Martini rifles used by the Ottoman Army. More portentously, the shah consulted his court and decided to take back Karbala at the earliest opportunity. The Ottoman ambassador said that the shah found it useful to prepare troops and conscript soldiers from various provinces, totaling 40,000 for that purpose all told.³⁹

Ironically the reason the shah bypassed Istanbul en route to St. Petersburg was attributed to the 1877-78 war, when the shah chose to travel via St. Petersburg in order to visit an international exhibition in Paris. The Ottoman ambassador noted the jubilation, both spoken and unspoken, in the court of Iran when Kars fell to the Russians and the Ottoman Army retreated to Erzurum. Although they had always stressed the general solidarity of Islam, the shah met with a Russian general who had been at Kars the very day he arrived in Tehran, which was unusually hasty as normally such meetings occurred only after a two- or three-day wait. The Ottoman ambassador also warned that if the Ottoman Army were attacked at the beginning of spring, the Persians might march towards Van and Baghdad. The fact that the Russian influence was increasingly felt in Persia can be also seen in the same correspondence of the Ottoman ambassador from Tehran, this time telling of another general called Frankini, who after staying six or seven months in Tehran returned to Tblisi via Tabriz. Meanwhile he contributed to military reforms and arranged the artillery while in Tehran.⁴⁰

The Eastern Question

After the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, the foundation of the Three Emperors League had to be modified under the newly unified Germany. Russia began to pursue its privileges in the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Y.A.Hus. 1,30 from the Ottoman Embassy in Tehran to the Foreign Ministry 1295-3-7.

Balkans under the pretext of pan-Slavism rather than the protection of Orthodox Christians. The direct emphasis on nationality rather than religion constituted a more potent policy against the Ottomans. The freedom of southern Slavs from Muslim rule under the leadership of Russia was the main aim of pan-Slavism. In general, the Balkan population began to be more exposed to nationalist agitation. Pan-Slavism also attracted popular support among influential individuals in Russia's court and society, which affected its support for an imperial ideology.⁴¹ The 1875 Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis and the 1876 Bulgarian rebellion had led to a European reaction against the Ottomans, something that Russia manipulated easily in the international diplomatic arena. These crises lessened the Russophobia felt in Europe and also helped secure Austrian assent for a Russian military campaign in the Balkans, even though pan-Slavist propaganda also had implications for the Slavs under Habsburg yoke. The Ottoman Empire was unable to implement necessary "reforms" for its Christian subjects, and the Russians declared war on the empire when its international public image was at an all-time low.

When the possibility of Russian occupation of Istanbul emerged, Britain moved its fleet through the Dardanelles on February 18, 1878. The negotiations of February 19-March 3 ended with the Treaty of San Stefano. Britain was alarmed by Russia's acquisitions in Asia Minor and the possibility it could advance further through "Armenia" to the Mediterranean Sea. The port of Batum could become a suitable naval base for attacks on Istanbul. On March 27, Disraeli persuaded the Cabinet to call up the reserves and have troops moved from India to Malta for the secret purpose of seizing a military installation in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴² On June 4 Great Britain offered its protection to Istanbul against further Russian encroachments in exchange for its occupation of Cyprus. Although a naval base at Cyprus and a fleet in the Aegean could offset a Russian threat through the Straits and keep the status quo

⁴¹Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 174.

⁴²Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian Great Britain*, p. 131.

so Britain could retain superior naval power, the new Russian acquisitions in eastern Anatolia and its influence on local Christians would give it an opportunity to expand overland to the Mediterranean or to Basra, something Britain could hardly check. When the Great Powers assembled at the Berlin Congress on June 13, a new dimension was added to the Eastern Question.

During the decade after the war, the complicated nature of the Armenian problem and the ambiguity of the provisional reforms remained unresolved. By carrying the threat of instability, the sheikh movement in the region abetted these issues resisting solution. The alarming international recognition that his movement received can be seen in this context.

As stated in Article LX of the Treaty of Berlin, “The valley of Alascherd and the town of Bayazid, ceded to Russia by Article XIX of the Treaty of San Stefano, are restored to Turkey. The Sublime Porte cedes to Persia the town and territory of Khotour, as fixed by the mixed Anglo-Russian Commission for the delimitation of the frontiers of Turkey and Persia.”

A brief evaluation of Article LX is a simple matter: Through an acquisition of the strategically important valley of Alascherd, possible further Russian land encroachment against the Ottomans was prevented and the massive Russian land gains to date were in a sense offset. But the cessation of Khotour territory to Persia would be the next issue between the empires through its status as an important pass to Urmiye from Van. Article LXI of the treaty stipulated, however, “The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application.”⁴³

⁴³ American Journal of International Law, Volume 2, Issue 4, Supplement: Official Documents (Oct. 1908), pp. 401-24.

The ambiguity of Article LXI was obvious, since the means for the Sublime Porte to realize the implementation of these reforms after such a defeat remained obscure. In fact after the urgent problems of Montenegro and Thessaly were solved, the Porte constantly cited its insufficient administrative and financial situation as a pretext for deferring reforms or at least delaying them. As for the demands for reforms, military consuls assigned to the region accomplished nothing more than piling up the number of petitions remaining unresolved.⁴⁴ Moreover, these military consuls also changed the assignments of many governors who were considered to be slowing down the reforms. The consuls there, in the eyes of Muslims and Christians alike, were a “continual reminder of the overshadowing power of the Christian kingdom of the West. They were a sign to the people, an omen of the future, ‘casting out devils’ in a literal sense, for a where a Mohammedan governor was found by them oppressive beyond the average, his deposition followed.”⁴⁵

The Circassians and the Kurds were seen as the sole troublemakers. Their removal from office was firmly recommended by the consuls. Because of the prejudice against them as being completely illiterate nomads, they were excluded from the entire reform initiative, so the local Muslim majority became part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

The reforms did not suffice to satisfy the desires of the locals, neither the Muslims nor the Christians. Although they were implemented as a British containment policy against Russian expansion in the Asiatic provinces, soon the Armenians began to prepare for revolt in places where they could count on Russian assistance in achieving their aims. The British fear of “Armenians thrown into the arms of Russians” was uppermost in British diplomatic policy until March 1881, when Czar Alexander II was assassinated by a nihilist. Afterwards, Russian policy became more restrictive against the nationalist affairs of its Armenian subjects.

⁴⁴ Garo Sasuni claimed that in 1860-70, the Armenian Patriarchate forwarded 529 decrees to the attention of the Porte. At total of 144 of them were directly related to Kurds, p. 149.

⁴⁵ John Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors*, p. 104, quotation from Charles W. Watson, *The Life of Major General Sir Charles Watson* (London, 1909) p. 106.

The movement of the sheikh to the extent of bringing Russian intervention on behalf of Armenians was alarming for the British consuls, as on December 29 when a Persian general arrived in Van demanding the punishment of the sheikh as well as the surrender to Persian authorities of Kurds who had fled across the frontier. Reportedly, the Russians had 40,000 men with 40 or 50 guns near Nakhichevan and there was a bridge train at Yerevan and other equipment for taking the field. It is supposed that this concentration of troops was meant to lend assistance to Persia in case such was needed.⁴⁶

Russian involvement in the affair was weakening the already delicate balance established in the region and moreover led Britain to put more pressure on the Porte to settle the dispute. On February 25, Van Consul Captain Clayton informed Major Trotter about 150,000 Armenians ready to cross the frontier to give assistance, adding that the Russian government had encouraged them and sold them arms for a quarter of the price originally paid. Captain Clayton relied on his interview with a Mr. Barnum, an American missionary who based his information on two Armenians from Tblisi sent there by their committees. These Armenians told Barnum that all preparations had been made to come the assistance of Turkish Armenians in the autumn, as when Sheikh Ubeydullah first began to move. At first it was supposed that he was coming to massacre the Christians, but when his moves were observed and understood, the movement was postponed. The consul thought if the sheikh rose up again, this would be a signal for the movement among Armenians as well, and in his words “there seems to be very little doubt that [the sheikh] is making great preparations for a fresh rising in the spring. From all sides reports come in of drilling among the Kurds, and it is said that the sheikh is paying his troops, giving 2 liras a month to the officers, and a medjidie a month to the men. The British consuls saw Turkish authorities, however, profess to place no

⁴⁶ From Bilal N. Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, p. 192 document, inclosure 3 in No. 58. FO 424/122 p. 60 No. 35/3. The Persian governor was Sipahsalar Y.A Res. 10/3 16 December Sipahsalar ASK..ed for the return of the fugitives, and Serip Mirza Rıza Han was sent for the coordination and arrest of the culprits and subjects of the Ottomans, especially the sheikh and his son.

credit in these reports of preparations.”⁴⁷ This agreed with Persia’s view that the Ottomans were provoking a revolt among its Kurdish subjects. On March 17, 1881, Mr. Goschen informed Earl Granville, relying on the report of the Van consul, that Sheikh Ubeydullah was preparing for a fresh uprising.

At the time, the British authorities were expecting a revolt among the Armenians with Russian assistance. They were in the region specifically to head off such events. They considered the reforms the only remedy against sentiment in favor of revolt and the leaning of local Armenians towards Russia. The possibility the sheikh movement would turn against the Armenians and the need to protect them militarily would have left British diplomatic policy confused and eased the Russian intervention. As for the implementation of reforms, the Ottoman state naturally remained unenthusiastic, since it knew from its previous experiences in the Balkans that the reforms would bring fresh territorial losses. How the Christian populations of the Balkans turned to the empire’s enemies under the banner of “reforms” not so long ago was not something to be forgotten. Even if the empire wished to adopt necessary policies in those fragile and depressed times, it could not hope to succeed against the financial and administrative barriers it faced.

In general the British diplomatic policy of enforcing reforms and peace was secondary to its containment policy against possible Russian expansion. The “Great Game” between Russia and Britain at the time led to differering and sometimes conflicting results with respect to imperial policies. In order to curtail Russian expansion in Asia, the tribal and semi-state structures existing in a wide swathe from Afghanistan to Transcaucasia had been subject to constant shaping according to imperial needs. It is not surprising that the same imperial policy might imply different views in such a vast region. For example, when the Russian border with Persia was closed gradually during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the nomadic

⁴⁷ Ibid. Inclosure in No. 62 FO 424/122 pp. 84-85 No. 53/1.

tribes of Shahseven were devastated. In order to check the increasing influence and colonization of Russia in the Mogan basin, Britain stressed the crucial contribution of these tribes to the Persian economy and military. Therefore, the British consuls put forth these reasons and tried to cast blame on the Persian side for its possible losses if the Russian settlement policy succeeded. The pass through the borders was vital for the Shahseven tribes, who because of their nomadic way of life were totally dependent on travel between pastures on both sides of the border. The Russian settlement policy gradually resulted in the closure of the border for these tribes.⁴⁸ In contrast, in eastern Anatolia almost the same tribal structures were holding back the so-called “implementation of reforms” backed by the British interest in pursuit of containment policy. These tribes were seen at the root of disobedience to law and order in the region, and the reforms envisioned new judicial and administrative organs, with equal representation of Christians and Turks as a precondition. Such a view went along with the Western sympathy towards the shackled co-religionists living under cruelty with no authority to protect them.

The diplomatic policy not only discriminated against the locals but also wreaked havoc among the existing administrative order. As a result, the Ottoman administrative staff’s sphere of authority intersected with the consuls’ sphere of influence in a conflicting manner. Although the Porte always wanted to see these consuls completely isolated from intervention in internal affairs, the empire’s great defeat gave them important space to maneuver in. Almost the whole of the existing Ottoman administration was considered incompatible with the reform program.

The existing power in the hands of administration had not been checked or balanced in the modern sense. Moreover, the war and the grave problems in its wake revealed the implicit cruelty in the governing mechanism. One of the most unwanted was Kurt Ismail Paşa, who

⁴⁸ For a more detailed history of Shahseven, see Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran*.

was criticized for his abuse of Christians among other offenses. Avreyanof referred to Kurdish militias sacking and plundering the war region, charging that Ismail always defended those offenders, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's orders to punish and hang them notwithstanding.⁴⁹ Such events can give a sense of the power at the disposal of an administrator under such conditions when power was naturally used in an arbitrary manner.

Since the safety of local Christians was of the utmost concern, the establishment of gendarmeries was an important step in the reforms. The head of the reform commission was Abidin Paşa, who won British admiration for his harsh measures against the local notables. Stephen Duguid has stressed Abidin's reliance on local urban notables in order to eliminate his rivals, the "aghas" in the countryside. He had no alternative but to rely on the advice of those urban notables, since he was an Albanian and a stranger to the area. The city was under their control and they had already used their influence among the local population to get rid of the old governor and discredit the local government in the process. Abidin Paşa's sole choice was felt drastically when he used advice from these notables to fill vacancies and new positions in the administrative and judiciary. These new office-holders in turn pursued their own self-interested agenda in order to gain the upper hand against their rivals, namely rural notables, Kurdish aghas and former representatives from the central government. As a result, according to Stephen Duguid, "He invited a hundred of them (aghas) to Diarbekir [Diyarbakır], ostensibly to discuss the problems of the vilayet, and then had them arrested and exiled from the area. The Aghas were to be sent to Albania but owing to interference from Istanbul never got farther than Aleppo."⁵⁰

Duguid's remarks may reflect the difficulties faced by any possible candidate in terms of reforms and obstacles to the reforms. Moreover, the chances for any reform were limited

⁴⁹ Averyanov, *ibid* p. 108.

⁵⁰ Stephen Duguid, *The Policies of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia*, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 145.

seriously straightaway by budget constraints when Istanbul forbade any change that would increase the budget of vilayets.

A short review and exploration of a single judicial case would help to demonstrate the potential gap between crime and punishment at that time and the resulting injustice. One important document from the Ottoman archive provides us with just this opportunity.⁵¹ The turmoil of the judicial process was the natural outcome of a situation in which convicts and suspects were far removed from their legal proceedings. As the conclusions of judicial rulings were delayed, petitions to the Porte mounted, highlighting the arbitrariness of the procedure and the resulting hardships suffered by the families of suspects and convicts. Aziz Paşa, the governor of Mamurat'il Aziz (Elazığ), who was assigned the task of investigating, divided convicts into three groups, namely ring leaders (elebaşılar), hard-core criminal thugs, and petty criminals. Although he considered harsh measures against the first two groups to be necessary, he thought that steps for the last group should be dealt in quick, on the spot proceedings. But the Armenian problem and the increasing complaints of local Christians via their patriarchies in Istanbul, along with pressures from foreigners, made exile verdicts politically sensitive. Legal procedures were under huge international pressure, and in that depressed period of the empire, suspects could not be sent back to Diyarbakır to complete their adjudication. Even some like Seyfeddin fled, and there were rumors that others would also soon be released. The local Christians became more anxious, fearful of possible retaliation if the suspects were to reappear. The relatives of suspects in custody increased their oppression towards Christians, since they were seen as the instigators of the catastrophe by their constant complaints against the suspects. Moreover, the same files give an interesting account of the escape of Eyüp Begzade Halil and Heri'e and Milli tribe leaders such as Ibrahim, Mehmed, and Ali from Sivas, while they were going to the bath (hamam) under the

⁵¹ Y. Res 9/61 1298-2-3.

supervision of penal officers. They were not the only ones to flee; the notorious Musto Kotu was also successful, along with others such as Ismail Viridi, Şabo and Anter. The central government realized that the possibility of such incidents in Aleppo was far greater, where crowded convicts were kept in military barracks rather than in prisons, making the problem worse once soldiers and the servants of notables were added to the convicts. Izzet Paşa also pointed to corrupt officials in Diyarbakır and their control of the administrative apparatus during the special conditions enjoyed over the last 20 years, and therefore he could not have been unaware of the local intrigues as with Abedin Paşa. Soon after the exile of those aghas, Abedin Paşa was assigned to other posts, first as a governor of Sivas and then of Salonica.

Gradually Ottoman public opinion turned against the reforms once the threat to the eastern regions was better understood. Although the determined attitude of Great Britain yielded some Russian concessions in its land gains of Erzurum, Beyazit and Eleşkirt and the interior side of the Batum province, it was not so effective in taking Batum, Ardahan or Kars away from Russia. Ottoman public opinion turned against the European powers even more due to the recent warfare. The British occupation of Egypt and foreign control in the administration of Rumeli and Bosnia under the guise of impartiality and recognizing the sovereignty of the sultan there made the Porte suspect that the British Cyprus convention was a prelude to occupation. The financial condition of the empire plummeted on October 3, 1880, when the empire announced to its lenders a meeting to settle debts, and in 1881 paved the way for a public debt administration after the famous Muharrem Decree. The Ottoman government was highly offended by the refusal of its suggestion for British financial aid. According to Jwaideh, the empire was ready to sacrifice anything necessary in return for such aid. But Britain consistently refused the sultan's credit demands, thus further offending the Ottoman government. As British influence waned significantly and relations with Britain deteriorated,

the ranks of reform opponents among the Ottomans swelled. The manner of such circles against reforms helped the Ottoman Empire's tolerant attitude towards Sheikh Ubeydullah.⁵²

Chapter 3

The Religious Order and the Tribal Basis

His title "Nehri" suggests that Sheikh Ubeydullah was from the Sadat-e Nehri. This old dynasty resided in the Nehri village of Shemdinan. Over time, this family had important religious roles that had an enormous influence on the region and its surroundings. The family claimed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad ('sadat' is the plural of seyid in Arabic, meaning descendants of the Prophet), and more significantly the sheikh held an important position in the Naqshbandiyya-Halidiyya religious order. An analysis of the tribal structures of the region and the religious order can give us an understanding of the great influence the sheikh held when he mobilized them.

Any researcher dealing with tribes faces a serious problem of documentation in its work. This difficulty is felt much more in history, since most of the tribes did not leave serious documents describing their own roles in important events. The extant documents do not belong directly to these social structures, as others outside of the tribe produced them – meaning government officials, travelers, etc. This fact can explain the tribes' apparently frequent appearance in catastrophic events; unless they had no role in some turmoil, their presence in history is not so clearly discernible by historians. Modern researchers have tried to overcome this paucity of documentation by relying on anthropology and local studies. But historians must use the results of such studies cautiously. A simple transplantation of modern concepts into old contexts naturally carries the risk of serious errors of understanding.

⁵² Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Tarihi* p. 19.2

Most studies dealing with these tribal structures have emphasized the external political factors determining the tribal unit and the subsequent power distribution within the unit. Other factors such as the economy and culture are also important in such analyses, but once these factors are carefully studied, they remain external to any tribe in the sense that tribes cannot determine their outcomes. A tribe can manage to survive as long as it can adapt itself to mercurial conditions rather than trying to change them. Even studies stressing the nomadic way of life in order to define the economic elements facing tribes also stressed their habituation to a barely tamed geographic region. Most of the time, the tribal formations were subordinated to their environment in many ways; culturally, they lacked sufficient institutions to produce a dominant culture, and geographically they lived in harsh conditions to which they had to submit. Under such conditions, they were cultural importers to a large extent by borrowing from their more centralized neighbors, and this transaction caused tribes to appear more like states. Here one can accept the definition of Gellner, who describes tribes as political units whose members jointly help maintain order internally and defend the unit externally.⁵³ As this research tries to explain political events, such a simple definition will suffice. In this definition the state is the main variable external to the model, though along with other factors such as culture and the economy.

In the case of Sheikh Ubeydullah, the extent of conflict found its expression in terms of religion as well. A large cultural gap between the sheikh's followers and the Iranian Empire may point to the frequent secondary roles played by cultural differences. Even if some aspects of Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement can be attributed to these cultural factors, their outcomes were largely shaped by international political factors that were more alien to his influence.

⁵³ Ernest Gellner, "The Tribal Society and Its Enemies," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper. London: Croom Helm, 1983, p. 438.

The classical Kurdish emirates of the Ottoman Empire lost their independence during the centralization process seen in the beginning of nineteenth century. The ensuing political vacuum was expected to cause more conflict in regions where tribal structures were dominant. Geographical barriers such as mountainous terrain made it hard to control the region and integrate it into the empire's political structure, so these regions took on a special autonomous political status, with tribal structures constituting the main actors of social organization and power regulation. The new political dynamic after the defeat of the semi-autonomous emirates resisted stabilization due to intense rivalries between tribal units corresponding to former emirates. The central administration was unable to integrate and assimilate these tribes into its structure. In terms of implementing its central policies, the state succeeded at, at most, merely delegating authority among the competing units, thus intensifying the struggle among them. The increasing conflict further destabilized the power vacuum by effectively putting any kind of new equilibrium out of reach. The more advantageous position of the sheikhs gave them the chance to boost their influence. This they achieved by resorting to their arbitrary roles and by being outside the tribal realm. In the end this potential might explain their rise to power, but their main challenge lay in holding onto that power while staying fully within the classical emirates' roles.

The classical emirates had inherited a role that got the empire's external recognition. A tribal leader might have other roles recognized by the center as well, but throughout this time military duties remained his primary obligation. This military obligation also found expression in the tribal unit, as the leader's armed retinue and his own position needed verification by the center, despite the various transformations witnessed by the empire. For most of the sheikhs, these armed retinues could only be acquired after a difficult process. Keeping a military force at his disposal was a strikingly different role for a sheikh to play in front of his disciples. The fact that the ultimate power of Sheikh Ubeydullah was expressed in

terms of his armed retinue, not in the number of disciples he attracted, may give some idea of the extent of the transformations taking place.

The existence of the emirates' military obligations to the empire determined how the center delegated power. The tribes held military power in term of armed retinues. Therefore, within a tribe, one's status as a leader was largely determined by having an armed retinue, besides having economic power. The leader of a tribe kept constant watch over the power situation of the constituent units. In his efforts to maintain order, his control over the armed retinue was crucial during both peace and wartime. This constant control was, however, something that the sheikhs lacked, which helps to explain their failure.

The empire's centralization movement coincided with important military reforms. The existing Yeniçeri order was abolished in 1826. The central government had to rely on auxiliaries to a large extent. The mobilization of conscripts was another complicating factor in the state's task of arranging military maneuvers to carry out centralization policies. The state resorted to manipulating existing conflicts between the tribes. The means determined the ends, and such policies proved insufficient to deal with long-term problems. They aimed at specific cases and had to be implemented within a short timeframe. The state had to consider the power of tribes as a temporary solution. In such calculations, once the opposing tribe was determined, the state counted the power of that tribe's enemy as an ally.

Basil Nikitin gives a brief outline of Sadat-e Nehri, who was the Russian consul at Urmiya in 1915-18. Here among the war refugees from Turkey he met Said Qazi, a Kurdish mullah from Nehri and a religious teacher from the days of Ubeydullah's son Mohammed Siddik.⁵⁴ The Sadat-e Nehri family claimed descent from Abdulqadir Geylani. His son Abdulaziz came to Aqra (to the northeast of Mosul) in order to spread the teachings of the Qadiri religious order. He died here, and his grave subsequently became an important

⁵⁴ Martin Van Bruinessen, Mullahs, *Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society*, p. 199. Here Bruinessen reports that Mullah Said became Nikitine's Kurdish tutor and wrote at his request a series of texts on social and religious life in central Kurdistan, texts later published by Nikitine in translation.

pilgrimage destination. Abdulaziz's son Abu Bakr went to the Herki region and settled in the village of Stuni. After his death, Ebubekir's son Sheikh Haydar and three or four of the succeeding generations also stayed in the same village. At the time of Mullah Hacı, the family moved to the village of Meleyan in the Humaro region. Several generations lived in this village and in the Demane Sufla village until the time of Mullah Salih. Mullah Salih moved to the village of Nehri together with his sons Abdullah and Ahmed. Until that time the family taught the Qadiriya order, but then his sons decided to quit Qadiri in favor of Naqshbandiyya-Khalediyya.⁵⁵

Mevlana Ziyaeddin Khaled, born in 1776, was a common Kurd from the Jaf tribe in the Şehrizer region. After completing his education at the classical medreses in Sanandaj, Sulaimaniyah and Baghdad, he became a mullah in Sulaimaniyah and gave lectures there. After a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1805, he decided to go to Delhi. He got full permission to be a follower (khalifa) of Shah Gulam Ali of Delhi after staying in his lodge for one year. In 1811, he returned to Sulaimaniyah again in order to spread the teaching of the Naqshbandiyya order. Thereafter he established his own branch of the order, giving it his name, the Naqshbandiyya-Khalediyya.

Among the various mystical Islamic orders, Naqshbandiyya distinguished itself by strict adherence to the orthodox line. Unlike followers of many other paths, this order stressed Abubakr, the first caliph, in the transmission of their spiritual reality, rather than fourth Caliph Ali. This change in the chain reflected their opposition to the heterodoxy of other orders that justified their positions through the figure of Ali. According to Algar, the overt Shiite hostility to the order came from the fact that the first diffusions of Naqshbandiyya in the Sunni world coincided with the rise of a militant Shiite state in Iran and the beginning of centuries of sectarian warfare between Shiite Iran and its Sunni neighbors.⁵⁶ They tried to consolidate the

⁵⁵ Basil Nikitin, *Kürtler*, p. 373.

⁵⁶ Hamid Algar, "A Brief History of the Naqsbandi Order," in *Naqsbandiyya*, p. 5.

shariah (religious rule) in terms of the actions of the Prophet (sunnet). Throughout its history, the order had been very effective in shaping the socio-political views of the Muslim societies where it was present. The scope of the present analysis makes it difficult to trace the interaction of the order's views with the existing socio-political structure over such a long period. Yet one can easily say that in formulating such views, the order was always very keen to preserve the shariah and sunnet, and this active receptivity to its historical context made the order one of the most effective among the various mystical paths and also explains its long endurance and political orientation.

The order first originated from Central Asia and owed its name to Bahaeddin Naqshband (1318-1389). Although the order was transformed by many leading sheiks, it retained the name Naqshband after Sheikh Bahaeddin. In the time of Ahmet Sirhindi, its area of influence centered on India, where the order tried to cope with Hindu influences on Islam. Fighting anything alien to Islam had long been the hallmark of the Naqshebandiyya order when Mevlana Khaled decided to become a disciple of Dehlevi. After Sirhindi, the need for renewal in order to deal with the changing conditions of Muslim societies was felt more acutely. This gave way to important reforms in the order that characterized its later politically reactive and interventionist attitude. It was not surprising that Naqshebandiyya initiated many battles against Western penetration and colonialism. After Sirhindi, the order began to be called Mujaddidiya, stressing the "renovation" witnessed in it, and leading it to become the most widespread and dynamic Sufi order. Although such characteristics are the main factors behind its large influence and staying power, they constitute great obstacles for historians. At any given time, the order lacked a collectively supported unique ideology that was identifiable across its various branches. Due to the variety of factors impacting such a widespread order and a lack of means of communication, the presence of different views defended by the order's various branches was not unusual.

Martin Van Bruinessen explains the rapid spread of Naqshebandiyya-Khalediyya through two factors, one being the characteristics peculiar to this order, especially those that distinguish it from the Qadiri order. The second factor was the specific situation of the region at the time of the order's introduction.⁵⁷

In fact, Khalediyya differed significantly from the existing Qadiri order, something which can be demonstrated by their different religious conceptions as well reflected in rituals. The ecstatic methods used in Qadiri rituals strongly contrasted with the silent *zikir* of Nakshabandiyya. The most significant difference for the present analysis can be found in their pattern of organization. The Qadiri order was more disposed to preserve its established organization. The khalifas of the Qadiri order were restricted by the limits of the lineage accepted as descendants of the Prophet, i.e. seyyids. Whereas the Naqshebandiyya had a more dynamic pattern of organization in which a given khalifa could give instructions to his own khalifas, a practice unknown in the Qadiri order. This can explain the rapid expansion of the order during the short life of Mevlana Khaled. During his lifetime, he appointed more than 65 disciples and had some 12,000 disciples.⁵⁸ This swift spread of the order caused a different perception of some of its basic tenets during the time of Mevlana Khaled. A disciple could generally enter the order's path after an initiation period called the "*suhba*." During this period, the candidate associated with and was accompanied by an accomplished sheikh who taught him the order's rituals and led him on the path of knowing God. In this process, the absolute loyalty of the disciple to his sheikh was strengthened by means of a linkage called "*rabita*." The time of Mevlana Khaled, however, witnessed important changes in both of these principles. In place of a longer initiation process, Mevlana Khaled adopted a more practical and faster method called the *khalva erbainiyya* (40 days of retreat) in Khaledi

⁵⁷ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 224.

⁵⁸ The sources vary on the number of khalifas and disciples. This figures given here come from the book by Martin Van Bruinessen, who in turn cites Rich (1836) for the number of disciples and Hakim (1983) for the number of khaliphas. In my personal interview with Gıyaseddin Emre, a former deputy from Muş with Naqshebandi ancestors, he put the number of khalifas at 482, besides many disciples.

practice. Through this practice, the disciple could enter his spiritual training earlier. Thus Mevlana Khaled eased the burden of a long-term of initiation in favor of more intensive training either under his control or that of a khalifa appointed by him. This time-saving and more rational method did much to help him rapidly spread the order over a span of only 16 years. Besides time efficiency, the method also had the advantage of keeping down the accommodation costs of the disciples.⁵⁹

Rabita was the bond between the disciple and his spiritual guide, the sheikh. A sheikh could instruct his disciples to link with his image. In this way, loss of consciousness of this world and absolute loyalty to the preceptor were both achieved. As Manneh describes it, this stage of non-existence and unawareness of the world is reached “by evoking the image of the preceptor into the imagination and then transmitting it to the heart followed by the surrender of will. The more one is dominated by this state the more he losses awareness of this world.”⁶⁰

During Mevlana Khaled’s tenure leading the order, this rather mandatory practice was more frequently used and took on a more spiritual function. He demanded from his deputies that they and their own disciples and deputies should link directly with him, not with their immediate preceptors. Physical descriptions of the master were provided for the disciples in order that they might perceive their master better. Although this aroused many objections even during Mevlana Khaled’s own lifetime, it was very effective for winning the loyalty of disciples and deputies to their masters.

How Mevlana Khalid decided to enter the Naqshebandiyya order gives important clues about the social situation of the time. One of the mystical interpretations mentions an incident during his 1805 pilgrimage to Mecca. There he encountered a dervish who was sitting with his back to the holy Kaaba (Ka’ba) shrine. Explaining his strange behavior, the dervish said that the servant of God in front of him was superior to the Kaaba and destined for

⁵⁹ Butros abu Manneh, “*Khalidi Suborder*,” in *Naqshebandiyya*, p. 291.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 293

greatness, and so should seek spiritual instruction from his preceptor in India. After Mevlana Khalid's return to Sulaiymaniya, he decided to travel to India with one of the disciples of Shah Ghulam Ali, Mirza Rahim Allah Azimabadi.⁶¹ Van Bruinessen points out that Mevlana Khaled had no previous Naqshebandi connections, but that on his way to India or perhaps shortly before he spent some time at the feet of Sheikh Abdullah, who accepted him into the Qadiri path.⁶² After Abdullah and his brother accepted the Naqshebandi order, the whole Sadate Nehri family began to follow the path. This initial acquaintance and early conversion explains the prominence of the Sadate Nehri order among various Khaledi ranks. They were later effective in spreading the order by appointing new deputies and disciples. Somehow, a similar initiation in terms of former acquaintances can explain another influential Siraj-ed-dini sheik at Hawraman.⁶³

The increasingly sensitive attitude towards respecting the sharia (religious rules) and preserving the essential structure of Muslim society against the increasing threats of the West gave the order a socio-political concern that was also shared by Mevlana Khaled. For him, the Ottoman state was the guarantor of the victorious presence of Islam, as long as it clung to sharia as source of its strength and durability.⁶⁴ He added his prayer for the well-being of the Ottoman state and cursed the infidel Christians and apostate Persians.

After the abolition of the Janissaries, the Ottoman state began to confiscate many Bektashi lodges. Important Bektashi centers were turned over to Naqshebandi administration.⁶⁵ The religious orders were realizing important functions in Ottoman society

⁶¹ D.W. Damrel, *Spread of Political Thought*, p. 283

⁶² Martin Van Bruinessen *Agha, Sheikh and State*, p. 223

⁶³ According to Ferhad Shakely: "Sheikh Uthman Sirajeddin I (1781-1867) was the most important figure among Mevlana Khaled's disciples even while Mevlana was still living in either Kurdistan or Baghdad. The two men know each other as students of Islamic sciences, and they met once again in Baghdad in 1811 during Mevlana's short five-month stay in the Mosque of Sheikh Abdulkadir Geylani, shortly after his return from India." *The Naqshebandi Sheikhs of Hawraman and the Heritage Khalidiyya-Mujaddidiyya in Kurdistan*, in *Naqshebandis* p. 92.

⁶⁴ Algar, *Political Aspects*, p. 138

⁶⁵ Ilbey Ortaylı, "The Policy of Sublime Porte Towards Naqshebandis and Other Tariqas During the Tanzimat Period," in *Naqshebandis*.

besides the purely religious one. The order benefited from the moderate attitude of the Ottoman state until the Tanzimat era, which was an important facilitator in its diffusion across Ottoman lands. Its opposition to Wahabism, a political and religious movement with many harmful affects on Ottoman rule in Arab lands, can be also evaluated in light of this.

There is less information available about Sheikh Seyid Taha, Sheikh Ubeydullah's father, who held an important position in the order after his uncle, Sheikh Abdullah. It seems he also had his disciples and appointed his deputies, among whom was his brother, Sheikh Salih. Some of them later held important positions in Turkey's sociopolitical order, such as Sebgetullah Arvasi Geydali (the grandfather of Kamuran Inan), Sheikh Fehim Arvasi, Sheikh Muhammed Kufrevi and Sheikh Mella Ahmed-i Meczup. Other distinguished (disciples) deputies were Mella Taha (also known as "köse khalifa," due to his sparse beard), Sheikh Taha el-Harici, Sheikh Islam u'l Kerkuki, Sheikh Haji el-Hakkari (whose grave is in Nehri), Sheikh Süleyman Bradosti and Sheikh Abdullah Neyniqi (the grandfather of Gıyaseddin Emre for whom a village in the Bulanık district of Mush is named).⁶⁶

Sheikh Taha attained spiritual power by holding an important position in the Naqshbandi order among the border tribes of Ottoman and Iran. Russia's southward expansion in Transcaucasia made his control over them more important. We know that Sheikh Taha sent some warriors to Sheikh Şamil to aid his resistance against the Russians in Caucassia, and they also shared a correspondence. From this correspondence the Russian Consulate in Tabriz reported in 1848 that Sheikh Şamil had many disciples among the Kurds, who were sharing the same Şafi sect. Sheikh Şamil sent gifts to Seyid Taha and Kerim Khan of Rewanduz. Sheikh Şamil's deputy Hasan, also known as Haji Murteza, used his teacher's

⁶⁶ This information I owe to Gıyaseddin Emre. He supplied the names of many important Naqshbandi sheiks of the Khaledi order based on the resource "*Mecdid-I Talid fi Menakibi Şeyh Halid*" published by Ibrahim Fesih Efendi, a member of the Education Council in Baghdad, p. 29-50. For the deputies of Sheikh Taha, his resource was "*Barakati Kelimat fi Menakibi Bazi Sadat*," in p. 13 by Muhammed Asım, the son of Sheikh Muhammed Alaeddin.

permit to make visits to Kurdish-inhabited areas of Ushnu and Piraman. Meanwhile, however, Russia was also doing its best to head off the nascent warm relations.⁶⁷

Yalçın-Hekmann claimed that Sheikh Taha also actively participated in the Crimean War of 1854-56, but there is contradictory information in Averyarov, who claimed that initially the Ottomans tried to incite Persian Kurds rather than this happening through the influence of the bigoted Seyyid Taha. Towards that end, the Turkish and British Consulates at Tabriz sent their officers to every part of Persian Kurdistan. Confirming Taha's relations with Sheikh Shamil, Averyarov added that he died before the beginning of war: "His brother, Sheikh Salih, then succeeded his position and was sitting at Berdesor. He was sending his deputies to Kurds in order to invite them to wage holy war against the Russians. He also gathered warriors among the Persian Kurds and make preparations to attack Russia. The Russian state asked Persia to arrest the sheikh and calm the restive Kurds, who were armed and taking his orders. Persia failed to give a definite reply due to its hypocritical diplomacy. In order to resolve this important situation, Russia sent a military delegation to Iran from Caucasia lead by General Sankvoski. The delegation conveyed the demands of the Russian side. The Persian government accepted them and so removed the sheikh from its lands and put its military units at the border in order to control the Persian Kurds."⁶⁸

The Ottomans and Persians had already gone to war against the Russians twice during the first half of the nineteenth century. Persian Prince Abbas Mirza had relied extensively on Kurdish conscripts in his campaigns against the Russians. According to Averyarov, two-thirds of his 50,000 soldiers were recruited from among the Kurds in the campaigns of 1804-13, and in 1826-28 made up fully half of his 88,000-strong army.⁶⁹ Thus, Sheikh Taha held important influence at the court of Qajarian Muhammed Şah, and the extent of his sway can be seen

⁶⁷ Halfin V.N. p. 55, Van Bruinessen, "The Sâdatê Nehrî or Gîlânîzâde of Central Kurdistan," and Muctebi Berzui, *Evzah-e Siyasi Kurdistan* p. 53.

⁶⁸ Averyarov, *ibid* p. 50.

⁶⁹ Averyarov referred to a French captain named Gaspar Drovil in the service of Abbas Mirza, pp. 1019.

through the memoirs of Abbas Mirza: “Taha was one of the greatest Sufis of Naqshbandiyya and the deceased Muhammed Şah, may God increase his salvation, gradually kept his advice and assigned some villages as tuyul and soyurghal to his hanagah. And every year he sent gifts and presents to him and the entire area of Kurdistan obeyed him. During those days he sent many visitors to me wishing my health and care. My mother was his disciple in the order.”⁷⁰ The influence of Sheikh Taha at the Qajarian court had other dimensions besides religion. The Qajarians were well aware that he had a great many disciples and that through the order’s strong relations with the Ottoman Empire and a center very near their borders inhabited by many tribes loyal to him, he held an important power base that could be turned against them. Such a land grant can be evaluated in this context. The tribes under his influence straddled the border, and there was no barrier impeding their relations with the Naqshbandiyya order’s deputies. Ali Qajar pointed to Sheikh Taha’s influence in the court when he mentioned his occasional visits to Tehran and Tabriz. Muhammed Shah, under the influence of his servants, gave him 500 toman as a permanent salary, and assigned him five villages from the Mergaver district as tuyul. By so doing, he made the sheikh dependent on the state. Sheikh Taha never treated this favor ungratefully, and in the same way the mystics of the state always took care to follow his example.⁷¹ The southward expansion of Russia over Caucassia made Sheikh Taha’s religious influence something to be taken seriously by the Persian and Ottoman authorities. During the years the Ottoman state pursued a centralization policy, unlike the emirates, Sheikh Taha managed to consolidate his power base.

In 1846, while returning from his visit to the Tiyari district, an area largely inhabited by Nestorians, British excavator and later Ambassador Layard noted a local sheikh’s hatred towards Christians. Layard had decided to make a short trip to the cooler climate of the Tiyari

⁷⁰ Berzui quotes from “Şerh-e Hal-e Abbas Mirza Mulkara” ba mukaddime Aştiyani be koşiş Doktor Abdulhuseyn Nevai, Tehran, Intişaret-e Babek, 1361 p. 121, in his book, p. 52.

⁷¹ Berzui quotation from *Risale-i Şoreşi Şeyh Ubeydullah zeyle Tarihe Afşar* pp. 529, 53.

Mountains in the summer during his excavations in the Mosul region. He mentioned in his famous memoirs a nearly blind sheikh with bigoted manners near a village named Kuremi. Layard claimed that this sheikh “had been the chief cause of massacres of the unfortunate Christians; and that, at that moment *his son Sheikh Tahar* [emphasis added] was urging Beder Khan Bey prove his religious zeal by shedding anew blood of the Chaldeans.”⁷² The immense influence held by Sheikh *Tahar* and the blindness reported by Layard is sound evidence for concluding that he was actually Sheikh *Taha*. He had a grave eye disease that explains his custom of veiling his face, rather than his worry of the impurity of Christian sights.

The rapid Russian expansion and the growing European missionary presence may have lay at the root of Sheikh *Taha*’s alleged hatred towards Christians. Whether he instigated the Nestorian massacres remains unclear, but it is certain that he became an arbitrator between the Ottoman state and the fugitive Nurullah Beğ, the last Hakkari emirate who in 1848 fled to Berdesor Castle in Iran after Ottoman attempts to establish order and prevent massacres of Christians.⁷³

Chapter 4

The Border Problem

The arrangement of a long territorial border between the Ottoman and Persian Empires remained problematic. Each side continued to propose conflicting claims and trying to realize them. The Persians annexed the Zohab and Ahverik areas that the Ottomans had claims on. In 1837, in retaliation, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad, Ali Rıza Paşa, invaded and destroyed Mahmere at the Persian border. In 1842, the province of Karbala was occupied by Persian troops trying to take advantage of the weak position of the Ottomans in the eastern regions. Ali Rıza Paşa soon retaliated and forced the Persian troops to retreat, taking many casualties

⁷² Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, p. 183.

⁷³ Nazmi Sevgen, *Türk Beylikleri*, pp. 165-70.

on local allies in the process. On May 13, 1847, the Treaty of Erzurum was signed between Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Over time, various committees had been assigned the task of determining the Ottoman-Persian border, and the most recent agreement on the status of Erzurum had even been signed again under pressure from the Russian and British services. Although it was not explicitly stipulated in the Erzurum agreement, the region belonged to Iran until the occupation of the Khotour Valley in 1848 by military units under the command of Derviş Paşa. The valley had a geopolitical advantage in case of a military offensive on Tabriz and Yerevan. This time another committee was assigned to determine the border. In a bid to frustrate Derviş Paşa's efforts to win the tribes' favor on border issues, the Persians appointed an official named Mirza Cafer Khan to the committee. The tension was concentrated in areas around Khotour, Egridağ and Çehrik. In a letter by Cafer Khan addressed to the people of Çehrik, Derviş Paşa was accused of trying to use unjust means to win tribal favor such as bribery and empty promises. Abdulhadi, the local Ottoman governor of Başkale, and Ömer Ağa of Rezki sent envoys to the surrounding area and incited the villagers of Çehrik. The villagers were deceived by a promise of a 10-year tax exemption. The Ottoman provincial governor (kaymakam) of Khotour, Abdulkadir by name, tried to persuade the villagers of Derik, Eşbatal and Şepiran to come and claim that their villages had always belonged to the Ottomans and sign papers declaring themselves Ottoman subjects. Using the same methods, the Ottoman governor of Başkale tried to persuade Mullah Mehmed of Şepirvan to issue petitions declaring they had been Ottoman subjects and that Iran had taken and recorded Maha as Persian property by force.⁷⁴ At last Derviş Paşa succeeded in bringing over a tribal leader named Maksut Ağa along with three other elders to the border committee as witnesses. When the Ottoman claims were backed by Britain and the Persian side had to withdraw its troops in order to deal with 1848-52 Babai rebellions, the de facto solution

⁷⁴ From the Berzui quotation p. 98, from the "inquiry of the borders" by Mirza Seyid Cafer Han Mühendisbaşı (intesherat-e Bunyad Ferheng-e Iran), pp. 170-171.

confirmed the Ottoman's advantageous position. The committee continued its work, but the 1854 Crimean War slowed their work down. After the war ended, Great Britain began to support the Ottoman claims against Iran more openly. In a clear challenge to the British policies, the Persian claims were naturally backed by Russia. In 1865, British topographers printed maps of the disputed territories with the participation of the Russians. In 1869, after the committee studied the issue and discussed it together with representatives from both empires, its conclusions were drawn up as an agreement to be signed later. The British consulate in Baghdad, Mr. Conbil, and the Russian military attaché in Istanbul, Mr. Zeynofi, participated in the committee assigned to settle the borders of the disputed lands.⁷⁵

In 1870, the Ottomans closed the border to the Celali tribe which had their winter quarters in Iran's Avacek and Maku districts. The Ottomans told the Persian side about the closure and asked it to stop the Celalis from coming to their summer pastures. Iran ignored the Ottoman advisory, and the resulting clashes between military units and the tribe exacted serious losses for both parties. A similar incident resulted when policies implemented by Iran in 1872 caused the Jaf tribe of the Shehrizor region to be barred from passing through the border to reach their summer pastures.⁷⁶

The increasing influence of the sheikh was alarming for Persian officials. Unlike in the Erdelan province, the governors of the Mukri region to the southwest of Lake Urmiye began to be chosen largely from among Azeris. Heavy taxes and unfair means of tax collection were exacerbating the local conflict between the governors and the people. This conflict soon flared up on a well-founded basis of cultural differences and socio-economic instability. The Sunni and Shiite difference between the ruling elite as well as the constant warfare in the first half of the century had made the taxes a great burden on the peasants. Moreover, Iran owed a

⁷⁵ Halfin, *XIX. yüzyılda Kürdistan Üzerinde Mücadeleler*. pp. 54 - 66.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 69

significant sum in war indemnities to Russia, which increased further the onerous Persian taxes.

In 1873, Urmiye Governor Yusuf Han Şuca Devle began trying to collect taxes directly from the villages belonging to Sheikh Ubeydullah, villages which had been assigned to his father as tuyul. The villagers, however, insisted on recognizing Sheikh Ubeydullah as the legitimate property owner and continued to pay taxes to him. The governor set fire to the villages, killing 48, and looted property worth some 50,000 tomans. Initially, Sheikh Ubeydullah sent his delegate Seyid Hasan to Tehran from Sawjbulak in order to make the incident known and issue a plea for justice. But his efforts to find a peaceful solution failed. The Persian authorities in Tehran ignored the rights of the sheikh, though they admitted that the villages at the south of Lake Urmiye were designated the sole property of Seyid Taha and that their residents had previously been exempt from taxes only during the time of Mehmed Shah.⁷⁷

This incident provoked a large reaction among the local tribes that led to the Ushnu affair. Subsequently, Ottoman tribes violated the border and sacked the Ushnu. Both sides put diplomatic pressure on the other for compensation. There were already mutual accusations, and the border tensions rose dangerously over the damage done by the incursions of the Hertuş tribe and Milan. In March 1874, the Persian government sent an officer named Mirza Sadık to investigate the region. In his report to the central government, he confirmed the legitimate claims of the sheikh. He indicated that Yusufhan had ill intentions in seizing some villages of the sheikh. Accordingly, Yusufhan gathered together some soldiers and Kurds from Ushnu and dispatched the men to the sheikh's villages to pillage and destroy them. Mirza Sadık has pointed to Yusufhan's rapid land purchases some time later, saying that no Iranian official had the authority to buy so much land.⁷⁸ The mutual accusations continued, leaving

⁷⁷ Qajarian Documents on Persian and Ottoman relations # document 599, pp. 741-42.

⁷⁸ Qajarian documents #562, p. 608.

the problem unsolved. Iran claimed, for instance, that there would be no way for 7,000 horsemen to cross the border without attracting the notice of Ottoman officers.⁷⁹ The Ottomans, however, objected that root of the problem lay in the cruel methods used on local peasants, saying they were powerless to prevent such consequences after the provocative acts of Persian officials. Moreover, the Ottomans accused the Persian side of having instigated the encroachment of its subject tribes onto Ottoman lands. This encroachment, they argued, led the Ottoman tribes in turn to seek vengeance in Persian territory. Throughout the debate, the Ottomans based their arguments on the just cause of Sheikh Ubeydullah, saying that he deserved compensation. Although the sheikh had been victimized by the cruelty of Persian officials, he showed an admirable forbearance and had pursued peaceful means in seeking compensation. Iran countered the Ottomans' demands for reparations of the sheikh's rights by contending that some 50,000-60,000 tomans in damage had been done by two years of attacks by the Ottoman Hertushi tribe upon Persian soil and that this matter had yet to be settled by a commission charged with investigating it. After a year of debate, Iran rejected the sheikh's rights to the lands, claiming that the papers meant to prove their transferal to him as tax-exempt tuyul were either incomplete or downright forgeries, adding that due to either ignorance or willful delay in bringing the documents to light, he had impeded the commission's work. Rather than giving him compensation, Iran asked the sheikh for all the taxes accrued over the last three years.⁸⁰

The Khotour region was becoming an increasingly problematic issue between the two empires. When the problems in the Balkans erupted into crisis in 1875, the Ottomans found that getting Britain's cooperation against Persia was no easy task. Britain feared that Iran could follow the example of the Balkans and side with Russia, so its policy moved away from offering open support to the Ottomans on the border issue. Iran had initiated some

⁷⁹ Qajarian documents # 568, p. 622.

⁸⁰ Qajarian documents #565 p. 615.

engagements to declare open warfare against the Ottomans alongside the Russians. But such a proposition of cooperation was postponed, because Russia knew well that Persia would be a weak partner in a possible joint campaign. Open collaboration with Iran could also make Britain feel threatened and therefore force its hand in supporting the Ottomans more openly. Moreover, the Persians would be hard pressed to defend themselves against a direct British attack.⁸¹ In the Treaty of Berlin, by supporting the Persian claims on the Khotour Valley, the Russians had at the same time the advantage of solving their problem with the Persians concerning the Tekin Valley. In addition to leaving the Persian-Ottoman border dispute unresolved, the Treaty of Berlin also helped the Russians after the war to consolidate their status quo. In the treaty, the valley of Alascherd and the city of Beyazid were left to the Ottomans under the condition that the Khotour Valley would be given to Iran. On July 16, 1880, the valley went into the hands of Iran.

Chapter 5

The Beginning of the Sheikh Movement

The war brought many disasters to the local population. The productive labor force was conscripted to the front. After the war, the population was hit once more by famine. The poor harvest of 1879 brought many near starvation, with some even dying.⁸² In Diyarbakır, people held demonstrations against the lack of bread in bakeries and high prices.⁸³ Similar complaints also arose in Van.⁸⁴ After its defeat, many soldiers deserted the Ottoman Army. These deserters were forced to resort to contraband activities. The chaotic situation exacerbated the social unrest. Under such depressed conditions, more crime and similar

⁸¹ Halfin, *XIX. yüzyılda Kürdistan Üzerinde Mücadeleler*. pp. 70-71.

⁸² A December 3, 1880 article in *The Times of London* by Celile Celil says that Dr. Lanuani was sent to the region to investigate the famine. In Hakkari, more than 10,000 people died (p. 54).

⁸³ Y. A. Hus 164/199.

⁸⁴ Y. A. Hus. 164/122 and 165/40.

violations were feared. The peace was not without a price, and the taxes levied in its aftermath amounted to a disaster for the poverty-stricken population. Besides high inflation and scarcity of goods, a lack of security was another side effect of the unstable peace.

The rebellion of the brothers Osman and Hüseyin Bedirhan can be evaluated against that background. An analysis of the incident is crucial for understanding the dynamics of Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement and the Ottoman state's first reaction towards it. The short-lived movement of the two brothers just after the defeat raised alarms in the Ottoman central government. In 1878, these sons of the former Botan emirate fled to the region. When Osman arrived, he was met with 2,000 armed men. This group contained the suspects of Abidin Paşa and who were later interrogated by Izzet Paşa. It seemed that same group resorted to banditry, especially on local Christians and were mainly the same ring leaders (elebasilar) and hard-core criminal thugs that later the government tried to bring them to law during Abidin Paşa's governorship. The central government did not find the group's numbers to be a serious concern. The government knew very well that such a group could be dispersed by a simple military maneuver. It initially sent a telegram through Siirt ordering that if the group did not submit when they got the message, this would be considered an act of rebellion. In his reply, Osman declared that he should not be treated like a rebel or bandit. He claimed that his followers had gathered around him merely to demonstrate their love and respect. He said had no choice but to stay in his native land due to both the insistence of his companions and the lack of anything else to do. He had just planned to visit the Cizre city and he was not there to instigate an armed rebellion. He emphasized that he would not hesitate to provide any sacrifice to his government' adding that he had already provided many important services to the government but received nothing in return. He recounted that during the war, he had

followed Ismail Paşa's orders in calling up 4,140 soldiers into military service and confronting a great common enemy.⁸⁵

He also criticized how the old emirate system was not being applied in Kurdistan any more. He charged that local officers were practicing oppression, saying that in contrast he was attracting popular support. With some sort of government position or assignment, he said, he could have served the state interest better. He alluded frequently to the glory of his family and the desperate conditions into which he had fallen. He said he could do nothing if government soldiers were sent to deal with him, and he had nothing to lose. The letter's final word – *hukmlillah*, meaning “the decision lies with God” – struck an ambiguous note, but Diyarbakır Governor Abdurrahman Paşa took this as a clear sign of his rebellious intentions. The governor also interpreted a travel permit issued by Osman bearing the seal “Osman Bedirhan, Emirate of Bohtan” as further evidence of his evil designs. Even the reluctance of Osman's men to cut the telegraph lines, so keeping the lines of communication open, was seen in the governor's eyes as a ploy to buy time to consolidate their power. The central government recommended firmly that he be prevented from entering Cizre, fearing his already considerable influence would spread further. But when he entered Cizre anyway, Abdurrahman Paşa questioned him through a telegraph machine. The governor asked Osman Bedirhan exactly what kind of office he was looking for, suggesting a position in the new established Malatya district. He was pointing to the government at the same time that finalizing such an offer would require significant paperwork and should only be seen as a suggestion. Osman replied to the governor's offer that he had already heard many empty promises, saying that since he knew shuffling the existing offices would mean some would lose their jobs, he preferred to stay in his homeland. His request for an office at home also found strong support among the locals.⁸⁶ The Cizre administrative council sent a signed telegram to Istanbul complaining that their

⁸⁵ Y. PRK. BŞK. 1/58 His telegram dated 11 teşrinsani 1894 (November 27).

⁸⁶ Ibid, November 24, 1878.

taxes were not only high, but also were not being collected properly, and went on to propose Osman Nureddin Beğ as a good candidate for carrying out the task. Meanwhile, for the Ottoman government, the interview with Osman had merely been a ploy to gain time. The necessary military units had already been dispatched from nearby towns. Three battalions from Mosul under the command of Said Paşa on the way to winter in Mamuratu'l Aziz would be added to the organized campaign. Auxiliaries conscripted from Şırnak and Midyat were sent on the road to Zaho in order to block any aid getting to Cizre, and another battalion from Mosul was ordered to set up there. From Bitlis, two battalions were sent to help two others in Siirt. Three reserve battalions were dispatched from Tercan and Bayburd to Muş as a reserve force. Soon a group of 200 men was scattered after the initial confrontation by the three battalions from Siirt. This ease of the dispersion could be attributed their lack of organization around a concrete goal.⁸⁷

At this very critical time, such a rebellion worried the central state. This showed the state that it could not rely on military forces being at the right place and the right time. Therefore the state had to rely on only regular soldiers from relatively distant cities nearby. Initially, there were no organized security forces on point. The reforms and petitions about incursions against the Christians made it difficult to resort to auxiliaries or organize new units from local conscripts, because the Christians' situation was dominating the spotlight. At this critical point, the central state found it difficult to decide on such an important matter, though it would later have important repercussions. In case of a drastic decision, the international interest would further destabilize the empire's already unsteady political and financial state. Abidin Paşa would later, while implementing British-supported reform policies, arrest the leaders and notables of the groups allied with the two brothers.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 28 Teşrin sani 1294 (December 10, 1298).

While the Ottoman state tried to gain time by questioning Osman Bedirhani, some of his relatives were trying to sway his course of action. Ahmed Hulusi tried to persuade him that he was pursuing a useless goal and that he would end up damaging the unity of the nation and religion. He urged him not to trust Kurds, whom he branded notorious turncoats lacking any sense of right and wrong. Later Bahri Beğ implored his little brother with another telegram reminding him of how their misguided father had followed a similar course with more allies, but had only been able to hold out for two days. Later their father had regretted his rebellious acts and advised his sons to be respectful and obey the sultan. After guaranteeing safety for both Osman and Hüseyin if they relented, Bahri was successful, and his brothers agreed to return to Istanbul. But Abdurahman Paşa was strictly against Bahri Beğ's proposal to bring his two brothers back. He pointed to Bahri's injustice towards Christians when he had been in the region one year earlier and his removal after many protests. Izzet Paşa was also against the brothers coming to Istanbul via Halep on January 25, 1878 with a military envoy also including Bahri Beğ⁸⁸ Later Bahri Beğ would again take a similar arbitration role in the case of Sheikh Ubeydullah.

Osman Bedirhani also sent a letter to his relatives in Damascus through a trader,⁸⁹ but the letter was seized and opened in Diyarbakır. In it he ordered one of his brothers, Bedri, to bring his mother. In his memoirs, Bedri Beğ's nephew Mehmet Salih referred to the arrest of Bedri along with Mehmet's father Mahmut Izzet Azizi.⁹⁰ The Ottoman state recognized that Bedirhan brothers derived their power from their family ties and acted accordingly. As a state still dealing with its inherited imperial legal remnants and in the process of territorial definition, dealing on a family basis rather than an individual basis was only natural. The fact that the trader was entrusted with the letter and, after interrogation, confessed to carrying it can give a better understanding about how Osman Bedirhani may well have intended to prove

⁸⁸ Y.A. Hus. 160/18. He was already making allegations against Bahri Beğ of injustice against Christians.

⁸⁹ Y. PRK. BŞK. 1/58 Zi'lhicce 1295, November 26, 1878.

⁹⁰ Malmisanij quotes «Cizre Botanlı Bedirhaniler» pp. 164,184.

to the government that his principal aim was his family's well-being alone. When Sheikh Ubeydullah became a rebel along with his two sons, a similar case led to a richer brew of attitudes in that context. The power of the state's opponents was vested in their family ties and so the state held them responsible on a family basis. Using family status became a *modus operandi* at the hands of both the state and its opponents.

After the 1293 war, new provinces and administrative centers were established due to land cessations. Formerly a subdivision of the Erzurum province, Van became a new province with Hakkari (Çolemerik) attached. Similarly Mamurat u'l Aziz was split off from Diyarbakır to become an independent province with Malatya and Dersim as sub-provinces. In January 1880, when the Bitlis subdistrict of the city of Muş became a new province containing Bitlis, Muş, Siirt and Genç as subdistricts, the new administrative regulation was complete. By virtue of their holding administrative positions in these new arranged cities, it would be no coincidence that the region's influential notables demanded the same positions appointed by the center. The case of Osman Bedirhan was a good example of just that.

The central state had evaluated the influence of Sheikh Ubeydullah in the same manner as it dealt with the affair of the two brothers. In fact, by holding greater power than the Bedirhani sons, the sheikh was a possible threat to the center if the two became rivals. As recent conditions had decreased the power of the central state, they had boosted the new candidates for its power. The rifles thrown by fleeing soldiers of the Ottoman Army were already in the hands of the sheikh. Whereas Osman Nureddin Bedirhan had complained of his family's fading glory during their sojourn away from their homeland, Sheikh Ubeydullah held a greater charisma if he turned against the Porte.

By that point, the influence of the sheikh had already indicated a conflict with the central administration. In the Nestorian-inhabited regions of the Çolemerik and Herki tribes of the Shemdinan district, tobacco cultivation was an important source of income. All previous

efforts to collect taxes from this business had been to no avail. Here the government recognized the fact that as the region was at the border, its people were unused such orders, and so such a tax could only be imposed through forceful intervention. Moreover the Nestorian villagers openly threatened to flee if such a tax were levied on them, whereas the state was relatively optimistic about the loyalty of Muslim tribes.

Including other taxes accrued over 30 years for the entire region, a total amount of 70 loads of piaster were in arrears. When the government recognized that collecting the tobacco tax by itself was impossible, it delegated the responsibility to Sheikh Ubeydullah by means of an auction. But since the region bordered Iran, the villagers found it more profitable to sell their products to Iran and therefore the sheikh claimed that he had failed in his task, and the crop found its way to the Persian soil without a tax.⁹¹

In 1875 the matters gained a new dimension, when the center recognized that the influence of Mar Shamun on the Nestorians and Ubeydullah on the tribes were in fact the main obstacles to assessing and collecting the tax. In light of this situation, the Van and Erzurum provinces suggested to the center that deporting the sheikh from the region would be useful. They might instead give him a suitable task around Hejaz since he was a Naqshebandi. This, they judged, was a better alternative than military intervention. As support for their argument, they also provided a letter from Sheikh Ubeydullah's son-in-law Muhammed Emin. In it, he suggested to the governor of Van that deporting the sheikh would be a wise choice and furthermore promised to collect the accrued taxes himself. In so doing, he told of the failure of sheikh in his previous task, charging that Ubeydullah had collected the tobacco himself and sold it to Persian traders for his own benefit. This contradicted the sheikh's account that he had been unable to assess and collect the tobacco tax. Muhammed Emin continued:

⁹¹ A. MKT. MHM. 480/66.

“Since deep obedience and obeisance to the Sublime State in both deeds and words is an obligation, I write sincerely in saying that the agriculture of Şemdinan and Herki depends mostly on tobacco. Approximately 100 yük and each 50 of yearly allowance are produced. And half of that which consists of 1 yük at freight of five belongs to Sheikh Ubeydullah himself, and the other part he buys cheaply from the people of two districts and then sells dearly to Persian traders. This way he prevents (kills) the application of the tax and does not allow it to be registered in the accounts of the sublime state. If the state does not deport him, it must completely forsake two districts, because God forbid he can so deceive and betray the people, but by deporting this the sheikh, I would promise that I can collect the taxes completely together with the sheep tax and tithes of barley and whatever else had resisted collection should the government assign us this task. The decree always belongs to the owner of the order.”⁹²

The letter, written in Persian and signed by Emin himself, was a good example how the government could find allies in a tribal structure. The central government could even exert its influence in a relatively politically free area coming out of a tax. Besides this phenomenon, there were other events pointing to the flexibility of tribal relations. Sheikh Ubeydullah tried to build a unity upon such a basis.

The idea of deporting or removing the sheikh from his sphere was not anathema to the Ottoman center. In general the Ottoman Empire might be expected to apply such policies to those whose influence had grown problematic. But in this situation the influence of the sheikh was greater than an ordinary notable, and moreover this influence was more connected with his residential domain than was the case with others.

Towards the end of the summer of 1879, the local tribes had a dispute with the regular soldiers dispatched from Mosul to the Imadiye region. The soldiers were accused of pillaging and violating the villagers. The soldiers had an armed confrontation with the tribes, and consequently a military division of the Ottoman Army was captured. The sheikh's son, Seyit Abdulkadir, was also involved in the affair. The Ottoman government became very suspicious

⁹² Same file dated October 12, 1875.

about the sheikh's intentions after this incident, especially when the empire was constantly under pressure for reform. The Ottoman government recognized well that the sheikh held enormous power at his disposal.

The government seemed to be reluctant to have an open confrontation with the sheikh, yet it took the necessary steps in order to pursue the father and the son. At first the government urgently asked them to come together to either Van or Istanbul.⁹³ Besides some arbitrators, the government officially assigned Sami Paşa from the Fourth Army to investigate the situation. Sheikh Rıza was also dispatched from Mosul to interview Sheikh Ubeydullah. When he recognized that the events of Imadiye had so excited the government's attention, Ubeydullah quickly ordered his son Abdulkadir to be near him. On September 7, 1879, Sheikh Rıza brought with him the captives together with their captain Kamil Efendi. He reported that he was just there while the two sons of Ubeydullah brought the captives. The rebels were considering executing the soldiers as vengeance for the losses from their clashes, but Rıza persuaded them not to. He added that he had personally witnessed the cutting off of the finger of the regional state tax officer who had betrayed the sheikh by providing information to the governor of Van.⁹⁴ Such demonstrative acts as public punishment might have been plays to purposely expose the sheikh. What Sheikh Rıza provided was not only an account of his impressions but also evidence of the degree of fear engendered by Ubeydullah. He claimed that the group gathered around the sheikh out of fear. Moreover, Ubeydullah was declaring that he would either unite Kurdistan to transform it into its former emirate status, like Montenegro and Serbia, or die for this cause and so save his soul. Another informant, Fuad Beğ, the former head of the Bradost tribe, reported that the group had already begun to disperse due to lack of food supplies.⁹⁵

⁹³ Y. A. Hus. 162/28.

⁹⁴ Y.A Hus.162/24, September 7, 1879.

⁹⁵ Y.A Hus 162/36.

Such informants and the sheikh's propensity to negotiate caused the government to lift the strict measures against the sheikh. Obviously the population was suffering under a great socioeconomic crisis after the great defeat, and harsh measures would naturally agitate them. The government found it better to invite the sheikh rather than compel him. Meanwhile Ubeydullah declared to the government that he was ready to submit his son. Events in the region calmed down. Taking stock of the situation, the government suddenly ordered him to stay in the village of Nehri rather than come to Van, as it had decided to dispatch special envoys and thought it might be better for him to stay put.⁹⁶ Moreover, the mufti of Van and Sheikh Fehim, who was Ubeydullah father's caliph, were also dispatched to the sheikh to give him telegrams from Istanbul.⁹⁷ They were accompanied by Mehmed Said, who had been in Van to maintain contacts on the sheikh's behalf.

The sheikh claimed in his petition that his son had been around Imadiye to help mediate between villagers and the government and to prevent any compulsive actions. His enemies and foreigners were laying such accusations on his son and distorting how things had really happened, he charged. Free soldiers could attest that his son had saved them, he stated, adding his regret at Ubeydullah's service in the war being repaid by such pursuit. He said that hearing of these incidents had made him very upset, so he ordered his son to come near him. He added that under such conditions his stay in Şemdinan had become unbearable without a guarantee from the Ottoman state, so he felt he had to move and settle at the border of Iran. In that case the whole region from Erzurum to Baghdad could erupt into turmoil. The sheikh was inclined to negotiate, but the minimum requirement for this was a guarantee from the government.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Y. A. Hus. 162/28, September 10, 1879.

⁹⁷ Y. A. Hus. 162/32, September 11, 1879. Sheikh Fehim Arvasi was the tutor of Sheikh Ubeydullah according to the information about Arvasi family in Aydın Talay's *Bizim Eller*, Acar Matbaası: Ankara, 1998..

⁹⁸ Y.A Hus 162/23, 162/36, 162/73 September 15, 1879.

The government was planning to bring Ubeydullah to Van and then persuade him to leave the region. Realizing the threat of the sheikh to order, the government had planned to send him to one of the holy cities under the pretext of a religious mission. That would in fact be a more rational solution than entering such a mountainous region, especially when the empire was militarily so weak. Therefore the government grew very careful in its attitude towards the sheikh. Each side showed mutual respect to the other in their written communications. On September 26 the envoys sent to Ubeydullah returned after giving him necessary assurances due to his old and longstanding obedience to the state. He was granted the mercy of the sultan, and the special aide-de-camps envoys established relations with the local tribes. After they were granted mercy the tribes renounced their rebellious acts, blaming them on foreign deception. A commission from Van was formed and sent to the region to examine their demands and investigate the related affairs of the Herki and Dostki tribes. These policies were effective in bringing calm to the tribes.⁹⁹

While the governor of Van had a positive attitude towards the sheikh, on September 29 the governor of Mosul took a more critical stance towards the guarantee and negotiation process. He charged that Sheikh Ubeydullah had begun to spread a rumor that a major and a mufti of Van had been sent specially to him, giving him responsibility for the whole area. He had begun to say, added the governor, that the army around Imadiye would soon disperse. The governor further warned that the sheikh was trying to buy time by initiating negotiations. In addition, the ağa of Zebar was near Edhem Paşa and tried to conscript rifle units in the region, but the group refused his envoys. This could be interpreted that the group was still leaning towards rebellion.¹⁰⁰ But the government stuck to its policy to persuade the sheikh to come and stay in Van. Towards that end the grandson of Ubeydullah, Mehmed Sıdık, was accepted as royal robe aide-de-camp because of his former services at the Beyazid frontier as miralay

⁹⁹ Y.A Hus 162/36 (9).

¹⁰⁰ Y.A Hus 162/36 (13).

during the war. Sheikh Ubeydullah sent one member from his family, Mehmet Said, as his deputy to the city of Van.¹⁰¹ On October 13 the sheikh's son Abdulkadir attended the commission established at Gevar (Yüksekova).

Fourth Army commander Sami Paşa dispatched Major Necip Beğ with the special envoys sent to the sheikh. The royal aide-de-camp Bahri Beğ was assigned with Ahmed Ratip Beğ to give the rewards and gratitude of the sultan.¹⁰² During the meeting, Ahmed Ratip received very special messages from the sheikh written and addressed to the sultan. The letter was signed by the sheikh and specially confided in Ahmed Beğ. The letter was dated October 17, but seemed to reach Istanbul only after a delay since the sheikh strictly instructed Ratip not to give the letter to anyone besides the sultan, and even to destroy it in case of danger. Ahmed Ratip found the way he received the letter remarkable, thinking that the sheikh had acted according to the special orders received from the sultan.¹⁰³

In the letter Sheikh explained that the disorder in the cities of Van, Erzurum and Van was occurring due to the tribes and corrupt officials trying to take advantage of this. This disorder was causing unrest and even the flight of some subjects, he warned. Secondly, he criticized Mar Shamun, the leader of Christians in the city of Çolemerik. Although Shamun lacked the power to confront even a single battalion of the state, he had increased his oppression due to the neglect and carelessness of local officers. This aroused the local people's distrust towards the government, as they watched the process culminating in an incident previous year when he attacked and burned 12 villages around the castle of Imadiye, as a result of which five Muslims were murdered and a seyid was thrown alive into the flames. The officials benefited from the rise of Mar Shamun at the cost of insulting Muslims

¹⁰¹ Y.A Hus162/65, October 9, 1879.

¹⁰² Y.A Hus. 162/73, October 15, 1879.

¹⁰³ Y.A Hus 162/36 (16), Y. PRK. BŞK... 4/18 In his November 28 telegram from Erzurum, Ahmed Beğ said that he received the special letter and some confided oral messages

and fuelling Christian animosity. This provocation from the officers reached the unbearable level of being suffered by the local Muslims.

Thirdly, he rejected plans for the province of Van to be annexed to Armenia, even though Christians formed only one-twentieth of the province's population. Such a decision would be very harmful for Van's Muslim majority and accordingly could not be accepted by them, he warned, excepting only 10-15 ruinous people called Timuroğlu from the town of Van who were notorious for their mischief.

Fourthly, he supported the annulment of some articles of the constitution called "kanun-i esasi," because he believed that all affairs of Islam should be under the direct control of the caliphate of Islam.

Fifthly, he pointed to the importance of religion. He said that religious affairs having precedence was essential for the advancement of the state. More enthusiastic and capable officials should be assigned to such tasks, he recommended, and the state should be more concerned about religious matters.

Sixthly, he pointed to the border problem. When foreign subjects attacked Ottoman subjects, military officers did not pay the necessary attention to the cases of those infringements, he charged, whereas Ottoman subjects' retaliation towards foreigners was met by firm measures such as capture and arrest of suspects, and confiscation and return to the foreigners of pillage spoils. Such blindness for the interest of their subjects caused further discredit to the government and led to oppression, he warned. He lamented how subjects of the state became victims of the oppression of foreigners due to the neglect of their own egoistic officers. Only the governor of Van, Hasan Paşa, was exempted from this general pattern.

Seventhly, he put forth for consideration the expense of his tekke (dervish lodge). The tekke was on Ottoman land. It had at least 5,000 piastre (kuruş) allocated for its annual daily

expenses, a sum met by contributions from the Iranian side. This situation was not appropriate for a tekke, he said, to which the sultan also belonged. His majesty's servants could also witness the crowd of the tekke's visitors and followers.

Lastly, some of the order's followers lived on Ottoman lands, and others in Iran. Those living in Iran enjoyed state support, whereas those on Ottoman land had none. Thus he asked that they be exempted from certain state taxes known as "tekalif-i miriye."

Sheikh Ubeydullah was constantly pressed to stay in Van. In order to avoid doing so, he provided many excuses and alternatives to each offer. On November 6 his son Abdulkadir came near Sami Paşa and submitted. During the autumn, the Ottoman state still maintained contact with the sheikh. On November 10, Ahmed Ratip moved from Van in order to deliver the royal decree. Sami Paşa said that the military unit had been well accepted by the public and the whole Hakkari region was in order. This situation was confirmed by reports from Mosul as well.¹⁰⁴ Despite this good news, the sheikh refused to come to Van again, citing his health as an excuse. Sami Paşa argued that calling him and giving him more guarantees would be useless, because the seasonal conditions would better justify the sheikh's former apologies. Rather he suggested postponing the same plan to the beginning of the spring.

The winter passed relatively quietly. The Council of Ministers held a special meeting to consider the settlement of Kurds. The government was anxious that the incursions of Kurds would cause the local Christians to apply for Russian or British protection, which could become a serious problem in the long run. Therefore a schedule was assigned to Sami Paşa until the end of that summer in coordination with the commission. Moreover, the nomadic tribes of the border were leaning towards Iran through the recent efforts of that state, and their settlement was to be decided according to negotiation with the tribes' notables and leaders. The Nestorian-inhabited region had the future potential to become Kurdistan's Montenegro

¹⁰⁴ Y.A. Hus. 162/126, November 14.

with their bishop religious leaders recently inclined towards Tblisi, and so the government had to settle with these tribes with the help of Sheikh Ubeydullah's sway after giving him esteem and deference. Clearly the decisions of the council were addressing some important issues in the sheikh's proposals contained in his petition.¹⁰⁵

The commission in the region suggested that in the Humaro district, near the sheikh's residence, a small settlement and barracks for a two-battalion unit should be built. It was decided that the plan was necessary for the district's development and would help maintain order and security. The presence of a military unit would also prevent tribal thievery, where recent figures of sheep theft in the Hakkari district alone reached 40,000.¹⁰⁶

In the March of 1880 famine hit the population and drew attention to the region. Christian charities tried to send help to their brethren in the region. According to an Armenian Patriarchate petition dated May 19, the famine was increasing Kurdish incursions against Armenians. The government replied that an aid commission had been established for relief and recovery had already begun with the arrival of spring. As for the criminal allegations, the government declared that these could not be called abnormal, beyond the random expectance of such occurrences in every society.¹⁰⁷

At the beginning of June, Britain was not satisfied with the proceedings of the Ottoman Empire in terms of implementing the reform programs. After diplomatic maneuvers, Britain managed to get international assent, and so gave a note to the Ottoman government urging it to fulfill the requirements of Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin.¹⁰⁸ At this critical turning point, bringing Sheikh Ubeydullah to Istanbul became more crucial for the government. Bahri Beğ met with the sheikh again on June 26. The royal aide-de-camp conveyed royal gratitude from the sultan and Sami Paşa gave him some orders and

¹⁰⁵ Y. A. Res. 5/17, January 19.

¹⁰⁶ Y. A. Res. 5 /29 9 February. Y.A.Hus. 163/92, February 3.

¹⁰⁷ Y PRK. BŞK. 3/15, May 26.

¹⁰⁸ 11 June, Şaşmaz, Musa, *The British Policy and the Application of Reforms*, p. 84.

suggestions related to then nation and state. The sheikh replied that although in recent years he had wished to reply to these honorable messages by coming personally to Istanbul, his health problems made this impossible. He noted that the messages of Bahri Beğ and his efforts had immense influence among the tribes and had spurred them to disregard every danger for the sake of the Muslims' leader, the sultan. He said he always thought of working to win the favor of the sultan as one of the holiest task.¹⁰⁹ Sheikh Ubeydullah decided to send his cousin and caliph to Van rather than going himself.

As a result, Mehmet Said came to the city of Van. On July 4, Sami Paşa reported from Van that the sheikh had declined the invitation to Istanbul due to the intrigues against him and that the sheikh's loyalty to the sultan was evident from his oath taken on the holy scriptures and the reports of some officers. The sheikh declared that if the demands confided in his son were listened to, he had already begun preparations to have Abdulkadir accompany Mehmed Said to Istanbul. The appointment of his cousin as a delegate to Van might be seen as a first step towards negotiations and the need for better communication.

Sami Paşa met the sheikh's deputy, who declared that all of them were determined to stand opposed to the Armenians being granted privileges and that they needed further assurance on that matter. There were rumblings that 3,000 of the 10,000 guns had arrived and been distributed among Nestorians and Armenians, whereas the Muslim had received not a one. On his return to Van, Mar Shamun saw the British and Russian consuls, but his offer of an independent government under his lead paying a fixed tax to the Ottomans was only accepted by the Russians. The sheikh privately warned Mar Shamun that in such a case he would issue a religious decree.

In reply, Sami Paşa recommended that they give up the idea of any sort of disturbances because the government had the power to suppress it, adding that the

¹⁰⁹ Y PRK. AZJ. 3/87, June 26.

government had never made any promises to the Nestorians or Armenians as they had claimed. Sami Paşa also delivered to the sheikh an ornamented box and golden watch from the sultan, saying that these gift and grants proved that the rumors were baseless. Mehmed Said also reported that the Persian shah's letter to the sheikh was sent with a two-mule load gift, and that letter declared the shah's good intentions concerning the sheikh's lodge since it was established by his ancestors, warning the sheikh of Ottoman conspiracies and giving him permission to come and settle.

Sami Paşa pointed to the possibility that the sheikh could be brought by giving guarantees. The sheikh's reluctance and rumors about Armenians were due to provocations from the Persian side, which the tribal leaders took a common oath to oppose. Other than the last incursion by the Persian Shekak tribe, there were no problems in the region. After evaluating the situation, the government insisted on bringing the sheikh and making firm his inclination towards the Porte, besides implementing necessary measures against the Persians' tribal incitement policy.¹¹⁰

The case of Sheikh Ubeydullah began to attract attention of other powers besides the Ottoman government. On July 9 the British consul at Van went to visit Şemdinan under orders from the general consul who had been in Van for some time. He met Mar Shamun during his return.¹¹¹ The more interesting note about the sheikh's activity during this period comes from a report written by Russia's consul in Van, Gamsarakan. He had been the head of the police force during the occupation of Erzurum and was of Armenian origin. In his report, he claimed that at the end of June, a general meeting had been held with the participation of many Kurdish leaders from a wide area. This was seen as the basis of Sheikh Ubeydullah's intention to mobilize the Kurdish population around a nationalist aim.¹¹² On July 18 the

¹¹⁰ Y. A. Hus 165/45, 6 July, A. MKT. MHM 485/82, July 15.

¹¹¹ Y. A. Hus. 165/45, July 18.

¹¹² There are many references to the Gamsarakan's work, which was an important source for the Russian authors as well. Garo Sasuni claimed that an Armenian trader of walnut trunks accompanied the English consulate in his

sheikh used the same excuse to once again reject the call for Istanbul, and he lamented that there were rumors distorting his good intention towards the government, although the result of his four years of efforts with the vali (governor) of Van to establish the order had been successful.

Finally, the sheikh gave thanks for the gifts and gratitude he had received from the Ottoman government and declared that he accepted the invitation and was ready to act in compliance with the official notifications. After this conclusion, Bahri Beğ asked for permission to leave, since everything was in order and a longer stay would be interpreted as lack of confidence.¹¹³ The long tension seemed to be calming down.

The Attack on Urmiye and Sawjbulak

At this initial phase before the movement towards the Urmiye plain, the compromise between the government and the sheikh remained ambiguous. Even a simple invitation from the government had provided the sheikh with many opportunities for delay. Another new invitation or meeting offer at that moment could have been the cause of further demands from the sheikh.

Meanwhile there had been new developments in Iran. The local governor of Sawjbulak, Lutfali Mirza, was already notorious for his abuse of local notables such as Feyzullah Beğ and Mina Ağa, the son of Kadir Ağa. Hamza Ağa had previously fled to Ottoman lands two years ago and returned to his land under an amnesty. The governor wanted to levy taxes on Kadir and Hamza Ağa in terms of assigning them some duties. Kadir Ağa got a permit to leave for his village in order to avoid this, whereas Hamza Ağa left the city without any such permit, despite advice to the contrary. The governor first arrested an

voyage to Nehri. Later the trader named Çilingiryan published his memoirs in an Armenian daily newspaper called "Murç." Garo Sasuni, pp. 153-55. There were 136 delegates, consisting of five the sheikhs, 21 caliphates, 42 notables and 68 ağas in Averyarov p. 125.

¹¹³Y. PRK. ASK. 4/28 September 2.

acquaintance of Kadir Ağa, who was released after negotiations. But this time a friend of Hamza Ağa named Aziz Ağai Fettah was arrested. Hamza Ağa decided to go to the city in order to release him and account for the arrears. The governor ordered him to his mansion one night in order to arrest him, but Hamza Ağa was also expecting such a trick. When the servants tried to put him in chains he stabbed them, and then snatching a rifle from one of the servants, he ran outside. He had his allies waiting outside, and they had clashes with the servants. They used the night and were able to leave the city.¹¹⁴

This incident led to great discontent among the people. The governor of Sawjbulak asked for help from Tabriz, and Mehmet Hüseyin Man with 20 cavalries along with Mehmed Sadık Han of Bahtiyari and Rahim Han Çelebyanlu with 80 cavalries were sent to the city to arrest Hamza Ağa. The initial plan of acting together with local notables, such as Kadir Ağa and Feyzullah Beğ, was doomed to failure in the mountainous resort of Hamza Ağa.

Meanwhile Hamza Ağa also resorted to collaboration with other government dissidents. He found good allies among his nephew Suwar Ağa of the Zudi tribe and Mamend Ağa of the Piran. These two tribes were near the Ottoman border. In the beginning his brother Kakallah adopted a precautionary policy of neutrality in order not to lose complete control over the Mengur tribe if they were unable to confront the Persian Army. The previous governor of Urmiye, Şehzade Ahmed Mirza, had seriously oppressed Abdullah Han and Ibrahim Han in Ushnu. These two brothers were disciples of Sheikh Ubeydullah and leaders of the Zirza tribe. They had already tried to get help in their former search for compensation that ended in vain. But the most important ally of Hamza Ağa would be Sheikh Ubeydullah. He went to ask his help with one of the sheikh's deputies named Kemal.¹¹⁵

On September 21, 1880, Sheikh Abdulkadir went to Ushnu with Hamza Ağa. Hearing of the incident, the Piran, Mangur and Aku tribes also joined them. In his letter to the leader

¹¹⁴ Quryans p. 16,

¹¹⁵ Quryans, *Sorësh-e Sheikh Ubeydullah*, pp. 22, 26. According to Quryans the sheikh already had correspondences with Hamza about accepting his lead, and until that time Hamza was reluctant.

of the Balek tribe of Revanduz, Abdulkadir declared that their presence there was due to the advancement of religion and demanded that they contribute to the movement by joining. Since Hamza knew the region better, he got a leading position in the movement. During the movement, he was at the helm with Abdulkadir.¹¹⁶ With the news that the sheikh would be involved in the affair and had begun to gather men for an offense, a great panic in Sawjbulak ensued, and on September 29 they entered the city which the local governor had fled just two days earlier. They delivered a sermon during the Friday mosque prayers intoning the name of Abdulhamid as the caliph and cursing the cruelty of Persian officials.¹¹⁷

The remaining tribes of the Mukriyan region took stock of the situation and acted bilaterally. For example, Mehmed Ağa of the Mameş tribe had a dispute with the sheikh over the control of Ushnu, which had been recently left to Sheikh Ubeydullah, disparaging his privileges there. When the extent of the sheikh's power became evident as well as the fact that the Karapapak tribe was being subjected to plunder because they confronted the sheikh, Mehmed Ağa decided to join the forces of the sheikh. Yet throughout the movement, he sought out every opportunity to desert as well as avoid tribal levies. Kadir Ağa, however, supplies the best example of pretense, as he hesitated from openly declaring sides, although his son Mina Ağa participated actively. In the end, he tried to save his property from the plunder and revenge of the Persian Army. Through his tacit understanding with Hamza Ağa, from the very beginning he grabbed at taking every advantage from the movement. Gulabi Ağa of the Dehbokri tribe was against the movement, but he had to conceal his intentions for a time. Osman Ağa of the Gavirg tribe in the Serdesht region participated in the movement

¹¹⁶ After the defeat and spread of the group, Hamza Ağa went to Merge. A telegram from the Mosul governor said that Hamza Ağa and the refugees at the Merge and Ranya went together with the Ottoman tribal leaders to the city of Erbil (Arbil) and meet Ahmed Ratip there. He warned that such acts could damage the internal order and attract the attention of foreign officers in the city. (Y. PRK.. A... 3/6, March 8ö 1881) On August 4, 1881, the representative of the governor of Mosul told of the murder of Hamza Ağa with seven associates together with two sons of his brother and a brother in the tent by Governor Fuad in Sawjbulak. They fled from Merge after trusting governor's guarantee. Their cut heads were sent to Tehran (Y. PRK.. UM. 4/66, Celile Celil gave the document dated July 26, Schulevsky from Tebriz to Tehran with more detailed and different figures about the same event, p. 14).

¹¹⁷ Y. PRK. EŞA 2/71, as Quryans depicts playing drums or wearing garments as the manifestation of authority.

after the Mianduab incident, and even then with much reluctance when a more accurate balance of power appeared.

Sheikh Abdulkadir settled his encampment in the city for a few days and according to Quryans, his first intention was to attack the lands of Afşar and Saqez. But a cry for help from the Kurdish villagers of Meraga in the direction of Mianduab led him to send some cavalries to Merhamedabad. His uncle was killed in skirmishes with cavalries of Mehmet Huseyin Han of Bahtiyar, Selim Han of Çarduli and Ali Han of Meraga. With the appearance of forces from Sawjbulak, they retreated to the Castle of Mianduab that contained a little artillery and some soldiers. After three hours of struggle, Celil Ağa (the brother of Han Babacan) passed to the Kurds' side by burning the city bazaar on the night of October 1, a Friday, causing great plunder and a massacre of civilians in Mianduab, leaving 800 Muslims, 20 Armenians and 50 Jews dead in the city, according to Quryans.¹¹⁸ Due to a lack of provisions, the tribal leaders resorted to pillage to devastating ends. Interestingly, they were unable to use the cannon that they got from Mianduab. On October 12, the group left Mianduab in ruins and moved on to Benab, and on October 17, they arrived in Malek Kandi¹¹⁹ The events of Mianduab soon aroused a reaction among the Shiite majority of Iran. A Persian army under the command of Itimadu's-Saltane moved from Tabriz towards Meraga, and a second army under the command of Hamza Mirza Haşmetu'd-Devle moved from Tehran on October 14.¹²⁰

The extent of looting demonstrated the nature of tribal warfare, although there might have been some runaway Ottoman soldiers from their rows at the border.¹²¹ Once each tribe

¹¹⁸ Quryans, p. 41. He gives the casualty figures on p. 43.

¹¹⁹ "... with a number of 8,000 cavalries and 9,000 infantries. The others that gathered with the expectation of plunder were not less than 10,000" (p. 57). Quryans seemed to exaggerate the numbers in order to make the Persian victory dearer. Although he had prejudices, his work supplies valuable information. That can be inferred also his stress of Friday night. He always stressed the futility of the sheikh's arguments and hatred of the Shiites.

¹²⁰ Y. PRK. ASK. 4/54, 4/65, 4/67.

¹²¹ Y. PRK. ASK. 4/72. On November 6, Sami Paşa reported there might be participants from the army though they were not permitted. There had been significant numbers from Ottoman tribes in the movement, and mainly the nucleus of the group around Abdulkadir was composed of former auxiliary veterans of the Ottoman- Russian War, which Quryans called "qarapuşek" for their wearing black garb. Therefore the commander Sami Paşa advised the government that soldiers not to be conscripted from the border regions.

took its share of the plunder, the need for continued fighting evaporated for them. They soon dispersed. As for the legitimization of their acts, they had the religious decree of the mufti of Sawjbulak that permitted taking spoils from unbelievers. Moreover, the desperate socio-economic conditions motivated such acts. Most of the loyal tribal units of the group were also geographically close to the sheikh's resort and thus under his influence. The lack of ammunition and medical care for wounds also made quick retreat strategically advantageous.

Looting incidents increasingly appeared around the towns of Benab and Meraga. Their effects were felt as far as even in front of Tabriz. When 55 infantries and five horsemen of the Mengur tribe were plundering the villages of Meraga, the soldiers of Meraga caught them and killed them all, excepting only four. Then Sheikh Abdulkadir ordered an encampment around the Kehrize Bazaar three kilometers from Benab. After stalemate skirmishes that lasted 10 days, the Kurds lost 300 men when the defenders used cannons. Abdulkadir retreated to Malek Kandi and stayed there for two days. From there he went to Çelik on November 3. There, due to insufficient food supplies, he decided to set some forces free and ordered most of them to go and join with the forces of his father at Urmiye. Many found this occasion a good opportunity to desert.

The army from Tabriz under the command of Hasan Ali Han then arrived in Meraga. Meanwhile, 500 voluntary cavalries from Shahseven under the command of Ferdi Han and Necefkuli Yurtçi arrived from Tabriz in order to join the main part of the army. They plundered en route (Kızılcan, Kuşkulan and Refvan were sacked). When they reached Çelik, İtimad Saltane refused their offer to pursue Abdulkadir, because he realized that it would be a further pretext for looting.

Afterwards the excesses of the Persian Army far surpassed the turmoil caused by the tribes. In this chaos, even neutral figures and supporters of the Persian government were not exempt from the damages of the army. Sheikh Abdulkadir stayed at Sawjbulak for a few more

days, and when he realized that the tribes would not be returning, he retreated towards Ushnu with the remaining 400-500 cavalries. He and Hamza Ağa also took some refugees with them to get shelter around Ushnu and Saqez.

On October 11 the Deputy Caliph Said and the sheikh's cousin Mehmed Emin came to Ismail Castle 9 kilometers from the city of Urmiye with 4,000 conscripted cavalries and infantries from the Bradost region. The town Mayor Ikbal u'd Devle confronted them by settling in the Bedirbu.¹²² Mehmed Said attacked the Kavilan and six nearby villages, and Christian villagers of the region ran to the city fearing a repeat of Mianduab. During an attack on the castle, Kurds were able to capture two cannons that however they were unable to use due to lack of ammunition. The army of Ikbal u'd Devle got pinned down in the castle but the nephew of Timur Paşa, who was patrolling between the city and castle, came to help with six squads from the Khoy regiment. On October 18, Sheikh Ubeydullah also came to Urmiye with 3,000 cavalries and infantries whom he collected among the tribes of Herki, Zirza, Deştbil and from the Mergever region of his influence. He encamped in the village of Saint Serkis at Mt. Sir situated three kilometer south of the city. This village was the summer residence of American missionaries. From there, he immediately sent a letter to the religious authorities of the town (Seyh u'l Islam and Muçtehid), telling them if they handed over the city peacefully, they would be spared. The city dwellers asked for a two-day delay, and this was accepted. The following day the Catholic Bishop Clozel sent an envoy to ensure the security of Christians. The Ottoman consulate representative took his brother Hoca Davud and Solomon the preacher with him. Here important words were exchanged between the sides. When the Ottoman consul introduced himself, he replied that the Ottoman and Persian state

¹²² The editor of Quryans' book points out that there is no Castle 'Bedirbu' or 'Bedirbud' Y. PRK. ASK. 7/34. Sami Paşa telegram dated November 2 describes the Bendi Valley as the meeting place of the sheikh, and from there they moved together with 6,000 soldiers. The governor attacked Mehmed Said when they were around Çenize Castle with four regiments and 800 cavalries with three batteries, and lost two of them. After two hours of skirmishes, the governor retreated to the Bedirbu ruins. When he could not protect himself, after two more days he retreated back to the city and closed the gates. The sheikh then laid siege to the city with 12,000 men.

were spoiled and their once-glorious names fading and that hereafter, there would be no need for consul, vizier or governor and he would conquer the two Sultanates. Then he showed some men around him, saying, “Look at these people! Each is noble and clever and used to own an estate. Now they were so oppressed at the hand of the Ottomans that they can no longer be called human, but rather animals. There will not be such oppression under our government. I hope that after I put the lands in Iran into order, I will turn to the Ottomans and defeat them. When I control the whole of Iran and Turan, I will establish an order so that everyone is at peace.”¹²³

The sheikh knew the city’s hope was to delay so as to buy time for help from Timur Paşa at Khoy, as he had captured some messengers from the city, so he refused their proposal for another three-day deferment. He stipulated again his former conditions under which the Christians would also be safe. If the people of the city would not tie up Ikbalu’d Devle and send him to the sheikh, Ubeydullah would attack the following day.

On October 23, the ceasefire granted to the city ended. The sheikh and his elder son Siddik and his caliph attacked the city from the west gates, Askerhan, for three days. Some 300 men, mostly civilians from the city, died. The British consul from Tabriz, Abbot, was in the city for his summer vacation. He had planned to visit thermal springs of Tblisi to allay his wife’s illness. He decided to spend a few more days in Urmiye due to its good climate. He went to see the sheikh and asked for another delay or at least permission for the Christians to leave safely, because they were in the dangerous part of the city most affected by the clashes. His stay there had already caused rumors that he was collaborating with the aggressors. So when he was returning to the city together with the Armenian Simon in order to deliver the sheikh’s messages and arrange for passage for Christians, he was targeted by shots from within the city. As his situation appeared insecure, he was sent to Sawjbulak via Salduz,

¹²³ Y. A. Res. 10 /3 (18) April 6, 1881. The Ottoman consulate representative told about his interview with the sheikh in his letter contained in this file. Quryans, p. 98.

because the Khoy road was not safe either. On October 31, he met with Sheikh Abdulkadir, who escorted him with 150 cavalries until Gerdereş 12 kilometers from Benab.¹²⁴

The sheikh shifted position and began to attack the city from the Garden of Dilguşa. The battle remained inconclusive, with the defenders using cannons, and the sheikh's elder son was wounded. He retreated to Mt. Sir. Meanwhile, 500 loads of ammunition reached the city and boosted the defenders' morale. A 15-day stalemate then ensued. Timur Paşa came with six divisions, 2,000 cavalries and six cannons from Khoy. He was situated 36 kilometers from the city and not making haste because he had a history of conflicts with the İkbāl u'd Devle. Sheikh Ubeydullah confronted him by sending 500 men with 30 camel loads of artillery under the command of his elder son, but Timur Paşa was able to check the retreat of Sheikh Sıddık. He was able to reach and settle at the north of the city. After then only small skirmishes occurred, such as one at the village of Askerabad. While the sheikh was trying to move to İsmail Castle the local villagers attempted an ambush. This venture was doomed to failure because there was no help available from Timur Paşa. Another clash occurred when the sheikh attacked the village of Çarbaş where Timur Paşa was encamped. The resulting clashes extended until Aluce, a village three kilometers from the city. For a time there was a stalemate between the sides. On November 11, the group disappeared and emerged again in Bradost two days later. There the group around him dispersed. The sheikh was ill, so he stayed at the Dir Monastery for a half hour and then moved towards his region Mergever. In his letter, the Ottoman Consulate representative reported that either the sheikh had returned to Nehri or stayed between the borders out of fear of the Ottomans. He added that illness was preventing the sheikh from eating or sitting.¹²⁵ Timur Paşa continued to commit injustices indiscriminately towards local people. The government, in order to get rid of his nearby

¹²⁴ Quryans, p. 68.

¹²⁵ Y. A. Res 10/3 (17,18) and Quryans leaves his report of sheikh's until his retreat towards Bradost region. Y. PRK. ASK...5/31. On December 9, Nafiz Paşa reported that the sheikh had rheumatism of the knee and he was resting at his home, and his son Abdulkadir was protecting the grain stored at Merge.

excesses far exceeding those of the Kurds, paid lip service to sacking faraway villages at Mergever under the pretext of pursuing the sheikh. His hatred towards the locals was due to his punishment by former Governor Sucau'd Devle.¹²⁶

The Ottoman state retaliated at the turmoil on the Iranian side with measures of martial law, whereas the official declaration of the situation was suspended and given to the disposal of the Fourth Army. If a large army were sent to settle the border, the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis was a good model for the powers to assert their influence. Moreover, Persia officially declared that the offenses of the sheikh should be prevented by the Ottomans, otherwise the necessary permission should be given to pursue him and any responsibility for a possible border violation by the Persian Army should be assumed by Van's governor. The state was very sensitive on not causing disorder on the border. At first it tried to provide the required grain and cash for the dispatched army from local supplies. But the poverty-stricken population made this alternative unavailable, so the Ministry of Finance had to bear the burden. Although the state acknowledged the possibility of still persuading the sheikh, there were serious reports about his acts. On October 12, Sami Paşa sent a telegram giving an account of the sheik's affair. He said that the sheikh had gathered in excess of 8,000-10,000 men in the Ushnu district, which he collected from the districts around Gevar and among Persian tribes on the other side of the border, and by sending letters, he told of his attack on Sawjbulak and Urmiye and asked armed men from the local notables and ağas. Accordingly, Abdullah Ağa from Seydanli and Izettin from the Albak district separately gathered some men to go immediately, and the sheikh's caliph Said also came to Hervati and gathered men. In the Geviç region of Colemerik, in the Albak districts, the residents of Masru and Siverkan made open alliance with the sheikh, and Ishar and other places also made common cause with him. Although there were rumors that the sheikh would openly attack Persian lands and punish Ali

¹²⁶ Y. A. Res 10/3 (16) and also Quryans.

Han of the Şikak tribe for his raids on Ottoman tribes, Sami Paşa said that his real aim was to control the Ottoman side and so the need to send more troops would be urgent if no solution emerged in Iran. More crucially, since the sheikh had great influence, a possible invitation of tribes would cause grave turmoil on the Ottoman side. In order to prevent this, and to head off people crossing the border to help the sheikh's movement in Iran, military strength was boosted in the Rewanduz and Hakkari districts, and two detachments of mountain artillery and a battalion under the command of Miralay Ali Şefik were dispatched to Gevar. Musa Paşa, the commander of the Eighth Division, with two battalions and a battalion of soldiers in Erciş was immediately sent to Hakkari. Two battalions were also requested from Fourth Army headquarters. A regiment of soldiers from the Seventh Division was prepared to be ready for rapid deployment, and the same was ordered from the Şehrizur headquarters at Revanduz.¹²⁷

On October 19, Sami Paşa reported that the insurgents consisted of three branches. One was on the move towards Tabriz under the command of Sheikh Abdulkadir, and they were around Merhamedabad. The second was under the command of the elder son Mehmet Siddik around Mergever en route to Urmiye with the consent of the Urmiye people, and the remainder was in retreat under Abdulkadir to Somai in order to secure the grain stores and hold back a Persian offense. This reserve might join with the group in Urmiye and go onto Tabriz. The Ottoman Consulate in Tehran notified the commander Sami Paşa that the deployment of the Persian Army was insufficient. Sami explained his fears that the sheikh's real aim was to establish an independent Kurdish government, and since the sheikh understood that he could not realize his aim in Ottoman lands, he was using Hamza Ağa's case as a pretext for his offense. If the Persian Army could not cope with them even with all power, then his government would settle. Next with the power he had acquired, he would

¹²⁷ Y. A. Res. 8/7.

increase his influence and even if he did not demand Ottoman lands, it would be natural for people near the border to cross to his side due to their ethnicity.¹²⁸

The state consulted a military committee which included former commander Muhtar Paşa and Ahmed Ratip. On the issue of how to deal with the sheikh, they recommended his removal from the region for several reasons, mainly due to the former policies of the Iranian state. In order to compel the sheikh to its side, the Persian government for a time followed a process of cutting the incomes of his foundations situated on the Persian side, and then they granted Persian citizenship to first the elder son and then the younger. By gradually granting them such favors in order to win their favor, the ultimate aim was to make them fear the Ottomans and cause the sheikh to flee due to a possible Ottoman military operation on Hakkari.¹²⁹ Despite the constant damage from the Persian side, in a letter the shah tried to create just the opposite by personally asking the sultan to send his army to the border. The reply to his request was an assurance that the Ottoman tribes would be prevented from joining the insurgency along with information on military proceedings on the issue.¹³⁰

In addition to other necessary steps, the general military inspector Asaf Paşa was assigned to the region in order to delay the instructions and directions from getting to provincial administrators and tribal leaders so as to prevent their participation.¹³¹

Initially the Ottoman state considered the situation an ordinary border violation, and there were no serious suspicions about the sheikh's loyalty. Even the previous reports of Van's governor saying that the sheikh shied away from his sons' acts and had gone to Urmiye in order to dispel the participation of Ottoman subject when he found suddenly himself in

¹²⁸ Y. PRK. ASK. 3/72.

¹²⁹ October 16, Y. PRK. BŞK. 3/64.

¹³⁰ Kajarian Documents on Persian and Ottoman Relations, document #574, p. 642.

¹³¹ 16 October, Y.A.Res. 8/9.

skirmishes were taken for granted. Soon the extent of the incidents became clearer through the protests of Iran and other reports.¹³²

The first remarks that the sheikh had begun to gather men were interpreted that he would move towards Imadiye, as did the governor of Akra, who reported that the men of Sheikh Abdulkadir had stolen the sheep of another local sheikh, Mehmed. The fact that the sheikh had established connections with foreigners and that he was provoking and leading the movement had more serious consequences than his attacks on the Muzuri and Gerdi tribes of Semdinan just a few weeks before the Urmiye incidents.¹³³ When the incidents' impact began to be felt, the Ottoman government had to reach a political decision that would not harm its international balance. When the Ottomans understood that the incidents were more widespread and defeat of the sheikh more likely, the 10 infantry battalions were supplemented by a cavalry regiment and a canon battery, and the border officers responsible for the incident were reassigned.¹³⁴ The governor of Van was discharged, but his cooperation was found necessary for the critical interim and due to the importance of the affairs a stronger and more intelligent commander, Mehmet Nafiz Paşa, was appointed commander of the Fourth Army in place of Sami Paşa.¹³⁵

The Ottoman government viewed the situation as a threat to the recent unfortunate conditions since the war. Therefore it mainly aimed to stabilize the border and prevent the sheikh from using his influence among the tribes to derail Ottoman-Persian relations. The state recognized that the possibility of prolonged border chaos could spur Great Britain or Russia to interfere to the Ottomans' detriment. An interesting and significant remark was the Ottoman concern about the Armenians living in the region. The state acknowledged and tried

¹³² Y.A.Res 8/23 November 5, Y PRK. AZJ... 4/12. A petition from the sheikh for his purpose to be in Urmiye A. MKT. MHM 486/28 the governor of Van's first interview with the sheikh.

¹³³ Y. A. Hus 166/49.

¹³⁴ Y. PRK. A...2/88, November 5.

¹³⁵ Y. A. Res 8/25, November 10, Kajarian Document #573 November 15, 1880, Y. PRK. ASK.. 4/76 from Erzincan; Nafiz Paşa pointed the seriousness of the sheikh's case and the need to send 2,500 soldiers with more condensed battalions.

to prevent the possibility of the sheikh's influence turning against the Armenians or the existing disorder harming them. With respect to charges that the sheikh would turn against the Ottoman state and allegations of his correspondence with foreign embassies, the government decided that even if true, these rumors would need no solution other than getting rid of the sheikh. Muhtar Paşa and Ismail Beğ were even nominated for this task. These allegations had to be checked against Persian propaganda aimed at making the Ottomans take harsher measures against the sheikh and the rebels.

Ottoman Ambassador Fahri Beğ said that the content of the letters delivered via Dr. Cochran and their seals were both inconsistent with the sheikh having sent them. He suggested that there might be a foreign intrigue involved in the sheikh's declaration of independence. The letters sent to İkbâl Devle remained ambiguous and inconsistent. The sheikh's interview with the British consulate had alarmed the government. When the consulate could not return to the city, the sheikh got written recognition from the consulate so that blame for any slaughter of the Christians by the town governor would not fall on the Kurds.¹³⁶

It was decided that the royal aide Ahmed Ratip would be sent for a better evaluation of the situation and to deliver suggestions to the sheikh. In order to obtain the sheikh's content, the government had to reconsider and conclude his demands after the incidents at İmadiye. Most of them were related to government issues so they were rejected, because they would have increased his already challenging influence. His suggestion that Seydan (descendants of the Prophet) be tax exempt was a non-starter, since it was contrary to the non-discriminatory principles of Tanzimat; the government could give aid only to those in desperate need. He had also asked for the taxation of Nestorians on the same terms as Muslims and for a sales tax

¹³⁶ Y. PRK.. ASK... 4/79 November 9. Sami Paşa immediately sent some officials to the sheikh about the interview of the consulate. In Y. A. Hus 165/178, the Tehran consulate gave information about the involvement in delivering the letter of Rıza Beğ, who had visited Tehran the previous year to request the sheikh's acceptance of Persian subjects.

exemption on salt from Iran. The government decided that the sheikh should act in line with his status by not intervening or suggesting the removal of corrupt official such as the Timur Pasazade family in Van or generally appointing better officials. The government also wanted efficient officials, but there was no serious failure of the Timur family in Van. Ahmed Ratip returned to Hakkari with a 5,000-piastre annual allowance and some other privileges for his *tekye*, which had already been granted with his promises that the Herki incursions would be stopped by preventing such border crossings and that proven wounded war veterans would also receive salary grants.¹³⁷

The royal aide reached Van but was unable to reach the sheikh's resort due to winter conditions. His first interview with the sheikh's deputy, Said, confirmed the sheikh's loyalty and the events caused by Persian hostility against the Sunnis. In a letter left with the governor of Van, the sheikh stressed that the Persians' oppression of Sunnis had reached unbearable levels and sown feelings of great contempt. He did not deny his involvement in the affair in which the conditions prevented him from complying with the sultan's orders. He issued a plea about Persian injustices and left the disputed villages to the sultan's control.¹³⁸ Iran repressed the insurgency harshly, causing many civilians to cross to the Ottoman side. Iran ceaselessly asked for their return and advised the arrest of the sheikh and other Ottoman instigators. But the Ottoman state accepted them as refugees and tried to disarm them, telling the Persians that the problem should be solved by a general amnesty, and a commission should be established to look into crimes and damages.¹³⁹

On December 23, Iran declared a general amnesty and asked the Ottoman government to expel the sheikh from its borders. The amnesty was ineffective against the ongoing

¹³⁷ Y. A. Res 8/23 November 5; from then onwards, the state began to collect information about the intentions of the sheikh in Y. PRK. A...3/74.

¹³⁸ Y. PRK. A...3/4. December 15.

¹³⁹ A. MKT. MHM 486/28, November 23 puts the number of refugees at 60,000-70,000, and another estimate of Ahmed Ratip was 15,000 households in Y. PRK. A...3/4 January 3, in Y. PRK. ASK.. 5/70. Nafiz Paşa reported that the general amnesty was ineffective, January 9.

punishment of civilians. Even some paths of return were not spared. Winter conditions made any military operation impossible, but it was obvious that the refugees would attack again at the beginning of spring. In this case Iran implied that it would seek the help of Russia. There was already information that Russia was sending some troops towards Nakhichevan. Diplomatic relations between the two states held at that point until spring. The Ottoman government decided to bring the sheikh to Istanbul and settle the armed tribes in areas relatively farther away from the border. The Ottoman government was very sensitive that solutions reached on the basis of a committee between two Muslim countries not allow interference by outside powers.¹⁴⁰

During the winter, the refugees were making preparations to attack come spring. Some 60 men fled from the regiments, and by enlisting other former colleagues they reached 100 and began to perform military exercises. There were also other hints that refugees planned to transform themselves into a military order by buying uniforms, horses and guns. In February, Hamza Ağa attacked Karapapak cavalries and killed at least 100. Some tribes, however, such as the Gerdi and Bradost, declared that they refused the sheikh's leadership and even stole his elder son's sheep. The sheikh told the Van administration that he would not go with the refugees but also that he could not prevent their attack in spring. The Van administration interpreted this to mean that Abdulkadir would lead the refugees, and unless the Persian government would guarantee their safe return, they would again resort to insurgency. At Imadiye, the sheikh sent some envoys to Berfire and Rikan, announcing that tithes would be eliminated there. On March 23, another letter of the sheikh was intercepted, one declaring holy war against the Persians and asking the Erciş people (i.e. those living in Erciş district of Van province) to prepare and join their brothers. In order to blunt the affect of these letters,

¹⁴⁰ 166/38 Y.A. Hus. and 166/41, Y. A. Res 9/61 Russia sent 10 regiments and two batteries on December 26. Y.A. Hus. 166/42, January 24, the shah declared that he would reluctantly collaborate with Russia if he got no guarantee from the Ottomans.

the government ordered the Fourth Army and responsible governors to issue and deliver decrees denying the sheikh's claims.

The government's plans to disarm the tribes and their settlement inside the Bradost region were inapplicable, because the region contained more enemies than their kin. The refugees mostly settled around Merge and Ranya. They were accepted as refugees if they surrendered their guns; therefore, gun bearers remained at the Persian side of the border. They were to be sent to areas farther from the border in order to isolate them from provocation. The royal aide Ahmed Ratip tried to persuade them to stay calm.¹⁴¹

Meanwhile Iran began to increase its diplomatic pressure on the Ottomans to convince them that key signs still showed the sheikh instigating the tribes against Iran, yet the Ottomans did not proceed on their guarantees or deport the sheikh. The government rejected the Persian claims that the sheikh was being supported by the state on purpose. Iran began to declare more openly that Russia would contribute militarily to preserving the Persian borders. With the beginning of March, the Persian Army declared that it would mobilize under its old commanders and begin the attack on the Persian New Year, Nevruz. Russia also mobilized soldiers towards Nakhichevan.¹⁴² Iran gradually assured the Ottomans that foreign intervention for a solution should be sought after a certain timeframe, even though it considered this undesirable.¹⁴³ Russia held the same view as Iran about the sheikh, and officially declared to the Ottoman government that it would pursue the sheikh's case seriously.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Y. A. Res. 10/3, a February 28 telegram from the governor of Mosul said that a letter of Sheikh Ubeydullah had been intercepted, informing tribal leaders that their meeting with Ahmed Beğ was satisfactory and that all the foreign governments gave rights to Kurdistan and found Iran illegitimate and that the union should not be damaged. Y.PRK. ASK.. 6/25, On April 20 Nafiz Paşa informed about the content of the letter written in Persian so that it could be evaluated by the government, Y.A.Hus 167/42. A. MKT MHM 486/62 On April 17 the government rejected the Persian claims and ordered the issue of a decree refusing them.

¹⁴² Russia sent soldiers towards Nakhichevan, and figures for the mobilized Persian Army are given in Y. Res. 10/10, March 8.

¹⁴³ Y. EE. 82/6, Y. A. Res. 10/ 3,, Y. PRK. HR. 5/63, Y. A. Res 10/2 April 8, HR SYS 82/46, Y.A.Res 10/19.

¹⁴⁴ Y.A. Res 10/26,. On March 30, the government decided to remove the sheikh after considering of a possible Russian intervention.

The state recognized that the sheikh couldn't be gotten rid by force alone; rather, his influence among the tribes had to be included in any solution. The Ottomans initially sought the arbitrariness of a committee in which refugees' problem would be solved, but later the sheikh's plans for a new uprising and Russian overtures towards Persia made this unfeasible. The state had tried to get concessions from Iran through a committee, in order to compensate the refugees and compel some hardliners to settle at places distant from the border. Although the Ottomans openly declared that the borderline would be established on its part, the means was not clearly stipulated. A solution in favor of Ottoman benefits required both coordination from the sheikh and the consent of the tribes. Iran strictly insisted on removal of the sheikh and the return of criminals. They were given guarantees about the deportation of the sheikh and told how the issue was proceeding as proof of their serious intentions. When the invitation of the sheikh to Istanbul was heard, Iran still worried whether the sons of the sheikh would also be deported.

Moreover, the correspondence of the royal aide showed that the sheikh was reluctant to obey the sultan's invitation. The state became increasingly sure that the sheikh was instigating the tribes against Iran behind the scenes. It became clear that guarantees about preserving the border could not be established without removing the sheikh. The Persian ambassador hammered on the sheikh issue constantly, and his Russian colleague helped him to get the concern of other embassies as well.¹⁴⁵

At last it was reported that Sheikh Ubeydullah had deceived the government by his offer of border guarantees, while he was really just trying to buy time in order to provoke the tribes. He was ordered to come to Istanbul or more severe measures would be implemented against him. The sheikh replied to the official order by denying the accusations. He claimed that he had actually prevented the plunder of Urmiye. If he had had such aims, he would have

¹⁴⁵ Y. A. Hus 167/38 May 17. As for the personal intentions of the sheikh, another letter addressed to the Musa and Mehmed Ağa of the Haydaranlı tribes was intercepted (dated April 2), in Y. A. Hus 167/15.

already had that opportunity when the consulate and the notables of the city were near him, he said. His meeting with the consulate was for the purpose of arranging his secure travel to Tabriz, he asserted, denying foreign inspiration. The British consulate in Tabriz could attest to his common sense. He swore that he did not have such slanderous aims, calling the letters forgeries and frauds. He promised the security of the border again if it was necessary for the benefit of the state, but expressed bewilderment at why he should accept Shiite oppression.¹⁴⁶

The new Fourth Army commander, Nafiz Paşa, arrived in Şemdinan on May 31. The sheikh agreed to come Istanbul, but his two sons refused. They moved to Van via Gevar, and they reached Van on 11 June. Nafiz Paşa did not believe the claims of illness of Sheikh Abdulkadir, who did not meet him. Nafiz noted that the elder son Sıddık had not met with his father for eight months due to resentment between them. Sıddık was busy moving half of his household to Iranian lands with plans to move the other part after his brother recovered. The commander interpreted this as a threat of his leaning towards Iran. Sheikh Sıddık was not as effective as his brother. The brothers could not play the same role as their father and this was especially so when their father was in the hands of the government. The eight divisions of Musa Paşa had already been left in Gevar in case their deployment became urgent, and it was useful to postpone their dispatch until the sheikh reached Istanbul. The sheikh also guaranteed that his sons would not react. Moreover, 16 regiments of soldiers were redeployed, with a considerable number staying in the region even after the sheikh left. The sheikh was to move to Istanbul on July 4 with a group of his disciples and caliphates escorted by Ahmed Ratip and Süleyman Paşa.

Escape from Istanbul

¹⁴⁶ Y.PRK. ASK. 7/55, April 29, Telegram from Nafiz Paşa and translation of the sheikh's reply. Nazmi Paşa's accounts of bringing the sheikh from Şemdinan were given the same catalogue numbered, 7/34.

After staying in Istanbul for a year, Sheikh Ubeydullah decided to leave on July 23, 1882. When the government recognized his unexpected departure nearly a month later, his caliph Mehmed Said and a Persian refugee accompanying him were interrogated by a special commission. At first they denied knowing anything about his departure, but after three days Said said that the sheikh had gone towards Batum by steamer with the help of someone called Kurd Ahmed Efendi. Said seemed to have been left in charge of the sheikh's affairs with an explanation of his intentions.¹⁴⁷

The commission inferred from the last interview between the sheikh and his cousin that he would go and wait at his home for a decision for his deportation. He had already been in Istanbul for one year and his petitions remained unanswered. He declared that he had preferred any place in the vast Ottoman lands but had received no answer. He was glad to meet the sultan, but the compulsive conditions prevented his obeying by staying longer. In general, he regretted that Persia had not compensated for the damages committed against his property and that the Ottomans had not pressed on this matter. These points were clearer in the petition he had left one year ago. In his letter, he stressed that among the Nestorians and Armenians in the region, the Kurds were the most loyal subjects of the empire. But as they were from the Sunni sect, they were grievously oppressed by Iran as if to make them turn Shiite like the "Kelhur"s and "Lor"s. Recently, the Persian had increased their oppression to unbearable levels, and so his lodge became the main target. The Urmiye governor attacked his villages, killing 48 and causing 50,000 liras in damage worth. He had sought his rights through a commission established by the Ottoman Consulate in Tabriz. Although he was obviously in the right, everything remained in vain. The recent Urmiye incident was the outcome of such Persian policies and especially their support for the continuation of the

¹⁴⁷ Y. PRK. ZB. 2/14. On August 19, 1882, the commission took Mehmed Said's testimony and Y. PRK. KOM. 3/65, August 20. When the government learned of the departure, it bolstered security around another candidate for escape, the mufti of Taşlıca, Y. PRK. A... 3/46, August 16 his 5,000 kuruş allowance was to be cut. Y. PRK..KOM. 3/66.

excesses of Ali Han Şikak on Van. He prevented any looting in Urmiye when the clashes began. He also declared that despite his submission, the Persians had not ended their hypocrisy. By continuing such tricks, they successful in deceiving some 100 destitute Bradost tribesmen to go and settle on his lands during his absence. He had already sowed those lands with seeds totaling 8,500 loads.¹⁴⁸ In autumn, he filed another petition when Persian soldiers attacked 15 of his villages. At that time, he asked for a permit to go and settle either in Mosul or in Van, before the winter season, in order to prevent further damage.¹⁴⁹

Just after the interrogation ended, Sheikh Ubeydullah appeared around Van. He arrived there from a long route through Poti, Gümrü and Kars. In Eleskird, one of his deputies, Abdulsamed, and the other notables met him. The group around him climbed to 4,000, and he acted as if his return had been permitted in order to gather soldiers for the looming Egypt crisis.¹⁵⁰ When he reached the village of Şikafti on the Persian side of the border near Başkale on August 17, he had already collected a group of 5,000-6,000 men. A group of Ottoman soldiers were immediately dispatched from the Hakkari province to bring him back. But when it was realized their numbers were insufficient, supplementary forces were called up.¹⁵¹

In contrast to its previous reluctance, the government now responded to the sheikh's actions more quickly. All nearby military forces were sent to Başkale, and all officials around the region were informed about the incident for coordination. The Fourth Army command mobilized two infantries and a cavalry regiment from Erzurum, one regiment from Bitlis, besides the regiments at Van and the eighth marksmen regiment from Erzincan, and additional regiments of the Sixth Army were also requested from Revanduz. There were

¹⁴⁸ Y. PRK. AZJ... 4/84, August 30, 1881.

¹⁴⁹ Y. PRK. AZJ... 4/96, October 12, 1881.

¹⁵⁰ Y. PRK. UM 5/36 August 21, 1882 The report of the Van governor.

¹⁵¹ Y. A. Hus 171/37, August 19.

already 16 infantry and cavalry regiments in Hakkari.¹⁵² In order to neutralize the sheikh's propaganda, the tribal leaders were informed about his escape and how his actions would upset the order. The government considered the case very sensitive and acted quickly and doggedly. The government ordered the Fourth Army in Erzincan to bring the sheikh back to Istanbul alive. An envoy was dispatched with the suggestion that his resistance would lead to bloodshed and to tell him that his family would be sent to one of the holy cities of Mecca or Medina after him under government care. Royal Secretary Kamil Beğ was dispatched from Istanbul to bring him.¹⁵³

The group around the sheikh quickly dispersed when they realized that he escaped from Istanbul rather than through an official permit. The sheikh moved to his village in Nehri. A group of 500 armed men remained under the command of his son Abdulkadir, who tried to prevent the arrest of his father. Major Yusuf Paşa was sent to Şemdinan to convey the official message, and upon his return he reported that the sheikh was planning to unite tribes to affect the Persian tribes, and Iran was also informed so it could take necessary steps at its border. The sheikh responded to the official decree that he had gone to Istanbul to demonstrate the recent cruelty but had remained in vain, and therefore he had returned to his lodge. Any conflict between the soldiers and the people would cause disturbance among Muslims, he warned. During his departure from the east the year before, many came until Erzurum to prevent his deportation. But he persuaded and prevented them. This time his deportation to holy cities also meant the deportation of around 5,000 households. Such measures to make things difficult were aimed at inciting him to rebel again, he charged. He had influence among 200,000 people scattered through Russia, Iran and Ottoman lands. He contended that he had

¹⁵² Y. PRK. ASK. 14/7, August 20, Y. PRK.. ASK., Y. PRK. 14/8.

¹⁵³ Y. PRK. BŞK. 6/49, August 22. The official message was entrusted to Yusuf Beğ.

only tried to protect his life and honor. He asked for a delay until the spring and then he would come to Van, after which he would go wherever he was assigned.¹⁵⁴

At that stage, the government saw the delay as useful in order to make necessary military preparations and to better gauge the sheikh's intentions. The sheikh's village was blockaded, and negotiations with him began. After several days, the sheikh apologized for his escape and requested settlement in Mosul when he realized that his condition was critical. Meanwhile, the government grew suspicious that he intended to buy time to unite the tribes, but such an attempt was doomed to failure by military precautions and the dispersal of the initial group around the sheikh. The government had to evaluate the possibility of his fleeing to Iran or Russia, which could lead to great trouble. Refuge in Iran was closed to him because of previous events. In fact, a Persian governor, Emir Nizam, had already printed a decree informing the people about the sheikh's escape and his rebellion against the Ottoman state. He warned the tribes not to join him or believe that any government was supporting him. He also claimed that a request by the sheikh for Persian protection had already been denied. There were also hints that the sheikh had tried to appeal for Russian protection through the arbitration of the Nestorian patriarch, Mar Shamun. The governor of Hakkari reported that one of the sheikh's envoys called Mahmud went to Nestorian villages asking their help, but they replied that he should speak about such matters personally with Mar Shamun. Some other envoys were also sent to the patriarch, but they returned empty-handed.¹⁵⁵

On September 18, the sheikh met Royal Secretary Kamil Beğ, who had been dispatched there in order to arrange his deportation. The sheikh seemed to agree to go to Mosul, where he could still enjoy some influence. He requested settlement in Mosul under the pretense that he and his family used to live in a cold climate and they would have health problems in the heat of the holy cities of Hejaz and furthermore could not bear the long travel.

¹⁵⁴ Y. PRK. ASK... 14/20 August 29, the sheikh's reply.

¹⁵⁵ Y. PRK. ASK... 14/38, the telegram of the Hakkari governor, September 18. The Urmiye governor's printed decree dated September 16 is in the file Y. PRK. ASK. 15/18.

The government decided to settle the issue as quickly as possible and offered the sheikh 25,000 piastre as a travel allowance and a 15,000 piastre salary and if he agreed to go Medina, he would get sufficient grain allowances in the city as well.¹⁵⁶ The government tried to remove the sheikh by moderate means, when there were only 200 men left around him and some of the tribes even agreed to help the government in a military operation. Once the sheikh was persuaded to go Mosul, from there he could be moved to Medina. But the sheikh strictly refused the direct route to Medina.¹⁵⁷

On October 1, Sheikh Abdulkadir attacked Oramar with 300 of his men and took control. He began to settle at this easy defensible district and tried to control the surroundings from there.¹⁵⁸ The sheikh still insisted on settling in Mosul rather than in Medina and requested his safety and allowances. He gave an oath to send his son Abdulkadir to Istanbul, provided his requests were accepted. The sheikh was completely isolated, and the Ottoman state saw his bargaining as a ploy to buy time.

Finally, sixty of his family moved to the village of Evliyan on the road to Mosul, but the sheikh did not move from Nehri due to illness. When the deadline expired on November 5, Ahmed Ratip Beğ stayed in his house to prevent his escape with the assistance of 40 regular soldiers and 20 men of the sheikh's eldest son, Mehmet Sıddık, who had already declared that he was ready to serve if his father would not keep his promises.¹⁵⁹ His son Abdulkadir planned to secret his family out of Evliyan and bring back them to Oramar, but he could not leave Oramar due to the military blockade. Sheikh Ubeydullah moved to Evliyan and waited for his son, but when he understood that Abdulkadir could not leave Oramar, he decided to move to the village of Şepitan.

¹⁵⁶ Y. PRK. AZJ. 6/1 Sheikh's petition, Y. PRK. ASK. 14/39 and 14/40 contain the views of Kamil Beğ about the sheikh. The government offered 3 erdeb for each month (one erdeb was 1,000 kıyye) Y. PRK. BŞK. 7/90, September 26.

¹⁵⁷ Nafiz Paşa suggested arresting of sheikh, whereas Kamil Beğ favored a moderate approach. Y. PRK... 7/95.

¹⁵⁸ Y. PRK. ASK... 14/50 and 14/22.

¹⁵⁹ Y. PRK. AZJ... 6/7 Seyh Sıddık's petition, Y. PRK.. BŞK.. 7/97 Kamil Beğ's telegram. There was a serious conflict between the two sons of the sheikh. Three servants of Mehmed Sıddık were found dead around his village. Mehmed Sıddık was able to transfer his family to the Persian side.

It was understood that the sheikh would not go Mosul without being arrested. When Kamil Paşa was sent to Şepitan with 160 soldiers, another regiment was also dispatched after him. At the Gerdi pass the soldiers clashed with a group of around 200 men. The group could not stand up to the cannon fire and retreated. Kamil Paşa expected to encounter resistance in Şepitan and so asked for the assistance of three regiments. There were already three regiments of the Sixth Army at Kanireş, and they moved to Şepitan under the command of Huseyin Paşa. Together with these Paşa forces, Kamil Beğ attacked the village on November 24. Sheikh Ubeydullah was taking refuge in one of the houses when the cannon fire began. Abdulkadir was two hours from the village with 400 men and tried to help his father. When there was no possibility of escape, Sheikh Ubeydullah finally submitted. Even after seven hours of clashes, there were no casualties on either side. After two days, Sheikh Abdulkadir also came to be near his father in Şirvan. They were sent to Akra and then to Mosul under military escort of four regiments.¹⁶⁰

They arrived in Mosul on December 7, and after a month they were sent to Medina via Iskenderun. On February 10 they were in Kilis and they arrived in Beirut on March 17, 1882. The sheikh died in Medina in autumn of the next year. His son Abdulkadir remained there until the 1908 takeover by the Ittihat Terakki Party. He entered the Turkish Parliament as deputy from the Hakkari district. Sheikh Mehmed Sıddık had fled to the region early and he refrained from harming the order.¹⁶¹ Later he grew very influential in the region.

Conclusion

The movement of Sheikh Ubeydullah has been characterized as the first Kurdish nationalist uprising. But nationalism required other structures besides mere sheikhdom. There are various formulations concerning these structures, including ones such as an economic base, a middle

¹⁶⁰ Y. PRK. ASK... 18/39, the report of Major Musa Rüşdi.

¹⁶¹ March 16, 1902, Y. PRK. ASK, 181/86.

class, literacy, diffusion of ideas, etc. In the case of Sheikh Ubeydullah, all of them are singularly lacking.

Yet his movement is still important in dealing with issues concerning the reformation problem. It has been claimed that the Ottomans supported his Kurdistan ideal against Armenian demands. As I have tried to show here, actually the Ottomans acted in just the opposite direction. Secondly, the scope of the movement was not so widespread as claimed, though it did have a significant potential to be so. It was essentially a more religious conflict, as in this case there was a one-to-one correspondence between the communities involved and their associated sects. The sheikh's movement also tested the illusion of Abdulhamid pan-Islamism at a relatively early date.

Abdulhamid had tried to manipulate the other sheikhs in various parts of his shrinking empire.¹⁶² Ubeydullah sought the arbitration of the Ottoman government in his personal problem with Iran, and trusted the sultan's pan-Islamism in its sincerity. This fact can be inferred from letters in which he stressed sultan's position in leading the order and from his pleas to the sultan, who as a caliph was expected to help fellow Muslims. During Ubeydullah's stay in Istanbul, when he recognized that the Iranian and Ottoman empires were collaborating against his case and that the latter was willing to forsake the Kurds for its own advantage, he became a dissenter and fled. Initially he might have had some plans to increase his influence or worries about the situation of Kurds in Iran, but only during the second stage did he really try to implement them. When he arrived in Hakkari, he knew well that he could not unite the Kurds, although he met with a well of loyalty from some of the tribes in Van, mostly former tribes from his Urmiye onslaught. Understanding the prospect of Ottoman retaliation, he kept only a little group around himself for an armed retinue, so as not to incite

¹⁶² The government increased security around Müfti Mehmed Efendi from Taşlıca after Ubeydullah's escape, Y. PRK. A... 3/46. According to Karpat, "Mehmet Efendi led the Muslims in a guerilla war that, with the help of Serbian partisans, for three months prevented the Austro-Hungarian army from occupying the country" (The Politicization of Islam, p. 211).

the state's attention.

The Ottomans still retained some peculiarities of the empire despite the various Tanzimat reforms. In the process of transformation, Islamism became the main ingredient of nation-building. Meanwhile, the remaining Ottoman lands also needed territorial definition. The Ottomans invalidated pan-Islamism for the sake of territorial definition in order to confront the Sheikh Ubeydullah movement. This happened relatively early, when the pan-Islamist policies were still in effect. But no nation can be built using a fake ideology that loses its justification and persuasive power at its first hurdle. Some historians who tried to portray Abdulhamid as a leading Islamist and his reactionary policies with reformative results, through the same concession found pan-Islamism a continuously effective policy throughout his reign. Masking them underneath a political religious view obscured the notorious outcomes of his reactionary policies.

When he deported the sheikh, he had other calculations on the settlement of Kurds and the reforms. Without proper consideration of Sheikh Ubeydullah's movement, Hamidian regiments cannot be evaluated. Van was a province with a significant Christian population because both Nestorians and Armenians lived in the region. It was the only province where the Ottomans officially recognized that Christians made up more than half of its population, adding both communities together. After lands were ceded in the Russian war, various new cities were established by dividing the former provinces of Van and Erzurum. In this way the government tried to dissipate its authority over relatively small districts such as Hakkari and Bitlis. The influence of local government rivals in these core mountainous regions was also weakened by this delay of administrative authority.

The fact that the government did not lend open support to Ubeydullah can best be described by the expression of Sami Paşa in his telegram.¹⁶³ When he got the order to prevent the

¹⁶³ Y. PRK. ASK. 5/2, November 22, 1880.

sheikh's onslaught, he was so surprised that he needed to check its meaning, because the form of the order expressed that the government would strive with the sheikh. If the Ottomans had supported the sheikh, the response of the army commander, who was in the region, would have been precise and certain. The sheikh knew well the scope of his Urmiye campaign, and at least he expected the Ottomans to pay lip service to that incursion, but the central government saw the international condition of the empire differently.

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