

## 5 The Foundation of Peace-Oriented Foreign Policy in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire

### Rüstem Pasha's Vision of Diplomacy

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#### Introduction

In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha transformed Ottoman foreign policy from conquest-based expansionism to a peace-oriented foreign policy. Expansionism was the primary *modus vivendi* for the Ottoman Sultanate from its inception in the early fourteenth century. Such an ethos touted the Ottomans as preeminent warriors in the faith for their commitment to *gaza*, a commitment which accrued prestige for the dynasty as it expanded to encompass by the mid-fifteenth century most of the Balkans and Anatolia.<sup>1</sup> The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the core Islamic lands—Syria, Egypt, and the Hijaz—by 1517 fuelled more expansive visions of sovereignty on a universal imperial scale and boosted their legitimacy internally. Externally, the new discourse of universal rule provided significant ideological tools for competition with the other claimants to universal imperialism, namely the Habsburgs and Safavids.<sup>2</sup> These Ottoman ambitions however were superseded by more peaceful relations based on diplomacy and arbitration by the middle of the sixteenth century due to Rüstem Pasha's initiatives. In the place of aggressive expansion in the name of *gaza* or a push toward universal empire, the Ottoman *modus vivendi* now emphasised territorial integrity and arbitration of certain conflicts through peaceful diplomatic relations. This signalled a major pivot in Ottoman strategy and informed the empire's relations with its neighbours well into the seventeenth century.

In the last generation, historians have come to interpret Süleyman's long reign as a variegated period made all the more complicated by intense ideological experimentation, hardening confessional identities, emerging cultural patterns, and a reordering of the basic dynamics of state and society. Even so, most observers acknowledge a basic shift in Süleyman's rule from one fuelled by conquests and the anticipation of expansion of world-historical significance to a more measured approach to governance that emphasised the establishment and maintenance of order within the empire.<sup>3</sup> In this manner, the Ottoman shift toward a diplomatic policy emphasising

peace accords well with the broader trajectory of the period. Similarly, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, Ottoman expansion clearly slowed. Since the mid-twentieth century, historians have considered this slowdown a consequence of the various transformations of military administration, technology, and tactics, especially in the Ottoman European theatre, that rendered conquest both more difficult to realise and much more expensive to achieve.<sup>4</sup>

No doubt, both tendencies—an ideological shift driven by Süleyman and the late sixteenth-century military revolution—informed 'peace consciousness', yet in both cases, the quotidian processes that undergirded them remain obscure. Over the course of this period, the emerging prominence of the Ottoman grand vizier and his outsized role in diplomatic processes constituted the principal conditions under which Ottoman policy was shaped, developed, and maintained. Previous studies of grand viziers have tended to neglect their diplomatic agency or have assumed that their diplomatic actions were merely a proxy for the sultan's wishes.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the reign of Süleyman, however, new grand viziers emerged at the centre of the imperial administration to wield enormous power in government, policy, and patronage.<sup>6</sup> We can only understand Ottoman diplomacy properly if we understand better the role of specific grand viziers, especially from the mid-sixteenth century onwards.

This chapter examines how and why the Ottoman governing elite, especially Rüstem Pasha, preferred to abandon the traditional policy of expansionism. It also identifies certain critical points for, and key individuals involved in, this transformation. In particular, it demonstrates that Rüstem Pasha (served 1544–1553 and 1555–1561) consciously began to use diplomacy as a fundamental tool of foreign policy by the middle of the sixteenth century when he realised that the policy of expansionism was no longer materially or ideologically tenable. This chapter brings to the fore contemporary observations attesting that Rüstem Pasha was the most critical actor contributing to this transformation and establishing a peace-oriented foreign policy. It discusses how Rüstem fashioned diplomacy during his term as well as how he acted as head of the Ottoman negotiating team in the peace process with the Habsburgs and the Safavids. And it situates Rüstem Pasha's policy choices against the broader Ottoman context in the sixteenth century.

#### The Ottoman Need for Peace

From an Ottoman perspective, the first half of the sixteenth century was marked by two rivalries for universal empire: the Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry and the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry. These two rivalries included ideological and material competition as well as warfare on land and sea. Such ambitious claims for universal monarchy and expensive bids for conquest proved to be impractical and irrational. Therefore, the Ottomans preferred to make