# 6

# THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

The 1830s marked a clear departure in Mehmed Ali's career whereby he found himself at the center not only of Ottoman affairs, but also of world politics. During this decade his military activities triggered what came to be known as the Egyptian question – a diplomatic crisis that was to transform Egypt's international position; the inauguration of unprecedented reforms within the Ottoman Empire, known as the *Tanzimat*, was necessary, thus altering the relationship that the Empire had with European powers and deeply affecting internal European politics. Above all, the Egyptian question was only to be resolved when the Pasha had finally succeeded in extracting from the Ottoman sultan a precious *firman* that secured his position in Egypt definitively. Given that soon after his arrival in Egypt when he was in his early thirties he had managed to transform himself from a mere village bully into a fledgling politician, his transition into the role of an international statesman in the 1830s when he was then in his sixties was a further impressive reinvention of himself.

## THE BENEFACTOR

Throughout the 1820s, as we have seen, the Pasha managed to strengthen his control over Egypt, at the same time as reinforcing his household rule. His relatives and friends were now occupying key positions either as heads of these new institutions, which had been

brought into existence by the establishment of the army, or as provincial governors. Seeing him literally as *veli nimet* (Ar. *waliyy al-ni'am*), or the Benefactor, many members of this new elite tied their future to his well-being. He also managed to include in his larger elite those hundreds of students who entered his educational institutions, or those few among them who were chosen to travel to Europe for advanced studies. Remarkably, his old rival Hüsrev Pasha, a freedman with no children of his own, had embarked on a similar path of increasing his household in Istanbul by adopting an exceptionally large number of boys, paying for their education in the state's new schools and, on their graduation, pushing for their employment in key positions in the bureaucracy. Mehmed Ali's "household government", therefore, was not peculiar to him; rather, it was a common feature of Ottoman politics at that time. However, by the late 1820s Mehmed Ali could feel confident that his domestic powerbase was as strong as any other within the far-flung Ottoman Empire and that he had a dependable elite around him – one that acted at his bidding, albeit not always with the efficiency he demanded.

Indeed, the increased sense of security he felt in Egypt was also reflected in the patriarchal language he deployed in referring to his subjects at large. In a circular issued in 1828 it was stated that "the *waliyy al-ni'am* ... aims at bestowing his attention and care on all who reside in Egyptian lands and to consider them as if they were his own private estate. He strives to raise in his bounty all the residents of Egypt, young and old, high-ranking or commoner, and to treat them as his own children" (*Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya*, 1829). In a meeting he had with the British consul general in 1827 he said that he derived "pleasure in considering [his subjects] as his own children. He confessed that he had oppressed them ... till within the last two years but that since that time he had behaved to them as a father" (British National Archives, 1827b). And in an interview with a French traveler he said of the Egyptians: "This people has to be led as children, for if we leave them to their own devices they will return to the state of disorder from which I had elevated them" (Douin, 1927, 99).

## NAGGING WORRIES

Despite the increasing sense of security that he was feeling domestically, Mehmed Ali nevertheless had reasons to be anxious about his future. For one thing, he was not getting any younger and the death of those closest to him (his beloved wife, Emine, died in 1824, and his trusted deputy, Lazoğlu, in 1827) must have poignantly reminded him of his own mortality. At the same time the ambivalent relationship he had with Istanbul was a source of constant concern and, as he told the British consul, the more he invested his effort domestically by building institutions, inaugurating reforms and cementing his powerbase, the more he wondered who would benefit from all his efforts after his own death (Kutluoğlu, 1998, 126).

Furthermore, news arriving from Necib Efendi, his agent in the Ottoman capital, indicated that Istanbul was gradually adopting a belligerent stance. The sprightly efforts of Sultan Mahmud to tighten his grip over the provinces – the abolition of the old Janissary corps that led the way to reforming the sultan's military forces, and the rapid measures taken to revitalize the empire's bureaucracy and to revamp its finances – were all alarming signs that the Ottoman center was rapidly centralizing its control, and that the semi-independent policies adopted by governors like Mehmed Ali would no longer be tolerated. Above all, it was clear from reports he received from Istanbul that his old enemy, Hüsrev Pasha, was assuming more and more power there and had the ear of the sultan.

At the same time, developments in Europe were equally alarming. News was filtering through to the Pasha from several sources – the commercial agents he sent to various Mediterranean ports, the European travelers whom he took pleasure in granting an audience, the European ambassadors in Istanbul about whom his agent there was sending detailed reports, and, above all, the consuls representing the various European powers in Cairo and Alexandria – they all told him that some European capitals were starting to raise serious doubts about the actual viability of the age-old Ottoman state. Although it had been clear for a long time that the European powers

were increasingly gaining the upper hand in military confrontations with the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed Ali's experience in the Greek war showed him how Europe was now interfering in domestic affairs within the empire, and had successfully carved a new state out of the sultan's dominions.

With piecemeal news coming in and a lack of ambassadors within the European capitals, it must have been difficult for Mehmed Ali to figure out what plans were being hatched. He did his best to compensate for this handicap by employing his many and well-practised skills of charm and eloquence on the European consuls, milking whatever information he could out of them while at the same time manipulating them to convey his thoughts and wishes back to their superiors.

It was during one of these numerous meetings with European consuls that he received a bizarre offer which indicated that changes on a grand scale were being contemplated in European capitals. During a meeting in 1828 with the French consul, Drovetti, he was informed that Paris was interested in seeking his assistance in an invasion of Algeria, nominally an Ottoman province. In the ensuing negotiations Mehmed Ali demanded four men-o'-war ships and ten million francs, to which the French were only too eager to agree. Soon however the Pasha got wind of strong British and Russian opposition to the plan, and this, together with his realization that his interests lay elsewhere, made him turn down the offer and the whole project was dropped. This curious Algerian interlude must have given him an indication, though, of the scale of these European plans to gnaw away at Ottoman possessions.

## THE INVASION OF SYRIA

As alarming as the British and Russian opposition to his participation in the French Algerian plan was, the main reason why Mehmed Ali let go of the idea was that an invasion of Algeria would divert him from defending his northern frontier. It was in Syria and not Algeria that Mehmed Ali's strategic interests lay. The Pasha's sights had been

focused on Syria since his very early years as governor of Egypt: Syria was rich with forests that could supply him with the much-needed timber for his fleet. Its population, albeit smaller than that of Egypt, could offset the shortage of manpower caused by his conscription and demanding infrastructure policies. Above all, Mehmed Ali's interest in Syria was calculated, and related to his continuing sense of insecurity about Istanbul's next move. Any attempt by the Porte to pluck him out of Egypt by force would logically be made by launching an attack from there. Having therefore strengthened his naval power, beefed up Alexandria's defenses and constructed fortifications along the Mediterranean coast, what remained necessary now was to protect the land frontier between the heartland of the Ottoman Empire and Syria.

Throughout the years of 1830–1831 speculations abounded about the real purpose of the fervent military activity that had been witnessed throughout Egypt. Some said that the Pasha was about to send further troops to Arabia while others surmised that he was complying with the Porte's orders to help with the war against Russia. During the summer of 1831 in particular unprecedented military preparations were noticed and, following a devastating cholera epidemic that left the army camps and barracks relatively untouched (thanks to the efforts of Dr Clot who was subsequently rewarded with the honorific title of "Bey"), the real intentions of the Pasha were finally revealed. They were nothing less than a full land and sea invasion of the Syrian provinces.

On 2 November 1831 the full power of the Pasha's new army was unleashed onto Syria. Using the pretext of the governor of Sidon in southern Palestine, Abdallah Pasha, giving refuge to some 6000 Egyptian peasants who had escaped the Pasha's draconian policies and who refused to hand them back, Mehmed Ali gave orders for two forces, a sea and a land one, to move to Acre. Within the space of one month Ibrahim's troops had already reached the city and laid siege on it.

The Porte responded by ordering Mehmed Pasha, the governor of Aleppo, to raise troops from the neighboring areas and to confront

Ibrahim Pasha's army. Fresh orders were also issued to Hüseyin Pasha, who had wiped out the Janissaries, to muster another force in Anatolia and to reconnoiter with Mehmed Pasha. In May 1832 a *fetva* was issued by the *ulama* of Anatolia declaring both Mehmed Ali and his son Ibrahim to be rebels.

None of these moves, however, managed to intimidate Mehmed Ali. The siege of Acre, moreover, despite dragging on for weeks and months, only strengthened his resolve. In an interview with a British traveler the Pasha predicted: "In a few days Acre will be mine. If the Sultan consent that I shall keep it, I will stop there; if not, I will take Damascus. There again, if Damascus be granted me, I will stop; but if not, I will take Aleppo; and if the Sultan will not then consent – who knows? Allah Kerim! – God is merciful" (St. John, 1834, II, 486). Uttered at a time when his son's troops had not yet captured Acre, and when public opinion in Syria was divided about the legality of his military move against the sultan, and with a *fetva* declaring him to be a rebel hanging over him, these words are a remarkable demonstration of Mehmed Ali's steadfastness and unflinching will-power. They also proved to be quite prophetic: on 27 May 1832 Acre finally fell, allowing Ibrahim to march on to Damascus and to enter it, without fighting, on 16 June. Three weeks later he encountered the vanguard of the Ottoman army and inflicted a heavy defeat on it. Soon thereafter Aleppo, the northernmost city in Syria, fell to Ibrahim Pasha.

## CROSSING THE RUBICON

Within seven months of the army's departure from Egypt the entire Syrian provinces were under the command of Ibrahim Pasha. Some six months earlier in his interview with J. A. St. John, Mehmed Ali was unable to articulate what he would do in case Aleppo fell to his son; now that it had, he was still unclear about his next move. With military logic dictating events from day to day, matters on the ground continued to develop and for the following ten months it was clear that Mehmed Ali's mind was lagging behind his son's military victories.

In spite of capturing Aleppo, the main Ottoman army which had been gathered under Hüseyin Pasha had not been drawn into the confrontation. On 29 July Ibrahim Pasha crossed the Taurus Mountains and engaged Hüseyin Pasha's army, inflicting a heavy defeat on it. This was a very serious escalation of the conflict as Ibrahim had now crossed into Anatolia, the heartland of the Ottoman Empire. What made matters even more serious was that Ibrahim Pasha, building on the momentum of his army, was marching northward to engage with yet another army that Sultan Mahmud had raised and which had at its command Mehmed Reşid Pasha, the grand vizier. In December 1832 when the two armies clashed in Konya in central Anatolia the Ottomans were defeated yet again and Ibrahim even managed to capture the grand vizier himself.

This was the most significant military victory that Ibrahim had hitherto accomplished and with it the last fighting force that the Ottoman sultan had gathered was wiped out. The road to Istanbul was now wide open. Emissaries hurried between Mehmed Ali in Egypt and his son in Anatolia worried about the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, the fascinating correspondence between father and son reveals an intriguing conundrum: neither man appeared to know how to invest this significant victory. Having launched what seemed to be a defensive pre-emptive strike aimed at capturing Acre and thus securing his northern borders, Mehmed Ali found his son sweeping not only through all of Syria but also advancing onward into Anatolia. The final victory at Konya surpassed his wildest expectations, and his political calculations raced to keep up with his son's territorial acquisitions.

After capturing the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire and obliterating all the armies that had been amassed to stop his son's advance, Mehmed Ali had to think quickly about the terms of peace he could dictate on his now vanquished enemy. Soon the proposition of deposing the sultan and installing his son became explicit in the correspondence between Mehmed Ali and Ibrahim. With the army resuming its march on to the Ottoman capital, this idea acquired further shape: the *ulama* of Anatolia and Rumelia (that is, the Balkans) would be

prevailed upon to issue a *fetva* declaring Sultan Mahmud to have deviated from the Faith and to ask for his dethronement. A pledge to protect the lives of the members of the ruling family was also suggested.

The flurry of diplomatic activity that followed Ibrahim's alarming victories, however, induced the Pasha to seek a more moderate stance. To begin with he got wind, from his son, of a request by the sultan for British naval assistance which brought about further escalation when the British turned down the Ottoman request. This prompted Sultan Mahmud to approach the Russians. Seeing this as a golden opportunity to enhance their influence in the Ottoman capital, the Russians, having emerged from war with the sultan only five years earlier, were all too willing to respond favorably. A Russian envoy, General Muravieff, was sent on a special mission to both Istanbul and Alexandria. Muravieff offered the sultan the promise of Russian troops and warships and, in a meeting with Mehmed Ali in Alexandria on 13 January 1833, he warned the Pasha that Russia would not tolerate the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and that the Pasha should order his son to halt his advance on the capital. Given that the struggle between Mehmed Ali and the sultan had now been transformed into a European crisis, and that all the leading European capitals were now involved, he issued orders to his son to stop his advance on Istanbul.

During the next three months Mehmed Ali found himself falling under two contradictory influences: on the one hand, he was being pressured by Istanbul and the European powers to withdraw his troops and to reassert his subservience to the sultan; while on the other, his son was encouraging him on to march on the capital and "finish off the business". Mehmed Ali's mettle as a clever politician manifested itself in his ability to handle these contradictory influences. He accepted his son's assessment of the military situation and his pleas not to be "the first to blink". However, he also realized that approving Ibrahim's impassioned plans to march on the capital or to declare his complete independence would surely come up against the wall of European objection. In other words, while he fully grasped the extent of his own military strength, he also realized that he could

not translate the maximalist territorial expansions that his son was promising him into permanent diplomatic realities.

The resolution of what came to be known as the "first Syrian crisis" was couched in the "Convention of Kütahiya", named after the town where the negotiations were conducted, and which formed Ibrahim Pasha's furthermost expansion. According to this "Convention" the sultan re-bestowed the provinces of Egypt, Crete and the Hijaz on Mehmed Ali and his son, and granted Ibrahim Pasha the four Syrian provinces as well as the post of *muhassil*, or collector of taxes, of the strategic province of Adana in southern Anatolia – which was rich in timber and which held the key to an invasion of Anatolia from the south. When news arrived of the settlement "the Pasha [in the words of the British agent, Campbell] started up with tears of joy in his eyes, and laying aside anything like Turkish gravity, burst into a sort of hysteric laugh" (al-Sayyid Marsot, 1984, 230). His military adventure had been successful beyond all expectations and by entrusting the conduct of military operations to his son he managed to secure his northern borders. Furthermore, by grasping the full implications of his moves on European politics Mehmed Ali proved himself not only to be a first rate Ottoman politician but also a clever strategist who could think beyond the confines of the Ottoman world, as complex as these were, and factor in the intricacies of European politics.

## REORGANIZATION AND RETRENCHMENT

In spite of his victories in this first round of military confrontations with the Ottoman sultan Mehmed Ali paradoxically found himself in a precarious situation. The fact that the "Convention of Kütahiya" was not an official peace treaty but only a verbal agreement between his son and the sultan's emissary meant that he had not secured a formal diplomatic agreement. Furthermore, as a direct result of his military action the Ottomans agreed to sign a defensive pact with Russia. This treaty weakened Mehmed Ali diplomatically as now both Britain and

France blamed him for offering the Russians the opportunity to increase their influence in Istanbul.

In an attempt to strengthen his hand Mehmed Ali went on the diplomatic offensive and officially announced to the European consuls his intention to declare himself independent from the Porte. This mention of independence was quickly rebuffed by all European powers and Mehmed Ali promptly shelved his talk of independence and gave the consuls firm pledges that he would preserve the status quo. These were not empty words, though, for he had every reason to catch his breath, so to speak, and to take stock of his military situation.

In addition to the standoff with the Ottomans Mehmed Ali was facing serious problems as to how to administer the large areas now under his control. Crete, which Sultan Mahmud had bestowed on him in recompense for his assistance in the Greek war, rose in a large revolt against the conscription policy that was extended there. At first, Mehmed Ali sent Osman Nureddin, the commander-in-chief of his navy, to deal with the uprising. Osman, however, declared a general amnesty to the rebels without first consulting with Mehmed Ali and then, fearing his master's wrath, he preferred to defect to Istanbul, never to return to Egypt. Mehmed Ali therefore felt obliged to go to Crete in person (July–September 1833) to deal with the rebels and to pacify the island.

Moreover, in Hijaz, Yemen and Sudan the Pasha's agents were facing serious administrative and military problems, many of which were caused by local opposition as well as by the lack of experience of the Pasha's civilian governors and military commanders. But it was in the newly conquered Syrian territories that the Pasha faced the strongest opposition. In spite of having a large army (around 50,000 troops that increased to some 100,000 men in the late 1830s) under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, and assisted by Süleyman Pasha; and in spite of appointing the experienced Mehmed Şerif Pasha, the Pasha's nephew, as governor-general of Syria, Mehmed Ali never managed to raise enough revenue from Syria to cover the cost of the occupation. Furthermore, his monopolies policy that had been extended to Syria faced stern opposition from the Europeans, and

especially from the British, so he was finally forced to withdraw it. More seriously, the Syrians could not stomach the conscription and disarmament policies that Ibrahim attempted to impose on them. Large uprisings erupted – first in Palestine, then among the Druzes in Mount Lebanon, and finally in Beirut – and Mehmed Ali felt the need to go to Syria during the first of these uprisings (March–July 1834) to help his son restore law and order, something that was eventually achieved with extreme ruthlessness.

Domestically, Mehmed Ali was faced with an increasingly resentful population. There was a disgruntled elite clamoring to have more of a say in how to run the country, combined with a tightening economic situation made more difficult by the rising cost of his medical, industrial and educational enterprises. Above all there was the very heavy financial burden of his armies in the Sudan, Yemen, the Hijaz, Crete and Syria. To combat these difficulties he ordered a complete overhaul of his expanding administration and issued a law in 1837 creating seven *divans* (departments) to manage, respectively, the internal affairs of state, finances, the army, the navy, education, foreign trade and factories. However, these new departments were not given any significant degree of independence and their decisions still had to be approved by him in person.

The first half of the 1830s saw the Pasha's revenues significantly reduced: first of all, a cholera epidemic in 1831–1832 killed 120,000 people, and was followed by a series of low floods which led to serious famine in the countryside, together with a devastating plague epidemic in 1834–1835 which killed a further 200,000 people. All these disasters affected the country's manpower and reduced its productivity. A sudden fall in cotton prices caused by the international business crisis of 1836–1837 exacerbated an already difficult financial situation, forcing some serious measures to be taken. First to be affected was the educational sector: out of sixty-seven primary schools that had been opened in 1833, twenty-three were closed down. Soon to follow were many factories, suffering both from incompetent management and resentment within the labor force. Furthermore, in 1837 the Pasha implemented a major reversal of

policy whereby he allowed members of his elite to own agricultural land. Those who had grown rich in the wars were given large tracts of land whose taxes had not been paid, in exchange for payment of their tax arrears and guaranteeing future tax liabilities.

Significantly, the medical establishment was not affected by these constraints. Probably alarmed by the scale of the cholera and plague epidemics and by Clot Bey's enforcement of a strict quarantine system that spared soldiers in the army, as well as workers in the Alexandria arsenal, Mehmed Ali invested even more money and effort in his medical establishments. An International Quarantine Board was established in Alexandria which was composed of members of the European consular corps; it advised the Pasha on how to combat these deadly epidemics. A large number of state-of-the-art medical books were translated from European languages (mostly French) into Arabic and were printed in the government press that had been founded in 1820. Most interestingly, a school for midwives was opened in 1832 whose graduates were expected to curb the large number of stillbirths and to help with vaccinating children against smallpox. These measures all helped to reduce the annual infant mortality rates and generally to make a significant improvement in public health and hygiene.

## THE SECOND SYRIAN CRISIS

Having conducted this internal reorganization and succeeded for the time being in suppressing the different uprisings against his rule in different parts of his far-flung dominions, Mehmed Ali once again stated his intention to declare himself independent on 25 May 1838. As was the case with his first attempt four years earlier, this desire for independence was not based on any nationalist or proto-nationalist considerations, and he never claimed to be speaking on behalf of his Arabic-speaking subjects in Egypt. For example, he never argued that his subjects were resentful of Ottoman rule or that they were struggling to get rid of the Ottoman yoke as the Greeks had done in

the previous decade. Rather, in his meetings with European consuls he cited two considerations: one being the fate of his many reforms, and the other the future of his family. Relaying the Pasha's anxieties, the British consul explained that Mehmed Ali could never

> ... consent that all that which he has been toiling for, and all the useful and costly establishments founded by him at an enormous expense ... revert to the Porte and to be lost at his death, and that he should have the pang of feeling that all his labours should merely have been for the Porte which would allow them to go to ruin, whilst his own children and family would be exposed to want and perhaps even to be put to death. (Kutluoğlu, 1998, 126)

In spite of these impassioned pleas, the Europeans once more opposed his quest for independence; in fact, he gradually realized that Europe – and Britain in particular – had become even less tolerant toward him in the four years that had passed since his earlier attempt at independence. It was clear that Europe's now hardened opposition had been shaped by his military exploits which had brought the Ottoman Empire to the brink of downfall, a prospect the Europeans wanted to steer well clear of in order to avoid a Europe-wide war to fight over the spoils.

## SEEKING HEREDITARY RULE

Secure behind strong defensive lines, Mehmed Ali gave the European consuls his pledge that he would no longer escalate matters further militarily. Diplomatically, he changed tactics and started voicing his desire not for independence but for the hereditary succession of his authority to pass to his descendants. Over the following three years this idea of hereditary rule assumed increasing importance in Mehmed Ali's mind and he seemed, at long last, to have found a formula that would resolve his life-long concern about his ambiguous relationship with the Ottoman Empire. If only he could snatch a clear concession to that effect from the sultan and couch it in a clearly

written document, ideally a *firman*, then he would have resolved his deep-seated anxiety.

However, many obstacles stood between Mehmed Ali and the attainment of his goal. Firstly, what Mehmed Ali was aspiring to – namely, that his position of governor be passed on to his descendants – had no precedent in Ottoman history. It would therefore take considerable diplomatic skill and originality of thought to find out how best to have these desires enshrined in a binding political agreement.

Secondly, contrary to his wish that this delicate matter be conducted internally through direct negotiations between himself and his sovereign, Mehmed Ali faced another serious problem – namely, intense European interference which, at times, threatened to dissipate his energy, deprive him of his significant military possessions and even dislodge him from the coveted governorship of Egypt itself.

The most serious obstacle and challenge in his bid for hereditary rule, which he first announced in the summer of 1838, were the diplomatic and political complications ensuing from a dangerous military situation that was spiraling out of control. Having given a pledge to the Europeans not to be the first to open hostilities with the Ottomans, Mehmed Ali gave his orders to Ibrahim Pasha not to give in to Ottoman provocations. However, when the Ottoman army crossed the Euphrates in mid May 1839, Mehmed Ali ordered his son to engage the Ottoman army, and on 24 June Ibrahim inflicted yet another defeat on the Ottoman army near the small town of Nizib in southern Anatolia. Things soon escalated in an alarming manner. Before news of his army's defeat could reach him, Sultan Mahmud died suddenly on 29 June. He was immediately succeeded by his seventeen-year-old son, Abdülmecid, whose first act was to pardon Mehmed Ali and to grant him the hereditary rule of Egypt. This was conditional, however, on his returning all other lands he had acquired by force – namely, Arabia, Yemen, Crete, Adana and, most notably, Syria.

Having inflicted yet another heavy military defeat on the Ottomans and, realizing that he was now negotiating with a young, inexperienced sultan, Mehmed Ali felt confident that he could, in

fact, get a better deal than what was on offer. However, two further developments complicated things considerably. The first was the appointment of his old enemy, Hüsrev Pasha, to the most senior post in the Ottoman Empire, that of grand vizier. As soon as he heard this, Mehmed Ali wrote to his son telling him that the crisis was far from being over and that he expected hard times ahead (Egyptian National Archives, 1839a). Secondly – and as a direct result of Hüsrev's elevation to this important post – the grand admiral, Ahmed Fevzi, defected with his fleet to Alexandria, fearing that Hüsrev would turn against him and use his enhanced power to order his execution. In Alexandria, Fevzi presented the fleet to Mehmed Ali and urged him to capitalize on his military victory and to use his augmented naval power to sail to Istanbul and appoint himself deputy, *vekil*, to the sultan, a post with no precedent.

Mehmed Ali, however, opted for caution, realizing that with Hüsrev in the grand vizierate he was now dealing not with an inexperienced young sultan, but with a formidable foe. For years the name "Hüsrev" had become synonymous in the Pasha's mind with "the enemy" and the figure of his adversary assumed deep psychological signification. In fact, his obsession with Hüsrev bordered on the pathological and he was not even hiding this obsession from those close to him: he once told his advisors that he dreamt that he and Hüsrev were fighting each other with knives and that he had asked those around him to come to his rescue, but that none answered his plea for help. He interpreted the dream by saying that he always knew that he could never be helped by his associates and that he felt lonesome and vulnerable ('Arif, n.d., II, 11).

Given these deep-seated reasons for mistrusting Hüsrev, Mehmed Ali launched an unrelenting diplomatic onslaught to have his enemy removed from his important post: he wrote numerous letters to the viziers in Istanbul, to provincial governors, to leading military men, to members of the *ulama*, and even to the sultan's mother, insisting upon the removal of Hüsrev and arguing that only then could further bloodshed be avoided. He also wrote to Hüsrev himself telling him that he was not asking for anything except for the Syrian provinces,

and that once he was granted them, he would retire to the Hijaz. In that fascinating letter he even invited his old foe to retire with him to Hijaz so that they could both spend the remaining years of their lives in peace, devoting their time to prayers and meditation and preserving good names for themselves in the Book of History (Egyptian National Archives, 1839b). Ibrahim, seeing that his father had gone too far in his obsession with Hüsrev, felt obliged to write from the frontline telling him that there were much more serious problems than Hüsrev (Egyptian National Archives, 1839c). Eventually, Ibrahim was proven right for even after Hüsrev's removal in May 1840 (most probably as a result of pressure from Mehmed Ali), the crisis persisted for months to come.

With his son's stunning victory at Nizib, Mehmed Ali had every reason to be confident that he had an uncontestable upper hand: his army was in a superb defensive position having occupied all the important cities and the strategic mountain passes in southern Anatolia; the new sultan could be easily manipulated given his young age and inexperience; and with Hüsrev out of the way he had enough men in the highest echelons of power in Istanbul who were either in his direct pay, or could easily be persuaded to do his bidding. The problem was however that if he had calculated on European disunity, as had been the case with the first Syrian crisis following the victory at Konya, this time the major European powers swiftly got their act together and handed him a Joint Note (Joint Note of 27 July 1839) telling him that they had prevailed upon the Porte to suspend all direct negotiations with Mehmed Ali and to conduct such negotiations only through their mediation. It took two years for Mehmed Ali to internalize the full implications of this Joint Note – namely, that the dispute between him and Istanbul ceased to be limited to the questions of removing Hüsrev or returning the fleet – but had become a matter of European concern. Eventually, however, Mehmed Ali rose above the narrow confines of Ottoman politics and realized that his acts had truly global implications.

Key to this second transformation of himself from an Ottoman politician to a world statesman was a sober assessment of what his

military victories meant politically. In a series of impressively candid and revealing letters between him and his son, the far reaching implications of their military victories gradually became apparent to him. He first wrote to Ibrahim telling him that by insisting that he withdrew from Syria and Adana the Europeans were attempting to prevent the partition of the Ottoman Empire. This partition, he realized, would not be in his favor; in fact, it would mean that the Russians would end up taking the eastern half of the Empire by landing their troops in Istanbul, and Britain would end up occupying the western half, entrenching herself in Egypt. He then asked his son to tell him frankly what their options would be if they invaded Anatolia in order to block the Russian advance and thus remove the British pretext for occupying Egypt (Egyptian National Archives, 1839d). Ibrahim's response was shockingly candid: he told his father that he could withdraw his troops from Yemen and Arabia and thus muster 100,000 men. With this large number he could then invade Anatolia. He added that he was confident that he could defeat the Russians. The problem, he thought, lay with the Syrians and the threat they posed to his rearguard: "After our victory at Nizib and after holding celebrations all over [Syria], the Syrians are still up in arms against us ... It is certain that [they are determined] to cut our line of retreat in case we are defeated [by the Russians]" (Egyptian National Archives, 1839e).

In response, Mehmed Ali informed his son that in his most recent meeting with the British and French consuls he reiterated his insistence on holding on to Syria and Adana but left the matter of withdrawing from Crete vague (Egyptian National Archives, 1839f). Ibrahim then agreed with his father that they should hold on to Adana as tightly as they could. But he also proposed that, if need be, they could give up Arabia and return the two Holy Cities to the Sultan in exchange for keeping Adana. However, he ended by saying that if the worst were to come to the worst and if the Europeans insisted on withdrawing from Adana, then he thought that it was not worth keeping it – if keeping it meant going to war with five nations (Egyptian National Archives, 1839g).

With these very sobering calculations Mehmed Ali knew that he could not hold on to all the lands he had acquired by force. The question was, how much should he return to the sultan? And what could he get in return? For two years emissaries shuffled between Alexandria and Istanbul; Ibrahim was relaying constant information back to Egypt; and his father was regularly meeting with the European consuls. He tried his best not to be the first to blink and pushed hard to see how much land he could retain. Eventually, the stiff European opposition to his territorial expansion became abundantly clear and he realized that the one nation that had stood by him, France, did so not out of any "love for Egypt but," as he confided to his son, "because she wanted to break the political isolation that she found herself in ... My instincts about the French," he added, "have therefore been right all along. I have no choice but to comply" (Egyptian National Archives, 1840). When Palmerston invited Austria, Prussia and Russia to London, in what came to be known as the "Convention for the Pacification of the Levant" in July 1840, and when the convention issued very stern warnings to Mehmed Ali, threatening him with dire consequences if he did not return the fleet to Istanbul and order his son to withdraw from all lands he had occupied in Syria and Anatolia, Mehmed Ali still maintained a poker face and refused to budge. Seeing that the Porte had strengthened its hand by appealing to the four European nations of the London Convention, Mehmed Ali attempted to strengthen his card by accepting French mediation. Even after this mediation failed he still believed in his *fortuna* – and that things would end up as he wished.

The climax of this war of nerves was finally reached in September 1840 when the British bombarded Beirut and then landed troops there. Soon, Ibrahim's worst fears of the previous year came true: a massive uprising against Mehmed Ali's rule broke out all over Syria. Seeing that he stood to lose everything if he continued to fight, but also realizing that Palmerston had objected to the sultan's latest move of deposing him from the governorship of Egypt, and that, further, the British were willing to intercede to reinstate him in his most prized province, Mehmed Ali instructed Boghos, his loyal Armenian

advisor on foreign affairs, to accept the invitation of Sir Charles Napier, the British admiral who had just arrived from Beirut, to enter into negotiations. During these negotiations Napier proposed that if the Pasha agreed to settle his differences with the sultan, returned the fleet and ordered an immediate evacuation of Syria, "such acts would ensure him the hereditary government of Egypt under the guarantee of the Allied Powers" (Kutluoğlu, 1998, 174). Judging this to be the golden opportunity he had been waiting for, Mehmed Ali immediately sent a message to his son to evacuate Syria.

## JUBILATION

Ibrahim soon withdrew his massive army to Egypt and Mehmed Ali allowed the Ottoman fleet to sail to Istanbul. Shortly thereafter the Europeans interceded with the Porte to offer Mehmed Ali the longed-for promise of hereditary rule. On 20 February 1841 an emissary from the sultan arrived in Alexandria carrying the *firman* of investiture. This *firman* granted Mehmed Ali the hereditary possession of the governorship of Egypt; it set the size of the Egyptian army at 18,000; it obliged Mehmed Ali to execute all laws and treaties that the Porte had passed or entered into; and it stipulated the size of the annual tribute that Cairo had to send to Istanbul. On receiving this *firman*, Mehmed Ali was ecstatic. However, there were some important conditions that he could not accept. Significantly, he raised no objections to reducing the size of his fighting forces; his only request in this regard was to be allowed to appoint senior officers and not to leave this in the hands of the sultan as the *firman* had originally stipulated. After some negotiations his request was answered. He also managed to reduce the amount of the annual tribute. Most significantly, he strongly objected to the conditions that had allowed the sultan to retain the right to choose his successor from among his descendants in any of the direct lines. Mehmed Ali wrote back to Istanbul saying that he could not approve of this condition since it would open the door for civil war after his death (Egyptian National

Archives, 1841a). After some deliberations in Istanbul, all Mehmed Ali's requests were positively answered and a new *firman* was issued to that effect on 24 May which Mehmed Ali received on 7 June 1841. Three weeks later Mehmed Ali wrote to the Sublime Porte saying,

> When I received the auspicious [*firman*] I was thankful for this generous bounty with which I was engulfed. I wasted no time in accepting it and honoring it with the appropriate grand ceremonies ... Once my eyes fell on it, I approached it with thankful steps and my lips were honored by kissing it. I was then honored by the medal which [the emissary] had carried with his noble hands and my chest, which is already full of loyalty, was thus decorated with it. All *ulama* and statesmen were present and the text of the *firman* was read aloud to them. Everyone then sang the sultan's praises and prayed for his long life. In order for all our subjects to enjoy this blessing, the guns were fired in Cairo and other cities to express our joy and happiness for this event. (Egyptian National Archives, 1841b)