

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The Role of Diplomatic Missions in Algerian–Scandinavian Relations during the Ottoman Era

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Abstract

The Mediterranean Basin gained major importance as a cultural zone where advanced civilizations emerged along its shores—Phoenician, Greek, Roman, and Islamic. It was also a constant arena of conflict among the political powers located on its northern and southern coasts. These powers competed to control its key commercial ports. After the Muslim world entered a period of stagnation and weakness toward the end of the ninth Hijri century, Christian influence in the region increased, and coastal areas of North Africa, especially the central Maghreb, came under threat.

This study sheds light on part of the major transformations that the region experienced in the early modern period. Because the Regency of Algiers exercised sovereignty and naval power in the Mediterranean, European states worked hard to establish political and economic relations with it. Scandinavian states, in particular, were keen to send envoys to secure privileges, including the right to appoint consuls in the Regency, in order to protect their interests and conclude treaties and agreements.

Keywords: Mediterranean Sea; diplomacy; Regency of Algiers; Netherlands; Denmark; Sweden.

Introduction

Diplomacy is as old as civilization itself. Early human societies adopted it as a method of coexistence. In antiquity, communities developed diplomatic contacts as a way to communicate and reach understanding, and these contacts gradually became an established custom. As societies evolved, diplomacy took on an international character.

Algerian diplomacy during the Ottoman period displayed both dependence on, and autonomy from, the Ottoman Empire. At times, Algiers followed the orders of the Sublime Porte and accepted its mediation in foreign affairs with European states. At

other times, it acted independently and concluded agreements on its own. This situation led to diplomatic tensions with northern European states, which viewed the appointment of consuls in the Regency as a legitimate right. This article highlights the beginnings and mechanisms of Scandinavian diplomatic representation in Algiers and examines the role of their envoys.

Before addressing Algerian diplomatic relations with northern European states during the Ottoman era, it is necessary to clarify the concept of diplomacy, a term first used by the Greeks and later adopted by the Romans and other nations.

Section One: The Nature of Diplomacy

1. The Linguistic Meaning of Diplomacy

Researchers and specialists in international relations agree that the word diplomacy originates from the Greek term *diploma*. From this term came the French word *diplôme*, referring to documents issued by authorities that grant certain privileges to their holders (Zahir, 2011, p. 153).

The word *diplôma* means “to fold.” For this reason, the Romans used the term for folded, sealed metal travel documents (Rahima, 2013–2014, p. 118). These documents were issued by the supreme authority in the state (Mohamed, 2021, p. 271).

When the term passed into Latin, it acquired two meanings:

- First meaning: a document exchanged between kings in their relations, often carrying recommendations for good reception and respectful treatment. From this usage, French—and later Arabic—adopted *diplôme* to mean an academic certificate.
- Second meaning: the Roman use of the term to refer to a diplomatic envoy, along with the etiquette and formal courtesy associated with the role. In Latin, *diplôme* was also used to describe an insincere person with two faces (Bourakba, 2014–2015, p. 15).

Ali Hussein al-Shami notes that the English word diplomacy was not used until 1796, although Satoua argues that its first English use dates to 1640 (al-Shami, 2007, p. 32).

The term did not enter international vocabulary until the mid-seventeenth century, when it replaced the word “negotiation” (Abbah, 2009, p. 11). The Spanish were the first to use the terms “embassy” and “ambassador,” adapting them from the ecclesiastical expression *anfactus*, meaning servant, which later evolved into *ambassy* (al-Shami, 2007, p. 33).

The Technical Concept of Diplomacy

Ali al-Sadiq Abu Haif defines diplomacy as “the art of representing the government and the interests of the country before foreign governments and abroad, ensuring that the rights, interests, and dignity of the nation are not violated, and managing international affairs and political negotiations” (Haif, 2009, p. 10).

Foudéré also defines it as “the art of negotiation” and of conducting foreign affairs. He adds that it is a set of knowledge and principles needed to manage proper relations between states, and to administer the international interests of peoples and governments in their mutual dealings, whether peaceful or hostile (Fodéré, 1900, p. 2).

From this, it is clear that diplomacy is one of the tools through which foreign policy seeks to achieve its aims. It enables states to influence other states and external groups in order to win their support. This influence may take persuasive and ethical forms, or forms that rely on pressure and deterrence.

The term “diplomatic envoy” was expressed through several words, such as “messenger,” “ambassador,” and “mustā’min.” The messenger and the ambassador were considered equivalent. The mustā’min referred to a foreign envoy who came from the “abode of war” to the Islamic state. Diplomatic missions were also described as “messengers,” “embassies,” or “delegations” (al-Fatlawi, 2015, p. 15).

Diplomacy and its scope can be summarized as follows:

1. Diplomacy can only be conducted between ruling authorities and their appointed representatives.
2. Diplomacy aims to maintain international relations and ensure harmony among differing interests.
3. Diplomacy is practiced in times of peace and in times of war.
4. Diplomacy covers not only political matters but also economic, commercial, cultural, military, and communication issues, as well as negotiations and other fields.

Modern European Diplomacy

In Europe, diplomacy developed alongside the growing concern for international law and public law in the sixteenth century, and especially in the seventeenth century. Many works were written in this field, and specialists and practitioners engaged in detailed debate and reflection on its foundations (al-Qaddouri, 2012, p. 312).

Joseph Siracusa, in his book *Diplomacy: A Very Short Introduction*, states that the modern era of diplomacy is generally traced back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. This peace established the principles of state sovereignty, freedom of belief, and

religious tolerance. He adds that the first foreign ministry was founded by the French cardinal Richelieu in 1626 (Siracusa, 2015, p. 14).

Britain used its diplomatic policy in the eighteenth century to maintain the balance of power in Europe, while Austria used diplomacy to rebuild the European Council (al-Masri, 2013, pp. 39–40).

Modern diplomacy is therefore characterized by its permanent, stable, and continuous nature (al-Shami, 2007, p. 108). With the consistent exchange of permanent missions, diplomacy became a profession based on established rules and principles. The importance of permanent diplomatic representation was affirmed as the duties of diplomats expanded. Their role was no longer limited to representing their state and negotiating on issues of concern. They were also expected to observe and monitor developments in the host country and report to their government on matters they deemed significant.

Section Four: Principles of Modern Algerian Diplomacy

Algiers was regarded as one of the strongest states in the Maghreb. Its strength stemmed from its vast territory, long coastline, and economic wealth. It also held a position of leadership, and its word carried weight in both war and peace. European powers acknowledged this influence. Many of them paid tribute and offered gifts, and sought to conclude peace treaties to avoid conflict with it. Thus, any European state sending an envoy to Algiers would usually accompany him with money or gifts. The value of these gifts depended on the status of the state and the level of risk faced by its fleets and commercial interests (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 22).

This reality dismisses doubts about the existence of Algerian diplomacy before 1962. Some even claimed that Algeria lacked an independent political identity. In this context, De Grammont observed: “For more than three centuries, Algiers and its sailors were a source of fear and calamity for the Christian world. No European nation was safe from its bold seamen. Algiers repelled every attack and imposed what he called the humiliation of annual tribute upon three-quarters of Europe and even the United States of America” (Grammont, 2002, p. 15).

As a result, Europeans secured the safety of their trade by paying tribute in money or military supplies (Wolf, 2009, p. 191). Algeria’s strength lay in its full awareness of the European dangers around it. It invested heavily in preparing itself to meet these challenges at the political, military, and economic levels. Its naval fleet in particular played a vital role in the Mediterranean (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 24).

Foreign policy in Algiers was flexible. It was guided by confidence in its naval superiority and by the belief that the continuity of the state was essential to the political life of the Muslim community. Algerian diplomacy rested on two main principles:

1. Every state was considered hostile until it signed a treaty of friendship and peace with Algiers.
2. Any treaty that did not recognize Algeria's sovereignty over the Mediterranean was rejected and void.

The Dey was the central authority in diplomacy. He sent envoys to the states with which he wished to establish contact, and these envoys were known as ambassadors. During this period, Algiers did not appoint permanent ambassadors to European courts. Envoys travelled only to complete specific missions and then returned (Aisha S. A., 2017, p. 496).

Another principle of Algerian diplomacy was its effort to avoid alliances and to maintain neutrality in European conflicts. Many European states attempted to draw Algeria into their rivalries, using various forms of persuasion and influence. France, for example, during the reign of Louis XIV, sent a large delegation in 1702 to convince Algiers to align with it in the War of the Spanish Succession. Algeria firmly rejected the proposal (Qenaan, 1994, p. 51).

A further observation is that Algiers did not possess a fully developed diplomatic apparatus. The Dey's administration did not train officials specifically for foreign missions. Ambassadors and envoys learned their duties through experience and direct practice, based on what the Dey considered appropriate. Moreover, Algiers viewed the European practice of appointing consuls from among merchants as a cause of tension and instability. Their personal interests often conflicted with the interests of the state. For this reason, the Deys insisted that state interests be entrusted to individuals with no ties to commercial activity (Mukhtar, 2014–2015, pp. 119–120). Envoys had to be free from personal motives and act solely as representatives of the state.

Algiers maintained that no treaty was acceptable unless it acknowledged its naval superiority in the Mediterranean (al-Qasim, 2007, p. 283). This principle guided Algerian diplomacy for three centuries.

These factors shaped the political identity of the Algerian state in the Ottoman era. Algeria's strength and influence in international relations came from its awareness of surrounding threats and from its continuous efforts to prepare for confrontation (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 101). In addition, its diverse economic resources made Europe dependent on it despite the often unstable relations between them (Schaller, 1977, p. 10).

Algerians declared war on any Christian state not bound to them by a peace treaty. To secure the safety of their commercial fleets, European states accepted payment of an annual tribute, which was often burdensome for them (Belkacem M., *The International Personality of Algeria and Its Global Prestige before 1830*, vol. 1, 2007, p. 78).

This raises an important question: could the sultans who conquered vast territories and held immense power have needed to conclude agreements with the rulers of the “abode of war”?

The answer suggests that the purpose of diplomatic contact with the Ottoman Empire was to encourage European powers to strengthen their commercial ties with the Empire and with the Regency of Algiers. It also aimed to expand commercial activity, especially as European states competed intensely to obtain privileges for their subjects.

Section Three: Algerian Relations with the Scandinavian States and the Italian Cities

1. Relations with the Low Countries

The Mediterranean region was highly attractive to many powers, whether located on its shores or beyond them. The Netherlands sent its fleets to the Mediterranean to assert its presence there, alongside other European powers. Dutch attention was often directed toward the southern coasts of the sea (Fekair, 2007, p. 188). As a result, Algerian–Dutch relations experienced tension and periods of calm from 1622 until 1660. The Dutch launched several attacks on Algiers, but all failed (Aisha, 2010–2011, p. 164). Dutch ships crossed the Strait of Gibraltar for trade (Hatam, 1968, p. 310), but many Dutch sailors soon fell captive to Algerian corsairs. Their ships and cargoes were seized and taken as spoils (Wolf, 2009, p. 260).

From the early 1620s, the Netherlands sought to send envoys to Algiers to secure a truce. Cornelis Pynacker was appointed for this mission. He had previously served as ambassador in Algiers in 1616 under the name Wynandt de Keyser and remained there until 1626. He knew several Eastern languages. He left on 7 July 1622 and arrived in Algiers on 3 September (Fekair, 2007, p. 18). According to Krein, the Dutch authorities even appealed to the Sublime Porte to pressure the Pasha of Algiers to sign a peace treaty that would grant Dutch merchants the same rights enjoyed by the French and the English (Kreinc, 2002, p. 20).

Pasha Hussein Hamid Agha received the Dutch envoy. After agreeing on a prisoner exchange, he promised to prepare a draft treaty. In October 1622, the envoy accepted to pay 1,500 florins. He then left for Tunis on 18 October (Kreinc, 2002, p. 21). The mission concluded with an agreement consisting of fourteen articles (Belkacem, 2015, p. 75).

2. Algerian–Swedish Relations

Sweden was one of the most important European powers in the seventeenth century. It rose to become the strongest kingdom in northern Europe, which allowed it

to play a decisive role in many of the region's political issues. It took part in the religious wars to support the Protestant cause against Catholic forces. France, through its minister Richelieu, encouraged the Swedish king to wage war against Germany to weaken the Habsburgs (Yaghi, 1993, p. 123).

Most historical studies agree that formal relations between Algeria and Sweden began in the first half of the eighteenth century. However, Swedish attempts to reach the Regency date back to the second half of the seventeenth century. These attempts were primarily economic. The Swedes were in search of profitable commercial opportunities and potential markets for their basic goods (Muller, 2004, p. 55). Joachim Ostlund notes that one of the main motives for Swedish contact with Algiers was the issue of "freeing captives" and the lack of security at sea. In 1668, the Swedish Board of Trade decided that a peace treaty was needed so that Swedish merchants could trade under safer conditions (Ostlund, p. 153).

Calls for the release of Swedish captives in Algiers grew louder. The Swedish traveler John Gabriel Sparvenfeldt, who visited North Africa in 1691, recommended in his report to the king that ransom be paid for the most capable and youngest Swedish captives (Ostlund, p. 150).

In Sweden, the Ottomans were seen as a potential ally against Russia. This encouraged Sweden to attempt to strengthen its ties with the Ottoman Empire (Muller, 2004, p. 55). Yet Swedish governments also felt pressured at times to launch attacks on Muslim ships in the Red Sea. These efforts failed completely. Sweden then decided to follow the example of other European states that purchased peace with Algiers (Koh, 1937, p. 280). Sweden did not take part in any bombardment of Algerian ports. Following the report of John Arvidsson, Sweden went ahead with its first state-organized attempt to ransom captives. This mission, led by Captain Jonson Barkman in 1661, was unsuccessful (Ostlund, p. 152). By 1667–1668, discussions were already underway about concluding a peace treaty with the Barbary states, though these discussions remained only proposals (Muller, 2004, p. 55).

King Charles XII sought to conclude a commercial treaty with the Sublime Porte within a broader alliance directed against Russia (Muller, 2004, p. 57). This alliance encouraged Algiers and the other Ottoman regencies to accept peaceful relations with Sweden (Salmi, 2017, p. 77).

In 1726, George Laugier, a Scottish merchant with long experience in North Africa, settled in Livorno and used it as a base for negotiations (Muller, 2010, p. 194). Jean von Utfall was then sent in October 1727 as a fully accredited ambassador. He waited in Marseille for Laugier's signal before sailing to Algiers to sign the treaty (Belkacem, 2015, p. 78).

The treaty between Sweden and Algiers was signed in April 1729 by Jean von Utfall and the Dey of Algiers, Abdi Pasha, after consultations and approval from the Diwan. Sweden presented gifts as a mark of respect to Algiers. It sent two ships loaded with forty rifles, eight hundred swords, sixteen hundred cannonballs, masts, and anchors (Muller, 2010, p. 194). Sweden also agreed to pay 10,000 riyals every ten years, and to supply Algiers with military equipment and timber worth 15,000 riyals. It further committed to pay 6,000 riyals upon the appointment of a new Swedish consul in Algiers (Saidouni, 2012, p. 70). The treaty included twenty-two articles and was ratified in Stockholm by King Frederick I (Belkacem, 2007, p. 107). Because of his great respect for the Swedish king, Abdi Pasha ordered the corsairs and naval commanders not to disturb any ship flying the Swedish flag. Swedish ships and merchants were granted free access to Algerian ports under the Dey's protection (Salmi, 2017, p. 80).

The treaty contained political, diplomatic, economic, and commercial terms, in addition to articles with religious implications. Article 17 granted the Swedish consul the freedom to appoint his staff and interpreter. It also allowed him to sail freely within the Bay of Algiers, to travel inland at any time, and to host a Protestant chaplain in his consulate to oversee religious practice for the consul and his community. Slaves were also permitted to attend his sermons. Article 18 stated that in times of peace or war, the Swedish consul and his nationals could leave Algiers with their property without obstruction. Article 21 exempted the consul from paying taxes on items shipped to Algiers for his personal use (Salmi, 2017, p. 82).

3. Algerian–Danish Relations

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Danish merchant fleet expanded. By the end of the century, both Denmark and Sweden possessed the fourth and fifth largest commercial fleets in Europe. Yet Denmark still suffered from low levels of economic development (D. H. Andersen, 2011, p. 3). Throughout the eighteenth century, Denmark owned a merchant fleet whose size reached almost one-third of the British fleet, half of the French fleet, and roughly the same size as the Dutch fleet (C. Hans, 1992, p. 483). Danish shipping played an important role in the economic policy of the Scandinavian states (Jespersen, 2016, p. 328).

Before the mid-eighteenth century, very few Danish ships sailed into the Mediterranean because of the fear of being seized by Algerian corsairs (C. Hans, 1992, p. 483). Danish sailors often suffered captivity at the hands of North African seafarers (D. H. Andersen, 2011, p. 4). In 1634, the Skipperlav in Copenhagen ordered the collection of contributions from all sailors to redeem captives held in North Africa. Over time, Danish ships came to receive increasing state support, especially after the establishment of the Kommercekollegiet in Copenhagen in 1668. This institution encouraged new thinking on how to develop Danish trade, which in turn supported the

growth of a steadily expanding merchant fleet (Ressel, *The North European Way of Ransoming*, p. 132; Gunter, 1986).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the decentralized ransom system proved ineffective. In 1706, the armed frigate *Saint Christopher* of Bergen was captured, with more than forty Danish sailors on board. In 1712, more than twenty-six Danish sailors also remained in captivity after the seizure of the Norwegian ships *Jomfru Anna* and *Ebitzer* (Gunter, *Eswaren Rouler auf den Meerd*, 1986, p. 134).

After both the Netherlands and Sweden concluded peace treaties with Algiers, Denmark decided to follow their example. In 1736, the “*Slavenkassen*” (Slave Fund) proposed financing treaties with North African states, and the Swedish treaty was taken as a model (Muller, 2010, p. 69). Denmark first sought to conclude a treaty with the Ottoman Porte, believing that such a treaty might encourage the North African regencies to sign similar agreements (Odegård, 2017, p. 31). However, following the treaties signed by Sweden and the Netherlands, the kingdom of Denmark-Norway found itself under pressure to act. Several attempts failed. In the mid-1730s, Christian Jacob Henri, an agent of the Slave Fund, explored the possibility of a peace treaty (Odegård, 2016). The attempt failed because of financial shortages. The proposed cost of peace was far greater than the scale of Danish trade in the Mediterranean (Salmi, 2017, p. 106). Henri also rejected the Algerian proposal, judging it too expensive given Denmark’s limited maritime activity in the region (Odegård, 2016, p. 31).

In the autumn of 1738, a secret attempt was made with two English merchants, Hugh Ross and his son Alexander. They claimed they could secure a much cheaper peace than Henri. Their effort was abandoned in 1744 for unknown reasons. Another attempt was made by the merchant Jean Georg Hansen, who served as the French consul in Helsingør. He claimed he could secure a treaty with Algiers for only five or six thousand rix-dollars, which was about one-tenth of Henri’s estimate. His proposal appealed to the central administration, which instructed the commander of the fleet, Frederik Danneskiold-Samsøe, to continue the peace negotiations (Odegård, 2017, p. 35). Hansen was thus able to contact Ludolf Hammeken, a Norwegian who had previously served as the Dutch consul. With his long experience in Algerian affairs, Hammeken became the principal negotiator with the Algerian authorities (Salmi, 2017, p. 106).

On 10 May 1746, the peace and trade treaty was signed between Dey Ibrahim Pasha and the representative of the king of Denmark-Norway, Christian VI (Yousfi, 2020, pp. 130–131). The treaty contained twenty-two articles, many of which followed the structure of the Swedish treaty. It granted several powers to the Danish consul. The most important was Article 16, which stated that the consul held authority to settle disputes among Danish nationals living in Algiers (Odegård, 2016, p. 89).

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we can conclude that Ottoman Algeria enjoyed a notable degree of independence from the Ottoman central authority from the eighteenth century onward. The Sublime Porte did not openly recognize this situation, but Algeria exercised almost complete autonomy in its internal and external affairs. Its strong navy, active economy, and wide external relations strengthened this autonomy. Algeria declared war and made peace on its own, without interference from the Ottoman sultans. During this period, it also adopted a new approach by rejecting treaties and privileges that did not serve its interests.

For these reasons, Algeria's foreign relations came to rest on a set of basic principles, the most important of which were:

- Any state was considered an enemy until it signed a treaty of friendship and peace with Algeria.
- The Regency refused any treaty that did not acknowledge the strength of its navy and its superiority at sea. This rule remained a constant practice for three centuries.

It also becomes clear that political relations between Algeria and the Scandinavian states were tense during much of their shared history. This tension stemmed in part from a crusading spirit and from hostility toward Islam. At the same time, European states in general—and the Scandinavian kingdoms in particular—sought to conclude treaties, to negotiate peace, and to reach accommodations with Algeria. Their aim was to secure safer conditions for their ships and to protect their interests and privileges in the Regency. The study also shows that consular missions formed the main and most effective instrument of this diplomatic representation.

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