

AMIR TIMUR'S REGIONAL STRATEGY: INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND RIVAL INSTABILITY

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Annotation. *This article examines the key political events of the late 14th and early 15th centuries related to the activities of Amir Timur in Anatolia and Syria. Special attention is given to the diplomatic and military relations between Sultan Barquq, Yildirim Bayezid, Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad, the Mamluk Sultanate, the Kara Koyunlu confederation, and other regional powers. The author analyzes Amir Timur's foreign policy strategy aimed at dismantling existing alliances and establishing a new geopolitical configuration in the region. The study is based on Arabic, Persian, and Turkic historical sources. The article highlights the factors that prompted Amir Timur's return to the region after the Indian campaign, the internal crises in Anatolia, the weakening of the Mamluk Sultanate, and the administrative failures of Miranshah in governing the territories under his control.*

Keywords: *Amir Timur, Yildirim Bayezid, Sultan Barquq, Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad, Anatolia, Mamluk Sultanate, Kara Koyunlu, geopolitical balance.*

In 1396–1397, after successfully preventing Amir Timur's commanders from attacking Sivas, Sultan Barquq made vigorous efforts to strengthen a joint defensive alliance against the potential second incursion of Timur into Asia Minor and Syria. To this end, he dispatched his envoy to the Sivas court. Diplomatic letters and embassies were regularly exchanged between Sultan Barquq and Qadi Burhan al-Din. On each occasion, fine textiles and other gifts were sent from the Egyptian court on swift horses. In 1397, the Mamluk governor of Aleppo sent an envoy to Sivas bearing valuable presents. This envoy informed Qadi Burhan al-Din that the governor of Aleppo would provide immediate military assistance whenever needed. He also brought Barquq's decree stating that the Syrian Turkmens had submitted to his authority and that they would not launch any attacks against the Qaysariyya–Sivas polity.

Thus, contrary to Amir Timur's demand that regional rulers withdraw from the anti-Timurid coalition, diplomatic relations between Bayezid and Sultan Barquq continued to grow stronger and more amicable.

Sultan Bayezid declared that he was prepared to send two hundred thousand soldiers from his army to the service of the Mamluk sultan. This fact indicates that the members of the defensive alliance were undertaking serious preparations against Amir Timur. Having joined the alliance treaty in a moment of deep political distress—similar to the situation of Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad—Bayezid paid little heed to Timur's explicit threats. Even after the Sahibqirān withdrew, Bayezid continued maintaining contact with his allies. Qadi Zayn al-Din Safarshah was dispatched to the Mamluk capital, Cairo, bearing precious gifts. Through this gesture, Bayezid demonstrated his commitment to

strengthening friendly relations and adhering to the alliance established in 1394. Barquq, who had consistently supported such diplomatic initiatives, likewise sent Tulunchi Alishah to the Ottoman capital.

These diplomatic exchanges and major military-political events are recorded in the works of Arab historians such as Ibn Taghribirdi, Ibn Duqmaq, Ahmad ibn Ali al-Qalqashandi, Badr al-Din al-Ayni, and Ibn al-Shihna. According to Arab sources, through these actions Barquq sought to reinforce regional cooperation and solidarity in anticipation of a possible renewed invasion by Amir Timur into Asia Minor and Syria.

However, despite all efforts, the alliance ultimately failed to function in practice. The primary factor contributing to this outcome was the conduct of Tokhtamish. After losing his throne, the khan sought refuge in Lithuania, where he received military assistance, regained his strength, and, together with Lithuanian forces, engaged in battle against Yıldırım Bayezid's troops near the Danube River.

Nevertheless, it was mainly the risky and expansionist actions of the Ottoman state that led to the dissolution of the alliance. Driven by ambitions of world domination, Bayezid effectively undermined the coalition by attempting to seize the territories of the Qaysari-Sivas principality after the death of its ruler and, following Sultan Barquq's death, by seeking to occupy the Mamluk domains in Asia Minor. Through these actions, Bayezid rendered the alliance ineffective and hastened its complete collapse¹¹.

After Amir Temur returned to the region, he first set out to resolve the emerging problems and neutralize the forces opposing him. The first to face his military pressure were Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad and the Qara Qoyunlu, as they had become active members of the Anatolian alliance and persistent adversaries of the Timurids. Both Qadi Burhan al-Din and the Qara Qoyunlu had begun serious military preparations in their territories following the withdrawal of Temur's army.

For instance, Qara Qoyunlu leader Yusuf advanced into Syria and regained control over Mosul. Meanwhile, Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad attempted to capture the lands belonging to the Emirate of Erzincan and the Karamanids. Upon learning that Amir Temur's forces had reappeared in Asia Minor, Mutahharten, the emir of Erzincan, sought to resist the Qaysari-Sivas state. However, at that time the Sovereign was still in Samarkand, while Mironshah's forces had already arrived in Anatolia from Iran.

Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad launched military operations with the aim of seizing the territories subordinate to Amir Temur and eliminating Mutahharten, the emir of Erzincan. In fact, this plan had long been part of Burhan al-Din's strategic intentions. Taking advantage of the newly emerging circumstances, the Sivas forces advanced, and upon their entry into Erzincan, the ruler of Nemah immediately declared his submission.

Continuing his offensive, Qadi Burhan al-Din besieged the city of Erzincan for a full month. The Aq Qoyunlu also joined this campaign, as Mutahharten had previously inflicted harm upon them as well. Eventually, the captured territories—Erzincan and the

¹¹ Timurids' Tuzuks. In Uzbek, Russian, English, and French. Edited by B. Akhmedov. / Translated from Persian by A. Soguniy and H. Karomatov. Tashkent, "G. G'ulom Publishing House of Literature and Art," 1996. pp. 3–343.

lands stretching to Bayburt—were granted by Qadi Burhan al-Din to Aq Qoyunlu Ahmad as a gift, while he himself returned to Sivas. However, not long afterward, Mutahhartan once again managed to gather his strength. At this time, a conflict broke out between Aq Koyunlu leader Kara Yuluq Osman and his brother Ahmad.

Kara Yuluq Osman and Mutahhartan jointly launched a campaign against Ahmad. As a result, relations between Amir Timur and Qara Yuluq Osman improved considerably. Learning of these developments, Qadi Burhan al-Din reappeared once more in the territory of Erzincan¹². He was defeated in the battle that took place in November 1395. Following this victory, Mutahhartan appeared in the vicinity of Akşehir. Bozdoğan-oğlu Sa'dulmulk, who ruled Akşehir under the authority of Erzincan, abandoned the city and fled to Sivas. The decisive role of Mironshah's amirs greatly contributed to Mutahhartan's success. Their active intervention led to Qadi Burhan al-Din losing control of Sivas as well. Moreover, at this time, Ala al-Din Bey of the Karamanids had launched a campaign against him and entered into an agreement with Shaykh Musaid, the governor of Kayseri. Receiving support from Barquq, Qadi Burhan al-Din began preparing for another military expedition against Erzincan.

At the same time, another rival of Qadi Burhan al-Din — Alā' al-Dīn Beg, son of the Qaramanid ruler — also became active. Both the Qaramanid prince and the amir of Erzincan were subordinate to Amir Timur. Their simultaneous offensives posed a serious threat to Qadi Burhan al-Din. Advancing as far as Kayseri, Alā' al-Dīn Beg laid siege to the city. Soon after, the Üç-Oq and Kipchak Turkmens arrived to support him. However, despite all their efforts, these forces proved powerless against the mighty ruler, Qadi Burhan al-Din. Arriving swiftly at Kayseri, Qadi Burhan al-Din engaged in a fierce confrontation with Ahmad Alā' al-Dīn. The Qaramanid prince and the Turkmens were forced to retreat from these territories. Nevertheless, the son of the Qaramanid ruler continued his hostility toward the states of Kayseri and Sivas.

This time, he attempted to incite internal conflicts through the governor of Kayseri, Shaykh Musa'id. Ultimately, with the support of the Kayseri ruler, Shaykh Musa'id revolted. To suppress the uprising, Qadi Burhan al-Din arrived at Kayseri and sent an envoy to Alā' al-Dīn, proposing an open-field confrontation. Alā' al-Dīn retreated to Konya. During these operations, Konya, Niğde, and Larende also suffered devastation. At the same time, Mutahhartan experienced doubts and attempted to withdraw from the alliance with Amir Timur. He agreed to Qadi Burhan al-Din's terms, committing to return captured soldiers, material goods, and wealth, as well as to provide an annual tribute of 300,000 akçe and military support during wartime.

It is evident that Qadi Burhan al-Din successfully concluded his operations against Amir Timur's activities and plans in Anatolia during this period. Meanwhile, the Qaramanid prince, who did not weaken his cooperation with Amir Timur, realized that he could not overcome Burhan al-Din and attempted to fight on another front. He invaded

¹² Ibn Arabshah. *History of Amir Timur (The Marvels of Fate in the History of Timur)* / Preface, translation from Arabic, and commentary prepared by PhD in Philology U. Uvatov. Chief Editor: A. Orinboev. Volume I. Tashkent, "Mehnat," 1992. p. 328. Volume II. Tashkent, "Mehnat," 1992. p. 192.

Ottoman territories, dispatching his troops to Ankara and Bursa. During the initial campaigns, he achieved several victories, including the capture of Temurtash, a renowned commander in Anatolia.

Bayazid was well aware of the strong connection between Alā' al-Dīn and Amir Timur. Consequently, he sought to neutralize Alā' al-Dīn. The Ottoman ruler invaded the territories of the Qaramanids with a substantial army, liberated Temurtash, and captured Alā' al-Dīn. In 1397, Alā' al-Dīn was executed.

During the same period, it is also known that Sultan Barquq of the Mamluks undertook various measures against individuals associated with Amir Timur. In 1398, the ruler of Kayseri–Sivas, Qadi Burhan al-Din Ahmad, was killed by Qara Yuluq Usmanbek.

Undoubtedly, Amir Timur played a role in Qadi Burhan al-Din's death. This is confirmed by the subsequent improvement and strengthening of relations between Qara Yuluq Usmanbek and Amir Timur. The demise of Qadi Burhan al-Din brought immense satisfaction to Amir Timur, and the news was received with joy in the subordinate territories. Interestingly, Bayazid also welcomed this development. The death of Qadi Burhan al-Din marked the end of the period of regional resistance.

During the unfolding of these major political events, Amir Timur was on his campaign in India. After successfully completing the expedition and briefly resting in the capital, Samarkand, he returned to Iran. Historians have interpreted Timur's return to this region in various ways. Many emphasize the intensified incursions by Armenian and Georgian forces into the cities and villages of Azerbaijan, which resulted in significant suffering among the local population. Undoubtedly, Amir Timur's primary objective was to consolidate his influence in these territories. Additionally, the ineffective activities of the Qara Qoyunlu and Ahmad Jalayer also contributed, to some extent, to the instability that required his intervention.

In the autumn of 1396, Mironshah, who had assumed control over the administration in Iran, suffered a severe fall from his horse near Hoy, resulting in a serious head injury. During this period of physical and psychological decline, he increasingly indulged in drinking and leisure activities, paying less attention to state affairs. Consequently, the administrative system began to deteriorate. While still in Samarkand, Amir Timur received reports that Mironshah had started yielding to opposition, recklessly distributing state assets and treasury wealth. During Timur's campaign in India, he received a letter reflecting Mironshah's intentions and mindset, in which Mironshah openly expressed that it was now time for his rest. Due to Mironshah's behavior, the surrounding administrators ceased to obey him, further undermining the governance of the region.

According to Timurid sources, the activities of the Georgian and Armenian forces in the region were indeed a consequence of Mironshah's mismanagement. Additionally, the disruptive actions of the Qara Qoyunlu and the Jalayerids must also be considered within this context. Another factor concerns Amir Timur's earlier campaigns in Anatolia and against the Mamluk Sultanate during 1393–94, in which he had not achieved decisive victories. However, the subsequent profound changes in Anatolia and Syria created a favorable situation for Timur, as he was no longer confronted by two of his strongest



adversaries: Qazi Burhanuddin Ahmad, ruler of Qaysari-Sivas, and Sultan Barquq. Contemporary sources note that Timur expressed great satisfaction upon receiving the news of their deaths. In recognition of the messenger who brought the news of Barquq's demise, Amir Timur rewarded him with 15,000 dinars.

Amir Timur pursued his policies in Anatolia and Syria based on a carefully devised military-diplomatic strategy. He skillfully leveraged internal conflicts in the region, the instability of his rivals, and the competition among local rulers. As a result, formidable opponents such as Barquq, Qazi Burhanuddin Ahmad, and Yıldırım Bayezid were successively removed from the political arena.

The death of Qazi Burhanuddin Ahmad marked the end of regional resistance against Amir Timur in Anatolia. This development enabled the Sahibqiran to shape a new geopolitical configuration in the region, consolidate his sphere of influence, and enhance his prestige throughout the Muslim East.

Amir Timur's activities stand as a remarkable example of his era, demonstrating not only military victories but also the art of meticulous international political planning and the maintenance of strategic balance.

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