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Strategic Planning in the Middle Byzantine Period: A *Limitrophe* Policy Reintroduced?*

Abstract. In order to maintain or improve its political stability and overall might every state conducts certain policies, both domestic and foreign, throughout its history. They are usually a result of a systematic planning, encompassing in the process multiple state sectors. The Byzantine Empire was no exception. Throughout centuries of existence, the imperial government implemented numerous reforms and carried out reorganisation in the military, administrative and fiscal departments, with the intention to improve its governance. Creation of the military commands – *strategides*, *thémata* and *tágmata* corps are only some of the changes, and their implementation certainly required prior planning in accordance with the requirements and capacity of the state. In relation to foreign policy, starting from the mid-ninth century, a formation of a number of client states that were more or less politically dependent on Constantinople can be observed on the Byzantine borders; their existence ended around the mid-eleventh century. This paper aims to examine the process of establishing client states on the Byzantine borders, i.e., whether it was a policy initiated and subsequently applied by the imperial government as a result of some pre-determined planning, or whether it was just an *ad hoc* solution.

Keywords: Byzantine Empire, Middle Byzantine period, Byzantine diplomacy, strategic planning, limitrophe policy, Byzantine client states

Every state, throughout its history, undertakes certain policies, both domestic and foreign, with the intention of ensuring its own survival and in order to maintain or improve its overall political and military might. These policies are usually a result of systematic short-term and long-term planning, covering during this complex process one or several state sectors. In that context, polities establish a concept that encompasses ideas, plans, methods, techniques and means, and through the art of governance implement them in its domestic and foreign affairs in accordance with the resources they possess[1]. The Byzantine Empire was

* This paper was presented on the 24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Venice and Padua, 22–27 August 2022.

[1] According to A.M. Kjær, *Governance*, Cambridge 2004, p. 10–11, *governance is the capacity of government to make and implement policy*, *in other words*, *to steer society*. About theories of governance,

no exception to this rule. During its millennial existence the imperial government had implemented numerous reforms and carried out reorganisations in the military, administrative and fiscal departments, in order to improve its governance, which helped the Empire to endure many critical moments. Creation of military commands – *strategides*, *themata*[2] or *tágmata*[3] corps are only a part of these changes and their implementation certainly required prior military, administrative, economic and financial planning in accordance with the requirements and capabilities of the state. In relation to foreign policy during the Middle Byzantine Period, starting from the mid-ninth century, a formation of a ring of client states on the Byzantine borders can be observed. These were politically dependent on Constantinople, and their existence ended around the mid-eleventh century. The paper aims to research the process of the client state formation on the Byzantine borders in this period, whether it was an established policy or just an *ad hoc* solution, and to determine the factors that influenced it. The paper also aims to study the ends (political and military) which were intended to be achieved, the impact the client state formation had on the military capacity, defensive capability and overall security of the Byzantine Empire, and the causes for its disappearance.

There is ample evidence in the sources in relation to the matter of state-level planning in the Byzantine Empire and it can be observed in the domestic policies that were implemented in the administrative, judiciary, economic, financial and military sphere. A clear example of military planning is the preparation process for an upcoming campaign noted in *The Book of Ceremonies* (mobilisation of troops, the financial budget and logistics), for instance, the naval expedition of 911 which was probably aimed against North Syria and was supposed to return via Crete, the Cretan campaign of 949, or the expedition in Langobardia in 935[4]. Another

especially *étatist* model of governance, and policy processes see J. PIERRE, B.G. PETERS, *Governing Complex Societies. Trajectories and Scenarios*, Basingstoke–New York 2005, p. 1–48. For the state-centric theory of governance see S. BELL, A. HINDMOOR, *Rethinking Governance. The Centrality of the State in Modern Society*, Cambridge 2009, p. 1–19. For a general overview on theories of governance and policy processes see J. PIERRE, B.G. PETERS, *Governance, Politics and the State*, [2]London 2020; *Handbook on Theories of Governance*, ed. C. ANSELL, J. TORFING, [2]Cheltenham–Northampton 2022. See also, P. KATSAMUNSKA, *The Concept of Governance and Public Governance Theories*, EAl 2, 2016, p. 133–141; G. STOKER, *Governance as Theory: Five Propositions*, ISSJ 50, 1998, p. 17–28; W. WALTERS, *Some Critical Notes on "Governance"*, SPE 73, 2004, p. 27–46.

[2] For *strategides* and *themata* in J. HALDON, L. BRUBAKER, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850. A History*, Cambridge 2011, p. 726–728, 744–771.

[3] J.F. HALDON, *Byzantine Pretorians. An Administrative, Institutional and Social Survey of the Opsikion and the Tagmata, c.580–900*, Bonn 1984 [= ΠΒ, 3], p. 228–328; H.-J. KÜHN, *Die Byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Organisation der Tagmata*, Wien 1991 [= BG.E, 2], p. 47–122.

[4] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENNETOS, *The Book of Ceremonies*, trans. A. MOFFATT, M. TALL, Leiden 2012 [= BAus, 18] (cetera: CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *The Book of Ceremonies*), p. 651–678. For analysis about the expedition of 911, as well as the sources, origins and purpose of the document

example of military planning can be seen in the accepting of a general strategy for the upcoming campaign, an overall plan for the army march from imperial territory or the forward camp into the land of the enemy, for crossing a narrow mountainous gorge, defile, river or bridge, or tactical deployment of troops on the field prior to an engaging battle: all these are military activities where an advance planning is needed. Evidence of such planning in warfare is plentiful. Maurice's *Strategikon* points how a *general is wise who before entering into war carefully studies the enemy, and can guard against his strong points and take advantage of his weaknesses*[5]. Furthermore, it suggest that military commanders must make *plans to defeat the enemy not only by arms but also through their food and drink, making the water unfit to drink and poisoning the grain*[6]. George of Pisidia notes this type of planning in the Sassanian campaigns of Heraclius (610–641)[7]. The military manual titled as Ἀνονύμου Βιβλίον τακτικόν (Anonymous book on tactics), translated today as "Campaign organisation and tactics"[8], presents various tactics, as well as other practical advice, for a General of an army that are necessary to plan and successfully lead a military campaign. An example that there was awareness among military officers of the necessity for pre-campaign planning is found in the story in *the History* of Leo the Deacon about John I Tzimiskes' (969–976) military preparations in 971 against the Rus in Bulgaria where the emperor declared that

> I myself am well aware that to go into battle without due deliberation, but in a bold and arrogant manner, is particularly likely to result in danger and ruinous destruction. On the other hand, when the situation is, as it were, on a razor's edge, and does not give an opportunity to act according to one's wishes, then I think you too will agree with me that it is necessary to seize first this moment and take good care of our own affairs, since you have acquired great experience of the varying and shifting fortunes of battles. If then you will heed me as I counsel a better course of action, while the Scythians have lapsed into indolence, as yet unaware of our approach, let us seize the opportunity and victory will follow upon our passage through the gorge. For if they should perceive us when we were about to pass through, and should deploy themselves into ranks to oppose us in the narrow defile, the situation would not turn out well for us, but would lead to dire straits and difficulties[9].

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see J.F. Haldon, *Theory and Practice in Tenth-Century Military Administration. Chapters II, 44 and 45 of the Book of Ceremonies*, TM 13, 2000, p. 240–242, 265–268.

[5] *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, VII, A.25–27, ed. G.T. Dennis, Wien 1981 [= *CFHB*, 17] (cetera: *Strategikon*), p. 229.

[6] *Strategikon*, VIII, 2.99, p. 301.

[7] Georgi Pisidae, *Expeditio Persica*, *Bellum Avaricum*, *Heraclias*, II. 46–48, 179–181, ed. I. Bekkeri, Bonnae 1836 [= *CSHB*], p. 15, 20.

[8] *Campaign Organization and Tactics*, [in:] *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. et trans. G.T. Dennis, Washington D.C. 1985 [= *CFHB.SW*, 25], p. 246–327.

[9] *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, trans. A.-M. Talbot, D.F. Sullivan, Washington D.C. 2005 [= DOS, 41] (cetera: Leo the Deacon), p. 177–179.

However, all of these examples are actually short-term planning. There is also another type of planning that we distinguish today, one that covers the political and military ends of a state and the process of their achievement over a longer period of time, to which we refer today as state, national or grand strategy[10], a feature of statecraft[11]. The current theory is that this type of planning is not typical for all polities, and, as some scholars are emphasising, its presence can be observed also in the past only in states that have existed for centuries, like the Roman Empire / Byzantine Empire (Christian Roman Empire to be more exact), and had established a pattern of behaviour (grand behaviour)[12], termed as "operational code"[13]. What differentiates this state-level strategy from the modern state phenomenon that we term today as grand strategy is that is unwittingly formed, shaped and implemented by the leading officials of a particular state (while at the same time they are ignorant of its creation and existence), it lacks contemporary complexity and shares only its elementary features, i.e., a pattern of behaviour. The existence of this "pattern" is predetermined by several general factors: ultimate or penultimate state interests, geopolitical position of the state and the overall resources at its disposal, political ideology (if established), military traditions, and the historical and cultural heritage[14]. In regards to the theory that this pattern of military, political and diplomatic behaviour can be observed in the foreign policy of the Byzantine government, as its *modus operandi* of conducting state affairs, maintaining the Roman imperial status[15] and the prerogatives of the *basileus* as a guardian of

[10] For a comprehensive overview in relation to the research of grand strategy see, *The Shaping of Grand Strategy*. *Policy*, *Diplomacy and War*, ed. W. MURRAY, R.H. SINNREICH, J. LACEY, Cambridge 2011; *The Making of a Strategy*. *Rulers*, *States and War*, ed. W. MURRAY, M. KNOX, A. BERNSTEIN, Cambridge 1994; L. FREEDMAN, *Strategy*. *A History*, New York 2013.

[11] M.A. KAPLAN, *An Introduction to the Strategy of Statecraft*, WP 4.4, 1952, p. 548.

[12] N. SILOVE, *Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy'*, SecS 27.1, 2018, p. 43–45.

[13] For the Byzantine "operational code" in regards to military affairs see E.N. LUTTWAK, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Cambridge Massachusetts–London 2009, p. 417. That state-level strategy existed in the period of the Principate and Dominate, and afterwards, see E.L. WHEELER, *Methodological Limits and the Mirage of Roman Strategy: Part I*, JMilH 57.1, 1993, p. 7–41, and IDEM, *Methodological Limits and the Mirage of Roman Strategy: Part II*, JMilH 57.2, 1993, p. 215–240.

[14] For an overview of these factors in relation to the Byzantine Empire see D. GJALEVSKI, *Byzantine Military Tradition*, *Diplomacy and Indication of Strategy of Statecraft (6th–12th Centuries)*, Гла 65.1–2, 2021, p. 10–15. For a general analysis of the factors that influence and shape the grand strategy see W. MURRAY, *Thoughts on Grand Strategy*, [in:] *The Shaping of Grand Strategy*. *Policy*, *Diplomacy and War*, ed. W. MURRAY, R.H. SINNREICH, J. LACEY, Cambridge 2011, p. 9–21; W. MURRAY, M. GRIMSLEY, *Introduction: On Strategy*, [in:] *The Making of a Strategy*. *Rulers*, *States and War*, ed. W. MURRAY, M. KNOX, A. BERNSTEIN, Cambridge 1994, p. 7–23.

[15] The verbal dispute recorded in *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. P. SQUARTITI, Washington D.C. 2007, p. 270, over the prerogatives of Byzantine reign during his second diplomatic mission to Constantinople, are more than a clear indication of this tendency. D.M. NICOL,

Christians and the one true faith[16], reintegration of lost imperial territories[17], waging wars by recruiting allies to change the overall balance of power[18], the identical political approach with the period of the Principate and Dominate concerning pacification of the steppe peoples[19], existence of different foreign policy depending on region, i.e., acknowledging a military and political difference between Central

The Byzantine Views of Western Europe, GRBS 8.4, 1967, p. 316, 321. D.M. Nicol, *Byzantine Political Thought*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350–c.1450*, ed. J.H. Burns, Cambridge 2008, p. 58, 62.

[16] This image of the apostolic role of the *basileus* is observed in imperial biographies, such as *Vita Basilii Imperatoris*, 95.1–5, where the author notes that *the emperor did not show careless or indifferent to this apostolic work*. For the image of the *basileus* as a guardian of Christians see S.A. Ivanov, *Religious Missions*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard, Cambridge 2008, p. 315, 320; v. 231–239. For the diplomatic aspects of Byzantine missionary work, see D. Gjalevski, *Diplomatskite aspekti na vizantiskoto misionerstvo*, [in:] *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium "Days of Justinian I" Skopje, 11–12 November 2016*, ed. M.B. Panov, Skopje 2017, p. 66–81; S.A. Ivanov, *'With the Emperors Help': An Open-handed Mission and Byzantine Diplomacy*, [in:] *Cyril and Methodius. Byzantium and the World of the Slavs. International Scientific Conference 20th–30th November 2013*, ed. A.E.N. Tachiaos, Thessaloniki 2015, p. 78.

[17] For the Byzantine policy of reconquering Sicily during the reigns of Michael III and Basil I see A.A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. I, *La dynastie d'Amorium (820–867)*, ed. H. Grégoire, M. Canard, Bruxelles 1935, p. 221; idem, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. II, *Les relations politiques de Byzance et des Arabes à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne (les empereurs Basile I, Léon le Sage et Constantin VII Porphyrogénète) 867–959 (253–348). Première partie: Les relations politiques de Byzance et des Arabes à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne. Première période, de 867 à 959*, ed. H. Grégoire, M. Canard, Bruxelles 1968, p. 21–22. For the unsuccessful Sicilian campaign of Nikephoros II Phocas see Leo the Deacon, p. 115–117; John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, trans. J. Wortley, Cambridge 2010 (cetera: Skylitzes), p. 256.

[18] Author of *On Strategy*, 6.14–17, [in:] *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*… (cetera: *On Strategy*), p. 23, points out that when the Byzantine Empire was *unable to face* [the enemy] *on in open battle*, to improve its position the government should *stir up neighboring peoples* [to wage war] *against them*.

[19] M. Maas, *How the Steppes became Byzantine. Rome and the Eurasian Nomads in Historical Perspective*, [in:] *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity. Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. N. di Cosmo, M. Mass, Cambridge 2018, p. 19–34, esp. 27–28. Byzantine policy towards the Black Sea region in the period between fifth and seventh century was aimed at gaining allies by giving gold, conferring titles and baptism, as indicated by *The Chronicle of John of Malalas*, trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, Leiden 2017 [= BAus, 4], p. 233, 247, 250; *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, 10, 3.21–106, ed. et trans. R.C. Blockley, Liverpool 1985, p. 119–123; and Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, 9.1–9, trans. C. Mango, Washington D.C. 1990 [= *CFHB.SW*, 13], p. 49–51. For the Byzantine policy in the steppe region until the seventh century, see E. Nechaeva, *Patterns of Roman Diplomacy with Iran and the Steppe People*, [in:] *Empires and Exchanges*…, p. 358–364. An identical Byzantine policy is noted during the tenth century, but now towards the Magyars, Pechenegs and the Rus, as reported in Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 13.14–28, ed. G. Moravcsik, trans. R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington D.C. 1967 [= *CFHB*, 1] (cetera: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*); Skylitzes, p. 231; *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian text*, ed. et trans. S.H. Cross, O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Massachusetts 1953 (cetera: *Russian Primary Chronicle*), p. 82, 110–111.

Asia (during sixth and seventh century)[20], Pontic steppe, Caucasus, Sassanian empire and later the Islamic world, the Balkans and Christian Europe, as well as a different approach to resolving conflicts (whether they are political or military in nature), or imposing Byzantine political supremacy in these same regions, is confirmation not only of this tendency, but also of its presence[21]. The frequent shift between the two aspects of Byzantine "carrot and stick" policy – implementation of the imperial "soft" and "hard" power – towards the polities in Southern Italy and Caucasus[22], or the military efforts conducted by several emperors to reconquer the islands of Sicily and Crete from the Arabs in the period between mid-ninth and mid-eleventh century as a result of the imperial foreign policy named by the scholars with the term "limited ecumenicity", a change from the "universal ecumenicity"[23], are another examples. Signing a treaty with hostile and non-hostile polities, usually for as long a period as possible, mostly on a 30-year basis[24], with at least a political and military clause in its content, is another sign that the officials in the imperial government were acquainted with the idea of long-term strategic planning in relation to foreign policy which was concerned with the overall stability and security of the state.

In fact, the author of *On Envoys* clearly indicates that the Byzantine government had an awareness regarding the process of planning ahead and simulating hypothetical scenarios and their solutions (regardless of how rudimentary this process

[20] M. WHITTOW, *Byzantium's Eurasian Policy in the Age of the Türk Empire*, [in:] *Empires and Exchanges*…, p. 271–286; L. QIANG, S. KORDOSIS, *The Geopolitics on the Silk Road: Resurveying the Relationship of the Western Türks with Byzantium through their Diplomatic Communications*, MeW 8, 2018, p. 109–125.

[21] J. SHEPARD, *Information, Disinformation and Delay in Byzantine Diplomacy*, BF 10, 1985, p. 234, and A. KAZHDAN, *The Notion of Byzantine Diplomacy*, [in:] *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. SHEPARD, S. FRANKLIN, Aldershot 1992, p. 3–4.

[22] For the Byzantine policy in Southern Italy see F. MARAZZI, *Byzantines and Lombards*, [in:] *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, ed. S. CONSENTINO, Leiden 2021 [= BCBW, 8], p. 169–194; G.A. LOUD, *Byzantium and Southern Italy (876–1000)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine*…, p. 560–582; V. VON FALKENHAUSEN, *Between Two Empires: Byzantine Italy in the Reign of Basil II*, [in:] *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. P. MAGDALINO, Leiden–Boston 2003 [= MMe, 45], p. 135–151. For Caucasus see T.W. GREENWOOD, *Armenian Neighbours (600–1045)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine*…, p. 333–364. For Southern Italy and Caucasus during the tenth century see S. RUNCIMAN, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign. A Study of Tenth-Century Byzantium*, Cambridge 1929, p. 151–202.

[23] T. LOUNGHIS, *Byzantine Diplomacy*, [in:] S. LAMPAKIS, M. LEONTSINI, T. LOUNGHIS, V. VLYSIDOU, *Byzantine Diplomacy. A Seminar*, trans. N. RUSSELL, Athens 2007, p. 46–50.

[24] The validity of the Great treaty of 562 with the Sasanian empire was fifty years. See D.A. MILLER, *Byzantine Treaties and Treaty-making: 500–1025 AD*, Bsl 32, 1971, p. 59. For the Byzantine-Bulgarian treaty of 816 that was signed for thirty years, see *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati, Nomine Fertur, Libri I–IV*, I, 20.4–5, trans. M. FEATHERSTONE, J. SIGNES CODOÑER, Boston–Berlin 2015 [= *CFHB.SBe*, 53], p. 51. For the Byzantine-Rus treaty of September 2, 911, in *Russian Primary Chronicle*, p. 65–69.

was in relation to modern standards), i.e., of predicting the outcome. This procedure was applied to envoys who were preparing to go on a diplomatic mission abroad[25]. This was well known even by the foreign rulers, for instance the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz (953–975) who stated that *I know that he is an ambassador, who has exact instructions what to tell me, what impression to try to create in my mind and which answers to give on questions which his master possibly foresaw he would be asked*[26]. Similar planning is observed in *The Book of Ceremonies* for the military campaign in Southern Italy during the reign of emperor Romanus I Lecapenus (920–944)[27]. An additional confirmation for the existence of this process of planning ahead is the advice of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (944–959) to his son that the ruler must study what is known about the near and more distant nations, so that he can understand *the difference between other nations, their origins and customs and manner of life, and the position and climate of the land they dwell in, and its geographical description and measurement*, but also *the difference between each of these nations, and how either to treat with and conciliate them, or to make war upon and oppose them*[28]. This information in *De Administrando Imperio* indicates that the Byzantines possessed certain knowledge which made them aware of the necessity to carry out more comprehensive and long-term planning[29] focused not only on containing and resolving immediate political and military threats from the surrounding regions, but also on creating a defensive ring of allies around imperial borders. That this type of knowledge existed amongst members of the Byzantine government is clearly evident from Porphyrogenitus suggestion to improve overall security on the eastern border by annexing the Armenian principalities, or rather several cities around Lake Van, and establishing a direct authority over them[30], a proposal that was gradually accomplished and finally completed by his successors in the first half of the eleventh century[31].

From the mid-ninth century, sources inform that a large number of smaller polities emerged on the imperial borders. These at some point in time recognised the political supremacy of the *basileus* and become client states of the Byzantine

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[25] *On Strategy*, 43.39–42. For a detailed analysis of this chapter see D. Lee, J. Shepard, *A Double Life: Placing the Peri Presbeon*, Bsl 52, 1991, p. 15–29.

[26] S.M. Stern, *An Embassy of the Byzantine Emperor to the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz*, B 20, 1950, p. 249.

[27] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *The Book of Ceremonies*, p. 660–661.

[28] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, prooimion. 19–22, 25–27, 13.197–200. See also J. Shepard, *Information*…, p. 270–271.

[29] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, prooimion. 12–17, refers to the "doctrine" that Porphyrogenitus placed before his son and heir, so that he could understand *in what each nation has power to advantage the Romans, and in what to hurt, and how and by what other nation each severally may be encountered in arms and subdued*. See also D.M. Nicol, *Byzantine Political Thought*…, p. 56–57.

[30] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.125–128. See J. Shepard, *Imperial Information and Ignorance: a Discrepancy*, Bsl 56, 1995, p. 110–111.

[31] T.W. Greenwood, *Armenian*…, p. 362–363.

Empire[32]. On the eastern border the aforementioned foreign policy was implemented among the Caucasian states, for example Taron[33], Bagratid Armenia[34], Iberia[35] and other smaller statelets in this region[36] which were, predominantly, close allies of the Byzantines[37], although they rejected imperial hegemony whenever it was in their interest and at those times allied themselves with the enemies of the Byzantine Empire[38]. The same pattern can be observed in Southern Italy were the Lombardian duchies of Capua-Benevento and Salerno, when they could no longer resist the Byzantine diplomatic and military pressure, accepted imperial hegemony and become client states of the Byzantine Empire. This had occurred around 880 as a result of the military campaign of *strategós* Nicephorus Phocas in Southern Italy[39], and Byzantine supremacy was confirmed again in the first years of the tenth century when an imperial aulic title of *patrician* was conferred to the Lombard rulers[40], as well as in the third decade of eleventh century[41]. In the Balkans, Byzantine foreign policy was focused on the Serbian principalities and on Croatia, which was under the supreme authority of the East Frankish king in the ninth century. Theophanes Continuatus and *De Administrando Imperio* notes that

[32] For a different types of client states see D.A. MILLER, *Studies in Byzantine Diplomacy. Sixth to Tenth Centuries*, Ann Arbor 1983, p. 157–171. That not all of these states were vassal type clients, like for instance some of the Armenian statelets where the imperial agents could interfere into their domestic affairs, see D. GJALEVSKI, *An Outline of Byzantine Diplomacy in the Eastern Adriatic Region (c.867–1000)*, *Исто* 55.1, 2020, p. 33–34.

[33] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 43.7–9, 43.153–155.

[34] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.46; *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. A.E. DOSTOURIAN, Lanham–London 1993 (cetera: MATTHEW), p. 28, 41.

[35] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 43.36–38, 43.115, 45.35.

[36] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.33, 44.59, 44.63, 44.87, 44.110.

[37] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 43.64–69, 43.183–185, 45.206–7, 46.49–53. This was achieved through the bestowment of money, conferring of imperial titles, and granting of territory, as well as with dynastic marriages which helped to forge personal relationships with leading dignitaries and secure the established connections. SKYLITZES, p. 257, notes the military assistance that the Armenians and Iberians provided during the reign of Nicephorus II Phocas.

[38] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 43.12–20, notes how Krikorikios, *archon* of Taron, *always keep the commander of the faithful informed secretly through his letter of what was going on among us; and while he wished to appear a partisan of the Roman cause, he was found, on the contrary, to prefer and favour the cause of the Saracens*. Unsatisfied by an imperial decision, according to CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 46.130–135, some of these states wrote to the Byzantine emperor that they intended to *put off our servitude to your imperial majesty and make common cause with the Saracens*. T.W. GREENWOOD, *Armenian…*, p. 355, notes that when Saif al-Dawla, the future Hamdanid amir of Aleppo, marched north to Lake Van, several Armenian princes responded to his summons and submitted.

[39] G.A. LOUD, *Byzantium and Southern Italy…*, p. 560–562.

[40] S. RUNCIMAN, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus…*, p. 180–181.

[41] V. VON FALKENHAUSEN, *Between Two Empires…*, p. 148–149.

in the reign of Emperor Basil I (867–886) all of these Slavic polities recognised Byzantine overlordship, except for Pagania[42], and in case of Croatia this lasted only for couple of years[43]. In the tenth century the Byzantine foreign policy was mainly directed at Serbia (Rascia) and the other Serbian principalities[44], placing Croatia in the background, but never excluding it totally in the overall process of imposing political hegemony in the Balkans. Indication of the existence of one such policy is the information in the sources that from the time of Držislav the Croatian kings were conferred with the imperial title of *eparch* and *patrician* and *were called kings of Dalmatia and Croatia*[45]. Between mid-tenth and mid-eleventh century this group of Byzantine client states encompassed also the Hamdanids (from eleventh century the Mirdasids) of Aleppo[46] and the Marwanids centred in the city of Amida, whose ruler was honoured with the title of *magister* and *dux* of the East[47]. However, this was not an immutable process. Most of these states rejected Byzantine supremacy at some point in time. One such example is the Lombard duchy of Capua-Benevento[48], which went back to accepting imperial hegemony once more just a couple of years or decades afterwards, like for instance the Armenian and Serbian principalities, as well as Croatia and Iberia, while other polities were gradually integrated into the Byzantine Empire, which has happened to

[42] *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati*, *Nomine Fertur*, *Liber Quo*, *Vita Basilii Impeatoris Amplectitur*, 54.1–15, trans. I. Ševčenko, Berlin–Boston 2011 [= *CFHB.SBe*, 42] (cetera: *Vita Basilii*), p. 195; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 29.70–75.

[43] N. Budak, *Croats between Franks and Byzantium*, HAM 3, 1997, p. 17; T. Živković, *On the Baptism of the Serbs and Croats in the time of Basil I (867–886)*, SSBP 1, 2013, p. 42; D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, New York 1971, p. 100–101.

[44] For the Byzantine-Bulgarian diplomatic conflict regarding Serbia see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 32.91–126. Zacharias, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 32.111–114, send to Constantinople the heads of the generals from the defeated Bulgarian army. This suggests that Serbia in his time was a Byzantine ally, a client state.

[45] Archdeacon Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*, ed. D. Karbić, M.M. Sokol, J.R. Sweeny, Budapest 2006, p. 61. This, according to the opinion of N. Budak, *Croatia and Byzantium in the Tenth century. A Latin Member of the Byzantine Commonwealth*, [in:] *Center, Province and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. From De Ceremoniis to De Administrando Imperio*, ed. N. Gaul, V. Menze, C. Bálint, Wiesbaden 2018 [= MVB, 15], p. 218, happened probably before 976.

[46] J. Shepard, *Equilibrium to Expansion (886–1025)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine…*, p. 520. For the status of Aleppo in Byzantine foreign policy see W. Farag, *The Aleppo Question: a Byzantine-Fatimid Conflict of Interests in Northern Syria in the Later Tenth Century A.D.*, BMGS 14, 1990, p. 44–60; H. Kennedy, *Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy in the Near East from the Islamic Conquests to the Mid Eleventh Century*, [in:] *Byzantine Diplomacy…*, p. 142–143.

[47] J.-C. Cheynet, *Basil II and Asia Minor*, [in:] *Byzantium in the Year…*, p. 98; H. Kennedy, *Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy…*, p. 143.

[48] S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus…*, p. 191–192.

the emirate of Melitene in 934[49], or to the Georgian and Armenian principalities in Caucasus in a timespan of around one century[50].

What is common for the aforementioned polities is that they are all situated on the borders of Byzantine imperial domains. Lombard duchies in Southern Italy were located on the border of *thémata* Longobardia and Calabria, the Slavic principalities in the Balkans were close neighbours of *thémata* Dalmatia and Dyrrhachium, Armenian and Iberian principalities were on the eastern border, and the Hamdanids and the Marwanids on the Syriac border. Furthermore, the sources inform that with some of these polities, for example Croatia, or the Serbian principalities of Zachlumia and Terbunia[51], the Caucasian states of Taron or Iberia[52], the Hamdanids and Mirdasids of Aleppo, or the Marwanids in Amida, treaties have been signed[53]. In fact, signing a peace treaty, or an alliance, was a normal conclusion of the process of negotiations that the *basileus* conducted with other states and tribes[54]. It was of primary concern to the Byzantine government when it came to regulating formal relations with extremely aggressive and hostile nations, thus allowing a significant reduction of any future threat, as well with neighbours who had friendly intentions. In that context, although it's not explicitly stated in the sources, it can be rightly assumed that the Byzantine Empire had a treaty signed with all the polities with which it had established formal relations. Depending on the level of political and military might that these polities had when the treaty was signed, a different political status in relation to the Byzantine Empire was bestowed on them. According to the protocol for diplomatic correspondence in *The Book of Ceremonies*, polities who had concluded treaties were divided into those who received letters (γράμματα) and others who received orders (κέλευσις) from the Byzantine emperor[55]. This division depended on the very essence of the concluded

[49] J. SHEPARD, *Constantine VII*, *Caucasian Openings and the Road to Aleppo*, [in:] *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium. Papers from the Thirty-third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, *University of Warwick*, *Coventry*, *March 1999*, ed. A. EASTMOND, London–New York 2016, p. 29–30.

[50] According to J. SHEPARD, *Constantine VII*, *Caucasian Openings*…, p. 28–29, 35–37, Byzantine conquest of these states was a consequence of Hamdanid foreign policy in this region.

[51] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 30.123–142. The term πάκτον used by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in *De Administrando Imperio* denoted, in my opinion, an agreement where one or both parties agreed and bound themselves to provide some service or tribute, and were the Byzantine political supremacy remained intact. See also, D. GJALEVSKI, *An Outline*…, p. 35.

[52] For Taron CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.64–69. For Iberia CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.115–117, 45.99–112; SKYLITZES, p. 356–357. See also J. SHEPARD, *Constantine VII*, *Caucasian Openings*…, p. 33.

[53] H. KENNEDY, *Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy*…, p. 142–143; J.-C. CHEYNET, *Basil II*…, p. 98.

[54] D.A. MILLER, *Byzantine Treaties*…, p. 56–57.

[55] About the Byzantine protocol for diplomatic correspondence see CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *The Book of Ceremonies*, p. 686–692.

treaty, that is, on the arranged relations and obligations between the Byzantine Empire and the foreign state or tribe. Furthermore, every treaty that was signed had several clauses in it: political, military, legal, economic, diplomatic, religious, etc. What can be concluded from the sources is that there were at least two clauses in each treaty: political and military[56]. It was in accordance with the signed treaty and these two most important clauses that the Slavic principalities joined the Byzantine campaign in Southern Italy or maintained the security of Byzantine Dalmatia[57]; the auxiliary troops were sent to the Byzantines by the Iberians and Armenians, as noted in Skylitzes *Short History*[58]; or political and military intelligence was shared by the Hamdanids and Mirdasids of Aleppo, which was important for shaping the Byzantine eastern foreign policy[59]. However, by the mid-eleventh century all of these client states were either annexed and integrated into the Byzantine Empire, or had rejected imperial supremacy and become independent. Only one or two states remained clients of the *basileus*[60].

It is necessary to emphasise that this formation of a ring of *limitrophe* client states was not a unique trait of the Byzantine foreign policy from this period. Sources are confirming that the Byzantine Empire used similar, if not identical, policy in the Late Antique period of the sixth and early seventh century. According to them, the imperial government of this period also pacified its neighbours, hostile and friendly alike, on the Byzantine frontiers and allied them as client states that were politically dependent on Constantinople. These were the border polities of the Lazi[61], the Tzani who in *the reign of the present Emperor Justinian* […] *all straightway yielded to him*, *preferring the toilless servitude to the dangerous liberty* […] *giving up all brigandage and always marching with the Romans whenever*

[56] D.A. Miller, *Byzantine Treaties*…, p. 59–71.

[57] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 29.88–100; *Vita Basilii*, 55.24, p. 201. See D. Gjalevski, *An Outline*…, p. 32–35.

[58] Skylitzes, p. 197, 217, 257.

[59] J. Shepard, *Equilibrium to Expansion*…, p. 520; H. Kennedy, *Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy*…, p. 143.

[60] According to H. Kennedy, *Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy*…, p. 143, the Mirdasids of Aleppo in the 1040s were still clients of the Byzantine Empire. In 1041 Thimal b. Salih was bestowed with the title of *magister*, and other members of his family, his wife included, were conferred with the titles of *strategos* and *patrician*.

[61] According to *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*, trans. C. Mango, R. Scott, Oxford 1997 (cetera: Theophanes), p. 257, *Tzathios came to Justin at Byzantium and urged the emperor to make him a Christian and let him be proclaimed emperor of the Lazi by Justin. The emperor received him with joy, baptized him, and proclaimed him as his son. Tzathios married a Roman wife, a certain Valeriana, the granddaughter of the patrician and former curopalates Nomos, and took her back to his own land after being appointed emperor of the Lazi by Justin*. For the military assistance of the Lazi see Procopius, *History of the Wars. The Gothic Wars. Books VII (continued) and VIII*, VIII.8, trans. H.B. Dewing, London–Cambridge Massachusetts 1928 [= LCL, 217] (cetera: Procopius, *Books VII and VIII*), p. 117–129.

they went against their enemies[62], also the Abasgi[63], the Heruli in Pannonia[64], the Garamantes in southwestern Libya and Maccuritae in Nubia[65], or the Ghassanid Arabs who were important Byzantine allies in the protracted conflict with the Sassanian empire[66]. The information in the sources notes that all of these polities, same as in the Middle Byzantine period, signed imperial treaties with which they accepted imperial political supremacy[67], became allies of the *basileus*, were in charge of security of the border regions, like the Lazi, Tzani and Ghassanids for example, and provided military assistance to the Byzantine Empire in the form of auxiliary troops. This *limitrophe* client state policy can be seen again in the period of the Comnenus dynasty, mainly during the reign of emperor Manuel I Comnenus (1143–1180). The number of states that this policy encompassed now was much smaller. It was oriented mainly towards Serbia[68], the kingdom of Hungary[69], the principality of Antioch[70], Armenian Cilicia[71] and the Seljuq sultanate of Rum, whose sultan swore to be the empire's military ally (*symmachos*), friend (*phílos*) to the *basileus*, retainer (*oíkeîos*) and son[72]. After the death of Manuel this policy

[62] PROCOPIUS, *Buildings. General Index*, III, VI.2–8, trans. H.B. DEWING, London–Cambridge Massachusetts 1940 [= LCL, 343], p. 207; PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars. The Persian War. Books I and II*, I.15, trans. H.B. DEWING, London–New York 1914 [= LCL, 48], p. 137, notes that the Tzani *also abandoned their own religion for a more righteous faith, and all of them became Christians.*

[63] PROCOPIUS, *Books VII and VIII*, VIII.3, p. 81.

[64] PROCOPIUS, *History of the Wars. The Gothic Wars. Books V and VI*, VI.14, trans. H.B. DEWING, London–New York 1919 [= LCL, 107], p. 410–413.

[65] JOHN OF BICLARO, *Chronicle*, 7, 9, 28, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, trans. K.B. WOLF, [2]Liverpool 2011 [= TTH, 9], p. 53, 56, notes that the Garamantes *desired to be associated with the peace of the Roman state* and Maccuritae *placed themselves on friendly terms with the Romans*. Both became Christians.

[66] THEOPHANES, p. 223. For a comprehensive overview of the Arab foederati, among them the Ghassanids, and their political relations with the Byzantine Empire in I. SHAHÎD, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. I.1, *Political and Military History*, Washington D.C. 1985, *passim*; L.I. CONRAD, *Eastern Neighbours: The Arabs to the Time of the Prophet*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine*…, p. 188–189.

[67] Treaties were signed even with the polities that were not client states. One such example is the treaty (pacta) between the Byzantine Empire (at the time of Justinian I) and the Visigoths. See A.D. LEE, *Information and Frontiers. Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 1993, p. 36.

[68] According to *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus, by John Kinnamos*, III.9, trans. C.M. BRAND, New York 1976 (cetera: KINNAMOS), p. 90, the Serbian župan declared that he will be subject to the Romans and will assist them militarily with armed forces. Cf. *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Niketas Choniatēs*, trans. H.J. MAGOULIAS, Detroit 1984 (cetera: CHONIATĒS), p. 58, 77–78, 90.

[69] KINNAMOS, V.16, p. 186; cf. CHONIATĒS, p. 72, 75. For an overview see, P. STEPHENSON, *Balkan Borderlands (1018–1204)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine*…, p. 683–685.

[70] KINNAMOS, IV.18, p. 139, states that Reginald *bound himself with oaths to many things, to wit that he would act according to the emperor's will*. Cf. CHONIATĒS, p. 61–62.

[71] KINNAMOS, IV.21.A, p. 142; cf. CHONIATĒS, p. 59.

[72] CHONIATĒS, p. 66–70. See also D.A. KOROBEINIKOV, *Raiders and Neighbours: The Turks (1040–1304)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine*…, p. 714.

quickly disintegrated. It should be pointed out that this system of client states can in fact be traced all the way back to the first century A.D. and the first years of the Empire. On the border with Germania, imperial strategy under Claudius (41–54) and Nero (54–68), as under Tiberius (14–37), relied on chain of clients from Lower Germany all the way to the middle Danube. The Frisii, Batavi, Herntunduri, Alarcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatian Tazyges all became client tribes[73]. In the East there were also several client states, for instance, Pontus, Cappadocia, the Nabatean kingdom, Sophene, Commagene and others[74]. Similarly, after some period of existence of this system, a process of annexation of these client states next to the imperial border had begun. By the third century this state policy was seen as redundant by the imperial government, though some client or "buffer states" still existed on the border[75].

What can be concluded from the previously presented information is that the creation of a ring of *limitrophe* client states around the imperial borders from the mid-ninth century was not an *ad hoc* political solution of the current imperial government but, according to the sources, an established state-level policy, its *modus operandi* of conducting state affairs, a clear example of a pattern of behaviour which traces its beginnings all the way back to the first century A.D. and the early years of the Empire. It should be noted that any policy which a state implements as a solution is mainly intended to resolve a current political or military issue, nonetheless with an intent that it would be applicable as long as possible in regards to improving both foreign and domestic affairs. In that context the signed peace treaties on a 30-year basis need to be perceived as a long-term political solution to an existing problem. The confirmation that an idea for long-term planning existed among the members of the Byzantine government is found in the efforts it took to reconquer Sicily during the reigns of Michael III (842–867), Basil I and Nicephorus II Phocas (963–969)[76], or the island of Crete in the time of Michael II (820–829), Leo VI (886–912) and Roman II (959–963)[77]. However, this aspect of Byzantine foreign policy, *reconquista* of lost imperial territories[78], was highly

[73] E.N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire. From the First Century CE to the Third. Revised and updated edition*, Baltimore 2016, p. 21.

[74] *Ibidem*, p. 40–41, 126.

[75] *Ibidem*, p. 126–132.

[76] See footnote 15.

[77] About the attempts of Michael II to reconquer the island of Crete see Skylitzes, p. 45–47. For the campaign of Leo VI see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *The Book of Ceremonies*, p. 651–660.

[78] In regards to the duties of the *basileus* patriarch Photios in the section of Epanagoga (or Eisagoga) titled "Concerning the *Basileus*" in *Collectio Librorum Juris Graeco-Romani Ineditorum: Ecloga Leonis Et Constantini*, *Epanagoge Basilii Leonis Et Alexandri*, ed. C.E.Z. a Lingenthal, Lipsiae 1852, p. 66, states that *aim of the emperor is to guard and secure through his virtue the things which he already possesses; to recover and maintain through sleepless care the things lost; and to acquire*, *by wisdom and through just victories*, *the things absent*. For reintegration of former imperial territories

influenced by the idiosyncratic behaviour of the reigning emperor. In addition, the change which occurred in the foreign policy at the beginning of the ninth century with addition of the term τῶν Ῥωμαίων to the title βασιλεύς as a response to Charlemagnes acclamation as an emperor by the pope of Rome, as well as its practical implementation in the centuries that followed, as in the reign of Nicephorus II Phocas[79], should be observed as an evidence of the adaptation of imperial strategy to which several governments adhered, a creation of a new approach for maintaining an already established ultimate end (in this case the Byzantine imperial status and its Roman heritage) and continuity in Byzantine statecraft, as well as an indication about the awareness for long-term planning that existed among state officials. The same change in foreign policy, but also in strategy, is observed in the reign of the Comnenus dynasty which, in an attempt to maintain imperial interests, altered its attitude and policy towards Western Europe after the difficult period of the late 80s and the early 90s of eleventh century when the Byzantines were left without resources and with a total dissolution of their state in Asia Minor[80]. These are only a few examples of how a great state has the ability to adjust to the reality that its policy (resources and interests) finds itself out of balance and overstreched, taking a different political and/or military approach and shifting the focus to those aspects that could help the polity[81].

Confirmation that the implementation of the *limitrophe* policy in the analysed period was intentional is in the continuity which can be observed in the sources in relation to the process of imposing political supremacy on the Lombard duchies in Southern Italy, Croatia and Serbian principalities in the Balkans, the Armenian and Georgian principalities in Caucasus, and Aleppo in Syria, by several imperial governments in order to achieve or maintain this end, to which succeeding administrations also adhered. One such example is the position of the Serbian principalities in the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict in the first decades of the tenth century which were shifting its position from a friendly to a hostile stance towards the Empire depending on how strong or frail the Byzantine position was at a given moment[82]. That there was an idea among the members of several Byzantine governments from this period for such long-term policy is seen from the advice that

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as a responsibility of the Byzantine government see E. Chrysos, *Byzantium between East and West: Opponents and Allies*, [in:] *Heaven and Earth, Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, ed. A. Drandaki, D.P. Bakirtzi, A. Tourta, Athens 2013, p. 282–283; A.E. Laiou, *On Just War in Byzantium*, [in:] *Byzantium and the Other. Relations and Exchanges*, ed. A.E. Laiou, C. Morrisson, R. Dorin, London 2012, p. 156–159, 163–164; H. Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantine*, Paris 1975, p. 42–43.

[79] *Liudprand of Cremona*…, p. 270.

[80] J. Shepard, *Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 800–1204: Means and Ends*, [in:] *Byzantine Diplomacy*…, p. 56–57.

[81] W. Murray, *Thoughts*…, p. 2.

[82] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 32.90–119.

Constantine VII presents in *De Administrando Imperio* in relation to imposing hegemony, even direct subjugation, on Armenian statelets in order to improve security of the imperial domains in Asia Minor, which was finally achieved around the mid-eleventh century[83]. Porphyrogenitus declares that *it is right that you* [my son Romanus II] *should not be ignorant of the parts towards the rising sun*, *for what reason they became once more subject to the Romans*, *after they had first fallen away from their control*[84]. He suggests that *if the emperor holds these three kastra*, *Chliat*, *Arzes and Perkri*, *a Persian army cannot come out against Romania*, *since they are between Romania and Armenia and serve as a barrier*[85].

What were the causes that influenced the decision to reintroduce this old policy and to take steps towards its implementation? According to the influencing factors, the causes can be divided into external and internal. Regarding the external causes, the main aspect was the overall political situation in the mid-ninth century which saw a gradual formation of many smaller polities on the imperial borders in the East, the Balkans and Southern Italy, and was a prerequisite for practical implementation of this policy. The second relates to the foreign states themselves and their resilience to withstand the Byzantine diplomatic and military pressure. Regarding the internal causes, it was the process of military and economic revival of the Byzantine Empire which allowed the imperial government to allocate more resources, both financial and human, to achieve its political ends that were set in relation to these border states.

If we look at the political map of the wider Mediterranean region in the mid-ninth century, an increased military and diplomatic activities by several political actors in the central Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea can be noticed, as well as a process of fragmentation of the Abbasid Caliphate at its edges in Cilicia, Syria and Caucasus, which led to a creation of many small autonomous statelets. In relation to the central Mediterranean, around Italy and the Balkans, the sources tell of intensified Arab naval campaigns, which eventually led to a gradual conquest of Sicily, as well as of cities in Southern Italy, both of them under Byzantine rule[86]. At the same time, as a result of these frequent Arab campaigns, the Frankish emperor and king of Italy Louis II (844–875), apart from waging war against the Muslims, attempted to impose his political influence in the region[87]. As a result of this state of political flux, the Lombard duchies in Southern Italy became a political factor with their own interests to which the Byzantine

[83] J. Shepard, *Constantine VII*, *Caucasian Openings*…, p. 24–25, 33.

[84] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 43.4–6.

[85] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.125–128.

[86] A. Nef, *Byzantium and Islam in Southern Italy (7th–11th Century)*, [in:] *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*…, p. 205–210.

[87] M. McCormick, *Western Approaches (700–900)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine*…, p. 419.

government had to pay attention in order to secure its possessions in this part of Europe[88]. In the Balkans, by the mid-ninth century, Croatia and the Serbian principalities became powerful enough that they even began to challenge the already weak Byzantine presence in the region. In that context, the author of *De Administrando Imperio* reports that the population of the Dalmatian cities was prevented by the Croats from cultivating the land in the interior of the mainland[89], which points to the fact that Croatia posed a serious danger for their security. The military victory of the Croatian prince Trpimir that was achieved between 846 and 848 over the Byzantine *patrikios*, probably the first man of these Dalmatian cities[90], is evidence of how precarious and fragile the Byzantine presence was in this region. A similar situation is observed regarding the Serbian principalities, whose importance was extremely significant during the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict in diverting part of the Bulgarian military pressure to the west, away from the imperial territories in Thrace and Macedonia. On the eastern frontier, a process of formation of autonomous statelets in Cilicia and Syria (the emirates of Tarsus, Melitene or Aleppo), as well in Caucasus (the Armenian and Georgian principalities), which was a result of the political fragmentation of the Abbasid Caliphate on its periphery, had begun. Even though the Arabs continued to conduct military campaigns deep into Byzantine territory, these were of reduced intensity because they were initiated by the newly formed border emirates[91]. The military initiative gradually shifted to the Byzantine side.

It should be emphasised that no matter how favourable the political situation in the surrounding regions was for the *limitrophe* policy to be implemented, it would have been an impossible undertaking if the internal situation in the Byzantine Empire did not allow it. The period from the ninth to the eleventh century was a time of gradual revival and strengthening of the military and economic might of the state. Formation of *tágmata* units, as well as the increase of the *thémata* armies with an influx of new recruits and mercenaries from abroad, such as the Khurramites[92], Pharganoi, Khazars[93], Russians and others, allowed for conducting frequent military campaigns, especially when diplomatic measures did not achieve the desired results, or when warfare was the only solution to an existing issue[94].

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[88] G.A. LOUD, *Byzantium and Southern Italy*…, p. 560–563.

[89] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 30.123–125.

[90] F. CURTA, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*, Cambridge 2006 [= CMT], p. 139; T. ŽIVKOVIĆ, *Južni Sloveni*…, p. 239–240.

[91] J. SHEPARD, *Equilibrium to Expansion*…, p. 493–499.

[92] W. TREADGOLD, *Byzantium and its Army 284–1081*, Stanford 1995, p. 32.

[93] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *The Book of Ceremonies*, p. 693. See also J. SHEPARD, *Equilibrium to Expansion*…, p. 493.

[94] There is ample bibliography regarding Byzantine attitudes to warfare. According to the scholars, its main facet was "avoidance of war" as much as possible. See for example Y. STOURAITIS, *State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare*, [in:] *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204*, ed. IDEM, Leiden 2018 [= BCBW, 3], p. 59–91; W. TREADGOLD, *Byzantium, the Reluctant Warrior*,

Already from the mid-ninth century, the size of the imperial army according to the sources amounted to about 120,000 soldiers[95]. It gave the imperial government sufficient flexibility for offensive operations and conducting campaigns deep into enemy territory. Sources report that the military force was often used, especially on the eastern border, to "persuade" the other party to accept this policy and become a Byzantine client state. The Armenian principalities, as well as the emirate of Melitene or the Hamdanids from Aleppo, were repeatedly persuaded in that manner. However, it is necessary to emphasise that the use of military forces for this purpose would have been impossible without the favourable economic situation in the state[96]. The economic revival allowed part of the financial resources from the imperial budget to be used to "persuade" the leaders of foreign countries about the benefits they would have if they accepted a client status, or to finance a military campaign if the "soft" approach was unsuccessful.

What was the political end behind the creation of a ring of *limitrophe* client states on the Byzantine borders? From the treaties that were signed with these polities and the obligations they had according to the agreed clauses, and from other information in the sources, one could in fact conclude that the overall plan behind their establishment was to pacify the hostile neighbours, to create a ring of friendly states around the Empire, a buffer zone in front of the Byzantine frontier aimed at thwarting future enemy incursions with allies that would be responsible for the security of the imperial territories, although this military obligation was agreed also with other states who were not regarded as clients of the *basileus*, like the Kievan Rus[97] or, if one can were to believe the narratives of Skylitzes and Zonaras,

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[in:] *Noble Ideas and Bloody Realities. Warfare in the Middle Ages*, ed. N. Christie, M. Yazigi, Leiden 2006, p. 213–216; Y. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz (7.–11. Jahrhundert)*, Wien 2009 [= BG.E, 9], p. 219–231; J. Koder, I. Stouraitis, *Byzantine Approaches to Warfare (6th–12th centuries). An Introduction*, [in:] *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion. Akten des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011)*, ed. eidem, Wien 2012 [= DKAW.PhH, 30], p. 9–16; J.F. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204*, London 1999, p. 13–33. However, from a practical point of view, military campaigns were very costly, especially the overseas ones. The campaigns of 911 and 949, as N. Oikonomides, *The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy*, [in:] *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A.E. Laiou, Washington D.C. 2022, p. 1015, had noted, costed 234,373 and 127,122 nomismata, respectively.

[95] W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army…*, p. 65–67; J.F. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society…*, p. 102–103.

[96] M. Whittow, *The Middle Byzantine Economy (600–1204)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine…*, p. 473–474. For more detailed analysis of the economic revival in this period see *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A.E. Laiou, Washington D.C. 2022; A. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900–1200*, Cambridge 1989; M.F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c.300–1450*, Cambridge 1985; A.E. Laiou, C. Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, Cambridge 2007 [= CMT].

[97] The author of *Russian Primary Chronicle*, p. 76. notes that as part of the signed treaty of 944, *regarding the Black Bulgarians, who come and ravage the Kherson district, we* [the Byzantines] *enjoin the Prince of Rus' not to allow them to injure that region.*

Bulgaria during the reign of Peter[98]. A further goal was to aid the Byzantine Empire with the much-needed auxiliary troops in its military campaigns, like it was requested from the Slavs for the imperial campaign in Southern Italy, or from Iberia and the Armenian principalities for the Byzantine eastern campaigns[99]. Similarly as in the period of the Principate and Dominate, the client states and their armies were not merely additive but complementary to Byzantine military power – that is, they provided a different and synergistic form of power, not just more force[100]. Another end of this policy, that was both political and military in its essence, was to gather intelligence not only of the enemy army movements, but also about the policies of nearby hostile states, like the obligation to which Aleppo has agreed[101]. As a result of these measures, and the treaties that could be signed for a 30-years period, the Byzantine Empire acquired long-term, but not perpetual, stability on its borders, security of its imperial territories, a base of manpower for its army in the form of mercenaries or contingents of auxiliary troops, and a constant flow of intelligence, information related to the activities of the surrounding hostile states and tribes.

However, the client state status was not irreversible. It should be emphasised that client rulers were politically unstable, they were known to be rebellious, and a constant control and surveillance was applied in order for this policy to endure long-term, for instance in Serbia, Capua-Benevento, the Armenian principalities or Aleppo[102]. Their allegiance was maintained or reasserted when needed, mainly through diplomatic measures: bestowing gold as a financial incentive, or as payment for a military service that was agreed through a treaty, granting a personal honour by conferring imperial aulic titles, as well as ceding a territory, in the same way as in the period of the Principate[103], although, it should be noted, diplomacy itself could occasionally backfire[104]. If diplomacy failed or was insufficient, then it was the role of the army to carry out a "show-of-force" to implement or maintain this policy, a measure that was applied multiple times: in the Adriatic with the fleet

[98] According to SKYLITZES, p. 265, and IOANNIS ZONARAE, *Epitome Historiarum*, vol. IV, ed. L. DINDORFIUS, Leipzig 1871 [= *CSHB*], p. 87, Nicephorus II Phocas *wrote to Peter the ruler of Bulgaria, to prevent the Turks from crossing the Danube to raid Roman land*. It is not unthinkable that the treaty signed with Bulgaria in the reign of Peter regulated all relations between the states, where one of the articles in the clauses referred to their mutual border and its security, a policy already implemented in the treaties with Boris and Symeon, but concerning border demarcation.

[99] *Armenia and the Crusades. Tenth to Twelfth Centuries. The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans. A.E. DOSTOURIAN, Lanham 1993, p. 28; *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'I*, trans. T. GREENWOOD, Oxford 2017, p. 244–245, 286.

[100] E.N. LUTTWAK, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*…, p. 29.

[101] SKYLITZES, p. 257; MATTHEW, p. 28. Also, J. SHEPARD, *Equilibrium to Expansion*…, p. 520; H. KENNEDY, *Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy*…, p. 143.

[102] W. FARAG, *The Aleppo Question*…, p. 59–60.

[103] E.N. LUTTWAK, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*…, p. 33, 35.

[104] CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio*, 44.109–117.

of admiral Nicetas Ooryphas, on the Lombard duchies, or on the eastern border against the Armenian principalities in Caucasus.

After some period of existence of the *limitrophe* policy, a process of annexation of the client states had begun. Around the mid-eleventh century this system had almost disappeared, although some client states still existed on the borders. The reasons for this shift in imperial foreign policy are multifaceted and interrelated. One aspect was the political instability of the client rulers who needed constant surveillance. Emergence of a new political power with its own set of interests in the region was another aspect. Political decision of the emperor who reigned on the throne, his idiosyncratic behaviour, whether it was of state interest to maintain this policy or to seek the overall security with own resources only[105], also had its influence. And lastly, the inability of the imperial government to intervene militarily or diplomatically as a result of internal financial and military crisis, which was already evident in the reign of Isaac I Comnenus (1057–1059)[106], or an occurrence of a conflict in another region that required immediate attention[107] should also be noted as contributing causes. That several factors influenced this process of annexation can be seen in the case of Melitene. It was as a result of Byzantine interest (to secure imperial border and acquire the wealth of the enemy), an emergence of a new political power in the region and a foreign occupation of the city, that this client state was conquered in 934[108]. There were three regions were the *limitrophe* policy was implemented in this period: in the East (Syria and Caucasus), in Southern Italy and in the Balkans. The main cause why this policy was seen as redundant on the eastern border was the reasoning by the government that the Byzantine Empire was militarily powerful enough, that it will be more secure and will benefit more if these client states become imperial provinces, and that the overall security of the borders can be achieved by its own forces (who were by some estimated to have been between 150.000 and 250.000 soldiers strong)[109].

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[105] M. Angold, *Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118)*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard, Cambridge 2008, p. 598.

[106] *Michaelis Pselli Chronographia*, VII.44.2–3, 64.1–6, ed. D.R. Reinsch, Berlin–Boston 2014 [= Mil.S, 51.1], p. 228, 238, presents an image of the reign of Isaac I Comnenus (1057–1059) as an emperor who intended to stop and reverse the process of deterioration in the military and the imperial finance. That is why *from the very beginning he personally supervised state affairs…* [and] *he preferred to be ignorant of nothing, even to the smallest details, but because knew that this was impossible, he would have tried to obtain his information by indirect means. He used to send for a wise man and, without questioning him on the subject about which he was ignorant, by clever manoeuvring round it, he would make the other reveal what he himself did not know, in such a way that the expert was apparently explaining something that was common knowledge to both of them alike.*

[107] *Ibidem*, p. 599–600, 607.

[108] J. Shepard, *Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings…*, p. 30.

[109] For a total number of 150,000 soldiers see J.F. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society…*, p. 103. For a total number of around 250,000 for the Byzantine armed forces in the mid-eleventh century see W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army…*, p. 79–85.

Thus, only Aleppo remained as a client state. In Southern Italy the political interests of the Western Emperor, Arabs, Lombard duchies, the pope Rome and the Normans shaped a new political reality which, along with local revolts in Byzantine Italy, resulted not in a process of annexation of the existing polities who were already clients of the *basileus*, but in shaping of a new militarily powerful state, one that would end the Byzantine presence in this region during the second half of the eleventh century[110]. The internal political strife and instability, conflicts on other frontiers and the civil wars in the Byzantine Empire in this period only facilitated and accelerated this process. In the Balkans, unlike the other two regions, the *limitrophe* policy was maintained all the way to the mid-eleventh century[111]. It was only afterwards, after multiple crises, both foreign and domestic, had emerged and the inability of the imperial government to maintain this policy as a result of other state priorities that the Slavic principalities ceased to be clients of the Byzantine Empire.

What can be concluded is that the *limitrophe* policy in the period from the mid-ninth until the mid-eleventh century was implemented when the political circumstances in the surrounding regions, and the internal conditions within the Byzantine Empire, were favourable. That is, when the other medieval superpowers that existed in this period in the East and West, the Carolingian Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate, either were politically divided or began to fragment on the periphery. The consequence of these processes was that a large number of small polities on the eastern frontier in Cilicia, Syria and Caucasus, as well in the Balkans, had emerged. At the same time, the overall military and financial situation in the Byzantine Empire improved to such an extent that the imperial government started to be diplomatically more proactive and to conduct offensive campaigns deep into the enemy territory without fear for the overall security of the state. As a result of this *limitrophe* policy the Byzantine Empire was able to pacify its hostile neighbours, to acquire long-term, but not perpetual, stability on its borders, security of its imperial territories, a base of manpower for its army, in the form of mercenaries or contingents of auxiliary troops, and a constant flow of intelligence related to the activities of the surrounding hostile states and tribes. The main assets and means that were used to achieve and maintain this policy were diplomatic: bestowing gold as a financial incentive, or as payment for a military service that was agreed through a treaty, granting a personal honour by conferring an imperial aulic title, as well as ceding a territory. Military pressure was applied only when diplomacy had failed. However, this policy was discarded in the first decades of the eleventh century. There were two main factors for this decision. Firstly, this policy was perceived as redundant by the Byzantine government as

[110] A. KALDELLIS, *Streams of Gold rivers of Blood. The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade*, Oxford 2017 [= OSHC], p. 236–238.

[111] P. STEPHENSON, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204*, Cambridge 2004, p. 123–135, 138–141, and IDEM, *Balkan Borderlands…*, p. 668–670.

a result of the current military might and its reasoning that the Empire can maintain security of the imperial provinces only with the use of its own armed forces, which led to a process of annexation of the client states. Secondly, the emergence of multiple crises on not only one, but on several borders simultaneously, aided by the gradual deterioration of the Byzantine military and financial might that became visible in the mid-eleventh century, allowed even those states that were still clients of the *basileus* to reject his hegemony and become independent.

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