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The Sword of the Sultan: Ottoman Arms Imports, 1854–1914



Jonathan Grant

AT the beginning of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was self-sufficient in its armaments production, yet by 1914 its domestic military and naval manufacturing capacity had eroded to such an extent that the empire had become almost completely dependent on imports. While Turkish attempts to foster domestic production capabilities proved sporadic and unsuccessful, the Ottoman Empire was transformed into one of the most important markets for armaments in the world. Why did this erosion in production capacity occur, and why did the Ottomans ultimately rely on importing the hardware rather than domesticating the technology? Did the unwillingness of foreign firms to transfer technology force the Turks to import the finished defense goods and preempt the development of Ottoman war industries? Was there a conscious design on the part of the European producers of armaments to make the Ottomans dependent? In light of the evidence, the answer to the last question must be negative.

Rather than to any foreign plot, the process leading to Ottoman dependency on foreign arms suppliers should be attributed more accurately to the interplay of external and internal factors. Externally, the impersonal forces of rapid technological change and the development of an international armaments mass market made the rapid acquisition of the latest defense equipment a financially sound choice. Internally, the political and personal decisions of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909) profoundly affected the course of Turkish policy. This article emphasizes Turkish agency over foreign manipulation as the key to understanding the erosion of the domestic defense industries. Furthermore, although the Ottomans failed to achieve self-sufficiency in armaments production, the Turkish case may be considered a qualified success in that the Ottoman state did obtain high quality equipment quickly and relatively cheaply, given its limited financial means.

Ottoman war industries had deep roots in the gunpowder age. Since the fifteenth century the Ottomans had manufactured their own military and naval equipment using foreign expertise and copying foreign models. After falling behind technologically during the eighteenth century, Turkish domestic production began to return to a high level of quality beginning in the 1780s, thanks to the help of formal missions of technical specialists from western Europe. By the early nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire once again had become self-sufficient in its military production.¹

Ottoman armaments policy from the 1850s up to World War I reflected the empire's weak industrial and financial foundations, as the Ottoman government increasingly looked to the industrial and financial capabilities of Germany, Britain, and France to meet its needs for weapons and military equipment. Ultimately, imported arms became a substitute for domestic ones, as the Ottoman state armaments industry could not compete with the foreign producers in quantity or modernity of weapons and ships. It became easier simply to restock with the newest, top-of-the-line equipment rather than lose time and money attempting to create and maintain a domestic arms industry.

This complete dependence on foreign suppliers to meet Ottoman defense needs placed the country in an extremely vulnerable position, and presented the potential for foreign suppliers to exert influence on Turkish policy through the manipulation of the flow of arms and equipment. Recognizing this possibility, the Ottoman government tried to minimize risks by avoiding exclusive reliance on any single foreign supplier.

Given these conditions, the Ottoman Empire in the pre-1914 years can serve as a valuable case study for the dynamics of the arms trade in the Third World.

The Ottoman Empire was not unique in grappling with the challenges of modernizing its defense sector. Russia, Japan, China, and Egypt similarly confronted the problem of importing military technology from the West, with varying degrees of success. By 1914 Russia and Japan had accomplished the most in terms of developing a domestic military industrial base, yet even they had not achieved self-sufficiency in armaments or warship production. For all these modernizing countries, the challenges posed by the high costs of foreign expertise, imported materials, and skilled labor placed severe economic strains on state resources. In order to meet defense requirements as quickly as possible, all these powers turned to imports to a greater or lesser degree.²

1. Jonathan Grant, "Rethinking the Ottoman 'Decline': Military Technology Diffusion in the Ottoman Empire, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of World History* 10 (Spring 1999): 179–201.

2. David B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Thomas L. Kennedy, *The Arms of Kiangnan: Modernization in*

While they made this substitution of imports, the question facing Ottoman policy-makers was from whom to buy arms, for they always considered multiple options for suppliers. Based on an analysis of the patterns of Ottoman arms and equipment purchases, it is possible to establish a periodization consisting of four phases: (1) circa 1850–85, when domestic arms production waned as reliance on imports for the bulk of defense items grew; (2) 1885–95, marked by the preference for Germany in both military and naval orders; (3) 1898–1907, the period of renewal of naval orders from Britain and France while Germany continued as the preferred supplier for land forces; and (4) 1908–14, when Britain was preeminent in Ottoman naval orders and the Franco-German rivalry in military orders ended in the selection of Germany.

Overall, the entire period may be seen as characteristic of one way in which the Ottoman Empire reacted to the issue of Westernization. In the realm of warfare, it was more acceptable, or rather less objectionable, to incorporate Western borrowings than in other areas of state and society. The eclecticism with which the Ottomans combined arms systems and purchases from various countries demonstrated a “Take the best from the West” policy. A concise summary of the sixty-odd years would be that the Ottomans bought supplies from those countries recognized as world leaders in particular categories. More specifically, this meant that the Ottomans imported army weapons and supplies from Germany and naval systems from Britain (and to a lesser degree France). In both cases, the respective countries were acknowledged and respected as the best.

A good deal of attention has been given to the place of the Ottoman Empire, and the Middle East in general, in the developing world economy. These studies have tended to concentrate on the transformation of traditional agriculture into an export sector serving the needs of the markets of the core of the world economy, or they have examined the ruination of domestic textile industries by cheaper European imports.³ However, there has been no real systematic study of the changes in

the Chinese Ordnance Industry, 1860–1895 (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978); John Dunn, “Egypt’s Nineteenth-Century Armaments Industry,” *Journal of Military History* 61 (April 1997): 231–54; Jonathan Grant, “Tsarist Armament Strategies, 1870–1914,” *Journal of Soviet Military Studies* 4 (March 1991): 141–49; Joseph Bradley, *Guns for the Tsar: The State, Labor and Technology Transfer in the Russian Small Arms Industry* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990); “Japan,” in *Conway’s All the World’s Fighting Ships 1906–1921* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1985), 222–23.

3. Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914* (London: Methuen and Co., 1987).

Ottoman war industries. This is rather surprising given the historical importance of the military in the Ottoman Empire.⁴

Superficially, one might expect a degree of dependency in the armaments sector because the rest of the Ottoman economy was subinfeudated to the West; however, this proved not to be the case. There was no monolithic Western control because the West was not a single unitary economic actor. The individual states and the private arms suppliers engaged in keen competition politically and economically, allowing the Ottomans to exercise choice in arms and financial markets.

Ultimately, the primary cause of the decline of Ottoman war industries was a financial one. By far and away money was the commodity the Porte imported the most, and capital proved to be the true bottleneck in Ottoman production. Technical expertise or necessary materials such as coal and iron could be obtained with ease if the funds were available. It is true that the technological changes caused difficulties for an unskilled labor force, but the Turkish workers were certainly trainable. Moreover, the greatest hardship for the Ottomans regarding labor was retaining foreign experts, due largely to the need to pay them higher salaries.

Government revenues were the lifeblood of the war industries, and by the nineteenth century the Ottoman "Sick Man of Europe" clearly had a circulatory problem. Attempts to raise revenues failed, and the Ottomans lacked the means to cover the costs of reforms and continual wars. When they had the money, the Ottomans chose to pay the high costs required to maintain their armed forces. During the 1830s the army claimed 70 percent of total revenues.⁵ The government simply ran out of money in the 1840s, and consequently, the war industries began to atrophy.

State borrowing offered the apparent solution to the problem. Beginning in 1841 the state issued short-term bonds to pay a war indemnity but soon exhausted internal sources. The only alternative was foreign loans, which commenced during the Crimean War (1854–56) when the Turks borrowed from private bankers of their military allies, Britain and France. After the war Sultan Abdul Aziz (1861–76) continued to spend money, mostly for the construction of palaces, and the debt increased further. Due to inefficient administration and tax collection, the Ottoman government regularly ran in the red financially and covered the deficits by more borrowing at high rates of interest. Under Abdul Aziz, as

4. William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military* (London: Routledge, 1994). Turkish naval imports in the period 1908–14 are described in Paul Halpern, *The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 314–54.

5. Owen, *Middle East*, 59–62. In the early 1800s the Ottoman annual public revenue was approximately £2,250,000–£3,750,000 compared to the British average of £16,800,000 for 1787–90.

much as one-third of government income went toward paying the debts. As a result, during the 1870s the salaries for soldiers and bureaucrats were chronically in arrears.⁶

By 1880 the government faced bankruptcy, and the large Turkish war indemnity to Russia resulting from the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 threatened catastrophe. To stave off fiscal collapse, Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1881 issued the Decree of Muharrem creating the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (PDA). The Ottomans derived considerable benefit from the PDA, as half of their debt was forgiven and borrowing from European sources became easier. A negative aspect of the PDA, though, was its authority to collect its own taxes within the empire; consequently, much of the state revenue that could have flowed into the government's hands went instead to the PDA. Over the whole period from 1854 to 1914, Ottoman gross borrowing totaled 399.5 million Turkish lira. Of the loans, 45 percent was used to liquidate debts, another 34 percent was taken out as part of the commissioning of the loans, and only 6 percent (22.3 million Turkish lira) went for military expenditure. Sultan Abdul Hamid II saved the state from financial ruin, but at the expense of not paying teachers' salaries or buying the technological means for the empire to defend itself with its own domestic resources.⁷

Military Production, 1850–85

The most outstanding characteristic of Ottoman domestic military production was the degree of state control. All the factories that manufactured and maintained war materials were state-owned and administered. The government department responsible for these various activities was the Ministry of Imperial Ordnance (*Tophane-i Amire Nezareti*), which was independent of the Ministry of War (*Bab-i Seraskeri*). The Ordnance Ministry was entrusted with the production, repair, and supply of weapons and military equipment, and directly administered the Zeytinburnu factory and powder mills in Istanbul and Anatolia. Comprised of defense, communications, and supply departments, its main duties were guarding the straits and training technical personnel.⁸

6. Owen, *Middle East*, 61; Afif Büyüktuğrul, *Osmanlı Deniz Harp Tarihi III. Cilt* (Istanbul: T. C. Deniz Basımevi, 1973), 1; Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), 301–4. By 1863 the internal debt was 32.5 million Turkish lira, and the foreign debt had reached 40 million.

7. McCarthy, *Ottoman Turks*, 304–13.

8. Erkem Mustevellioglu, *Osmanlı Askeri Teşkilat ve Kıyafetleri 1876–1908* (Istanbul: Askeri Müze ve Kültür Sitesi Komutanlığı Yayınları, 1986), 9–10.

In general, Ottoman industry was weak and underdeveloped, and the domestic defense industries were no exception. The few existing factories had resulted from government efforts to create a modern army. Technological developments played a role in driving under Ottoman domestic firearms manufacturing. The advances in rifled gun barrels during the 1840s required a greater degree of technical precision and more money than the Ottomans were able to manage. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Ottoman factories producing military goods consisted of the factory at Izmit that made cloth and military uniforms; the Istanbul fez factory; the Zeytinburnu factory that produced cotton cloth for military uniforms; the military equipment factory at Beykoz that manufactured military shoes, boots, bandoliers, and cartridge belts; and the Tophane arsenal and artillery factory in Istanbul.⁹ This list demonstrates that most of the factories produced items of military clothing. It would appear then, that greater emphasis was put on having the army dress in a modern style, rather than equipping it with modern weapons.

By the early 1870s, the domestic military production of the Ottoman Empire could not provide enough equipment and supplies to sustain the empire's armed forces in time of war. The Tophane works, which with its associated workshops employed about fifteen hundred men, was the main Ottoman arsenal. It had the capacity to repair every kind of weapon with conventional gunstock, as well as swords. In addition, a factory at the Golden Horn (Halic) could repair and manufacture some weapons. The Zeytinburnu factory could produce ten thousand cartridges per day. The powder works at Bakirköy and Azadli, established or modernized during the 1790s, continued in production. There were also two major saltpetre works and one major sulphur works. However, these establishments proved incapable of meeting Turkish requirements, and almost everything was obtained from foreign firms. Furthermore, although the arsenals at Tophane and Zeytinburnu maintained an enormous quantity of military stores, the bulk was obsolete and worthless. With a supplement of English craftsmen brought to the Istanbul Tophane factories, some rifles, bronze cannon, and mountain guns could be manufactured, but not in sufficient quantities. Besides guns, the Imperial arsenal at Tophane also turned out a number of large cases intended for submarine mines and some torpedoes.¹⁰

9. Omer Celal Sarc, "Ottoman Industrial Policy 1840–1914," in Charles Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 55–56; Owen, *Middle East*, 117. See also Larry H. Addington, *The Patterns of War Since the Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 3.

10. Rumbold to Granville, 3 April 1872, Foreign Office (FO) 78/2216; Elliot to Earl of Derby, 3 May 1875, FO 78/2383, Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, Surrey, England; Ramiz Ertem, *1877–1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Kafkas Cephesi Harekati II*.

An examination of the equipment of the Ottoman army and navy at the time of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 will allow for a better appraisal of the changes that occurred over the course of the empire's last four decades. On the eve of the war, the Ottoman army appeared to use a hodgepodge of assorted systems of guns and ammunition. The artillery consisted of muzzleloaders, breechloaders, bronze and steel guns, and rifled and smoothbore cannon. Within the same regiment, French, Prussian, and English systems existed side by side. Almost all artillery units possessed four-pounder and six-pounder Krupp guns from Germany. The forts on the straits had mostly heavy caliber Krupp guns, although Fort Mecidiye also had a pair of heavy Armstrong guns from Britain.¹¹ In the forts on the Caucasian front, the number of domestically manufactured 15-cm. guns exceeded the number of comparable Krupp guns. Yet on the whole, Krupp guns comprised the backbone of the artillery component at these forts.¹²

The armament of the infantry was as varied as that of the artillery service. Infantry units had in hand breechloading Remingtons from the United States, as well as English-made rifles. About 600,000 Sniders were in the hands of the troops, and approximately 80,000,000 Snider cartridges were in store by 1875. Additionally, the Ottoman army possessed about 50,000 repeating carbines on the American Winchester system. Before the war, at the beginning of 1876, the government ordered 600,000 Martini-Peabody repeater rifles from the Providence Tool Company in Rhode Island, and by July of 1877 some 442,240 had arrived.¹³ The vast amounts of American weapons and munitions present in Ottoman hands are a great anomaly in the pattern of Ottoman foreign arms purchases. After the 1877–78 war, any American part of the trade virtually disappeared.

The fact that American weapons were purchased at this particular time helps to illuminate the key elements in Ottoman armaments policy. There were two reasons for the unprecedented surge in purchases from the United States: first, the recognition of American weapons as state of the art since the Civil War; second, and perhaps most important, expediency. Seeing that war was likely, the Ottoman government moved to

Cilt (Ankara: Gnkur Baskanligi Yayinlari, 1985), 45; William Smith Cooke, *The Ottoman Empire and its Tributary States (Excepting Egypt), With a Sketch of Greece* (1876; reprinted, Amsterdam: B. R. Gruner, 1968), 25, 38; *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878), 27–28.

11. Colonel Lennox to Constantinople, 13 February 1877, War Office (WO) 106/2, PRO; Lennox to Constantinople, 5 June 1877, WO 106/2; Edmund Ollier, *Cassell's Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War* (London: Cassell, Pelter and Galpin, 1880), 1: 138; *War Correspondence of the Daily News*, 27.

12. Dangall to Layard, No. 9, 1878, WO 106/2; Ertem, *Kafkas Cephesi*, 41–42.

13. "Turkey. Confidential, 1869," WO 106/1; Ollier, *Cassell's Illustrated History*, 1: 138–39; Ertem, *Kafkas Cephesi*, 45.

obtain the materials necessary for maintaining the army that domestic sources could not provide. As the government sought an immediate remedy for the situation, American industry picked up the slack. In this instance the Ottoman choice appeared remarkably similar to Egyptian decisions in the late 1860s.¹⁴

The easy acquisition of modern weapons from foreign manufacturers greatly facilitated the immediate strengthening of the Ottoman army. This armament policy certainly made an impression on the foreign correspondents covering the war. According to the *London Daily News*, "The various forts and lines [at Varna] mounted over three hundred guns, varying from 10 to 15 centimetres calibre, and all of the latest model. The supply of ammunition seems unlimited; and all day long the troops toil unloading the barges crammed with shell and cartridge boxes brought up by the transports."¹⁵ Moreover, the Ottoman import strategy yielded a significant qualitative advantage for the Turks over the Russians in this war. The Turks achieved superior firepower and longer range with their American repeater rifles and German steel breechloading artillery. Armed with these imported weapons, Turkish forces inflicted extremely high casualties on Russian forces using Russian-made weapons of lesser quality.¹⁶

As a field test of the import strategy, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 resoundingly validated Ottoman choices. Both Russia and the Ottoman Empire had a tradition of strong state control in military industry. Both had attempted to modernize their forces in the eighteenth century and had fallen behind again by the time of the Crimean War, when the two empires had possessed comparable levels of military technology. Their respective reactions to the Crimean experience showed the growing dependency of the Ottomans. The two states adopted strategies for modernization which were absolute opposites. Whereas the Ottomans moved ever closer to total dependency on Western imports to modernize their forces, Russia diligently worked to establish a modern, domestic military industry. Yet, when war came in 1877, the Turks undoubtedly held the advantage in quality of arms.

Naval Production, 1850–85

Ottoman naval production capabilities fell behind in the mid-nineteenth century. The failure of Ottoman naval yards to develop into a truly self-sufficient source for the empire was due in large measure to

14. Dunn, "Egypt's Nineteenth-Century Armaments Industry," 242–43.

15. *War Correspondence of the Daily News*, 36.

16. William McElwee, *The Art of War Waterloo to Mons* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 193–94.

three factors: time, money, and the rapidly changing technology of naval systems. These factors combined to end the possibility for a strong, reliable indigenous naval industry. Any naval program, even for a country with a well-established capability for naval production, takes a great deal of time and money, both of which the Ottoman Empire lacked. Throughout the period, the government faced wars and enjoyed only intermittent peace; thus, it did not have enough time to wait for ships to come off the local yards. Confronted with continual financial difficulties, the government certainly did not have the resources to cover the expenses of the ships themselves, much less the start-up costs of expanded docks. These two factors served only to magnify the impact of the third factor, the incredibly rapid changes taking place in naval technology. For example, perhaps the most unstable, unpredictable time in the history of naval development was the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, when the rapid transition from ironclads to heavy steel dreadnoughts made many systems obsolete before very much time had elapsed. As a result, the Ottoman government, along with many other states, found it more prudent to buy from abroad, and then make replacements as new technology arose.

After maintaining a reasonably respectable naval construction capability for the first part of the century, the Sublime Porte's (government's) position deteriorated in the 1850s and significant domestic naval production began to come to an end. During the Crimean War, Russia crippled Ottoman naval strength by destroying the Ottoman fleet at Sinop in 1853. To compensate for the loss, the Porte purchased warships from abroad for the first time, acquiring eight vessels from Britain and France in 1854 and paying for them with a foreign loan.¹⁷ The development of steam-powered ironclads also contributed to the demise of Turkish naval yards. The necessity to maintain some kind of naval force comparable to the European ironclads caused more foreign purchases. As a result of these factors, the foreign complement within the Ottoman navy steadily rose. In the period 1859–68, some thirty ships were purchased abroad, as opposed to thirteen manufactured domestically. The British- and French-made ships carried just over one-half of the navy's guns and most of the tonnage. Whole classes of ships were entirely foreign. For example, all four sail corvettes originated in Britain, all five river gunboats came from France, and the entire ironclad fleet was of British or French manufacture.¹⁸

17. Nejat Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz* (Istanbul: Kastan A. S. Yayinlari, 1988), 122.

18. Bulwer to Russell, 13 June 1860, FO 78/1507; Alison to Earl of Clarendon, 27 December 1857, FO 78/1276; Büyüktuğrul, *Osmanlı Deniz Harp Tarihi III. Cilt*, 16–18.

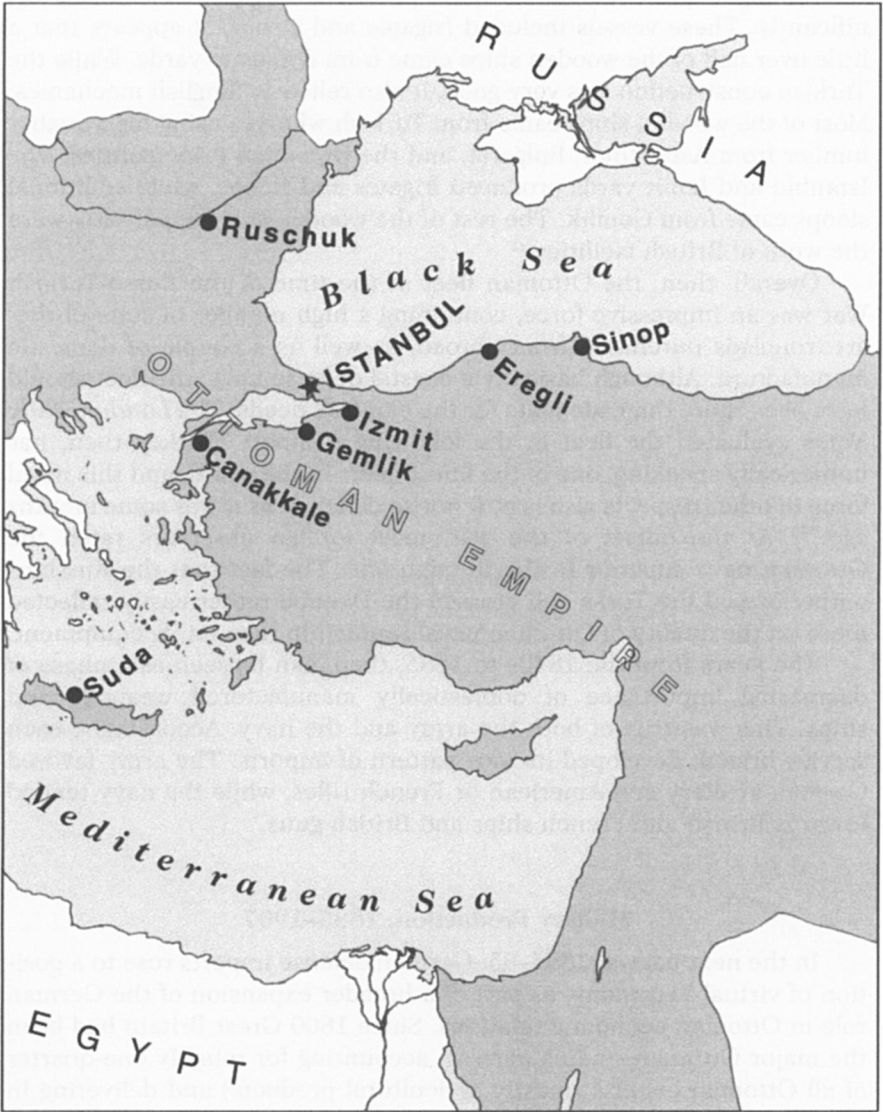
The government did make efforts to produce some of its own ships. When the Turkish government became aware of ironclad vessels in the 1860s, Sultan Abdul Aziz imported expensive machinery and raw materials to expand his naval building capacity. He sought to complete a Turkish ironclad from stem to stern including the boiler, the necessary steam engine, and plate-rolling mills, on the Golden Horn. Due to the lack of available infrastructure, most of the necessary materials and know-how had to be imported. The financing of this operation came from Britain and France.¹⁹

This Ottoman naval program was not completely without success. In 1870 the *Nusretiye* became the first ironclad produced entirely in the Ottoman Empire. Then, in 1872 the Imperial arsenal at Hasköy laid down the keel of the ironclad *Mukaddeme-i Hayir*. Some effort was made to expand naval construction facilities beyond Istanbul. Prior to the war with Russia in 1877, Ottoman naval yards were located at Ereğli, Basra, Mytilene, Rhodes, and Suda. Additionally, Sinop was to be made into a major naval fortress with extensive construction facilities.²⁰ Nevertheless, Ottoman domestic naval capabilities remained far below self-sufficiency.

The composition of the navy in 1877 showed a remarkable diversity of foreign-made and armed vessels. The Ottoman fleet consisted of twenty-one ironclads (including five gunboats), one hundred wooden vessels, five steam frigates, ten steam corvettes, twenty-six steam transports, thirty-five small war steamers, and twenty-four small sail vessels. As mentioned earlier, two of the ironclads were produced domestically, while most of the rest were British or French. Of the four *Osmaniye*-class broadside ironclads produced in Britain in 1864–65, Napier & Sons made three and the Thames Iron Works one. The French firm La Seyne built three battery ironclads (launched 1868). Two Turkish coast defense turret ships also originated in France in 1868, this time at Bordeaux. In Britain the manufacturers Thames Iron Works and Samuda Brothers provided, respectively, two and one casemate ironclads, launched in 1869–70. Two of these British ships were exceptionally good, considered by contemporary opinion to possess the highest degree of speed of any ships of war of the same class and equal tonnage. The Thames Iron Works also produced two *Mesudiye*-class central battery ironclads, launched in 1874–75. An additional ironclad was built in Trieste and

19. Bulwer to Russell, 30 August 1864, FO 78/1806; Elliot to Granville, 17 November 1871, FO 78/2178; A. Gallenga, *Two Years of the Eastern Question*, vol. 1 (London: Samuel Tinsley, 1877), 248–49; *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1860–1905* (New York: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 388.

20. Elliot to Granville, 15 January 1874, FO 78/2329; Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz*, 134; Ollier, *Cassell's Illustrated History*, 1: 135; Cooke, *Ottoman Empire*, 59–60.



Map 1: Major dockyards in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1870.

launched in 1870.²¹ Finally, because of nonpayment, four ironclads were never actually delivered.

Among wooden vessels, domestic production figured much more significantly. These vessels included frigates and sloops. It appears that a little over half of the wooden ships came from domestic yards. While the Turkish construction was very good, it also relied on English mechanics. Most of the wooden ships came from Turkish wharves using high-quality lumber from Asia Minor, Bulgaria, and the Danubian Principalities. The Istanbul and Izmit yards produced frigates and sloops, while additional sloops came from Gemlik. The rest of the wooden ships apparently were the work of British facilities.²²

Overall, then, the Ottoman fleet at the time of the Russo-Turkish War was an impressive force, containing a high number of state-of-the-art ironclads purchased from abroad, as well as a couple of domestic manufacture. Although basically a coastal defense navy, the fleet should have been more than adequate for the empire's needs. The *London Daily News* evaluated the fleet in the following manner: "Turkey then, has numerically speaking, one of the finest fleets in the world, and this naval force in other respects also is now not so deficient as it was some months ago."²³ At the outset of the war, most foreign observers rated the Ottoman navy superior to the Russian one. The fact that the Russians outperformed the Turks and crossed the Danube rather easily reflected more on the quality of Ottoman naval leadership than on its equipment.

The years from the 1870s to 1885, then, can be seen as a phase of decreasing importance of domestically manufactured weapons and ships. This was true of both the army and the navy. Accordingly, each service branch developed its own pattern of imports. The army favored German artillery and American or French rifles, while the navy tended towards British and French ships and British guns.

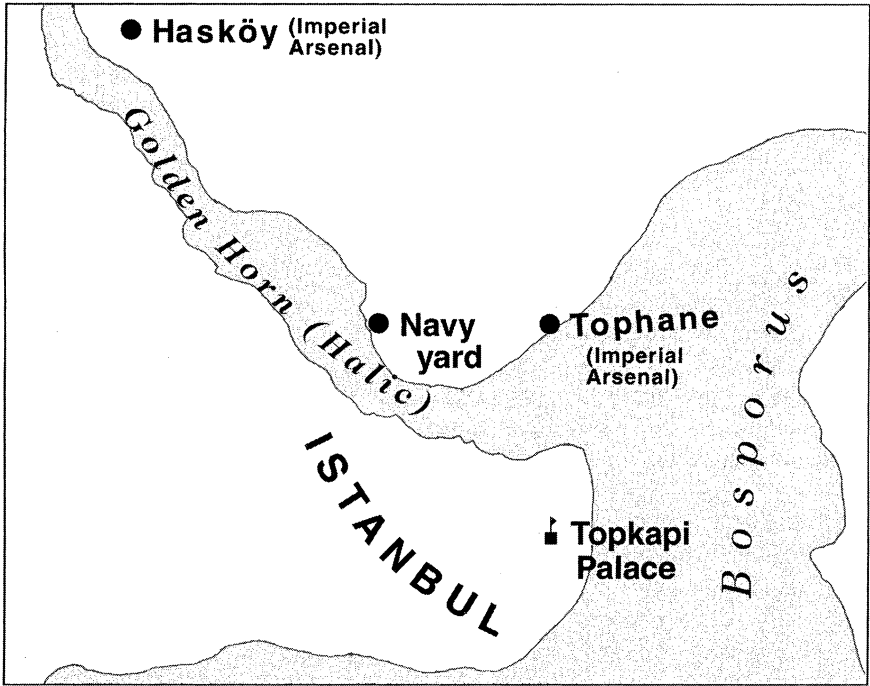
Military Production, 1885–1907

In the next period, 1885–95, German defense imports rose to a position of virtual hegemony, as part of a broader expansion of the German role in Ottoman economic relations. Since 1800 Great Britain had been the major Ottoman trading partner, accounting for roughly one-quarter of all Ottoman exports (mostly agricultural products) and delivering in turn between 30 and 40 percent of Ottoman imports. In terms of foreign investment within the Ottoman Empire, however, the British share

21. Ollier, *Cassell's Illustrated History*, 1: 141; Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz*, 134–35; Conway's *All the World's Fighting Ships, 1860–1905*, 389–91.

22. *Ibid.*, 392–93; Cooke, *Ottoman Empire*, 60.

23. *War Correspondence of the Daily News*, 22.



Map 2: Istanbul area.

decreased over the period 1888–96 from 50 percent to 20 percent. At the same time the German share of foreign investment rose from 1 percent to 25 percent, while the French became the single largest investor by increasing their share from 30 percent to 50.²⁴

The Germans owed their new-found advantageous position to the policies and temperament of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who was highly autocratic, deeply suspicious, and overly controlling. He had an obsessive preoccupation with loyalty and relied heavily on a private network of internal spies and police informers. The value he placed on personal loyalty over efficiency or performance thus promoted corruption and favoritism. The effects of his autocratic style manifested themselves negatively in the Ottoman armed forces. The Sultan distrusted the Ottoman navy because it had played the key part in the coup that deposed Abdul Aziz, his predecessor. Ever fearful of conspiracy, Abdul Hamid kept his forces on a short leash. He forbade the navy to leave its docks on the Golden Horn in order to forestall any potential movement against the

24. Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., 1997), 89.

palace; consequently, the ships rusted away at anchor. Similarly, the Sultan was wary of the army because he suspected that the military colleges promoted liberalism among the graduates. Therefore, he consciously promoted and favored officers who had not been trained at the academies and who lacked background in modern military science.²⁵

In the aftermath of the Turkish defeat by Russia, the Sultan sought a German military mission to oversee training and modernization of the Ottoman army. In June 1880 he requested that officers of the German General Staff, infantry, cavalry, and artillery services come to the Ottoman Empire on three-year contracts. In April 1882, officers Köhler, Kamphoevener, von Hobe, and Ristow arrived, and the Sultan gave them ranks within the Ottoman army. Later that same year, Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz joined the mission. After Köhler's death in 1885, von der Goltz functioned as acting head of the mission and remained in the Ottoman Empire until 1895. After his departure the influence of the mission declined, and by 1898, only three of the German officials were still in Turkey.²⁶

Abdul Hamid had his own reasons for preferring Berlin. In 1876–77, prior to the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottoman War Ministry had engaged a considerable number of British officers with the hope that their presence would be followed by active English intervention in favor of Turkey. After the Berlin Congress (1878), when the British not only refused to stand up for Turkey but in addition deprived it of Cyprus, the Sultan made every effort to minimize the authority and influence of these British officers. Prospects for a French mission also seemed unlikely because the Sultan distrusted France as much as Britain. Therefore, in place of Britain, the Sultan now looked to Germany as the first military power in Europe and as the most disinterested regarding Turkey. Abdul Hamid strongly desired to retain good offices at Berlin. However, his distrustful nature meant that no foreign military mission would ever be treated with real confidence and no foreign officer would ever be given serious exclusive authority except under the exigencies of hostilities. Moreover, the foreign officers discovered to their dismay, according to a British official, that “zeal and industry on their part are discouraged and are positively distasteful.”²⁷ Indeed, von der Goltz complained repeatedly about his inability to effect more improvements in the Ottoman army. Specifically, the Sultan forbade training maneuvers because he feared that they could serve as a means for a military coup, and out of

25. Hale, *Turkish Politics*, 28–29; Zürcher, *Turkey*, 84.

26. Jehuda Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe, Die preussisch-deutschen Militärmissionen in der Türkei, 1835–1914* (Dusseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1976), 35, 43, 54, 64, 85.

27. Chermiside to Ford, 26 May 1893, enclosed in Ford to Rosebery, 29 May 1893, FO 78/4479.

similar concerns, he never allowed the troops to practice with live rounds.²⁸

For their part, the Germans used their privileged position to support the cause of German military suppliers as they overhauled the Ottoman armed forces.²⁹ Because they were incorporated within the framework of the Ottoman military system, members of the German mission had tremendous opportunities to expand the role of German arms and equipment in the Ottoman army. Primarily, this unique position gave the German officers easy and frequent access to members of the Ordnance Ministry, which controlled supply and military production. Until 1889 all the German officers were subject to the *Serasker* (War Minister). However, after von der Goltz refused to renew his contract that year because of dissatisfaction with his lack of influence, he was attached directly to the Imperial Military Household with the right to address reports to the Sultan. Some Turkish officers and foreign observers grumbled about the German mission. A British representative noted: "One of the main handles for intrigue has been the accusation against the Chief of the Mission being interested in supplies of war-like material by German firms . . . but in 1891–92 there was an active but unsuccessful intrigue by the then French Military Attaché in favour of a French Military Mission."³⁰

The German military mission proved to be a boon for German firms. In 1882, the Ottoman government placed a large order with Krupp for artillery to replace and repair the fortifications and batteries of the Bosphorus and Çanakkale. This order largely resulted from the insistence of von der Goltz, head of the mission, who in 1885 managed to sell 500 Krupp heavy guns to the Ottomans. The magnitude of this sale can be appreciated when one considers that in the 1877–78 war, there were 590 field guns among the army in Europe. In 1886 the Ottomans bought 426 field guns and 60 mortars from Krupp and favored the German firm Schichauwerft with an order for torpedo boats. Then in 1887, as a result of the military mission's rearmament program for the Ottoman army, the Ottomans purchased half a million rifles and fifty thousand carbines from the German firms of Mauser and Loewe.³¹

28. Hale, *Turkish Politics*, 29.

29. For a thorough discussion of the German military mission, see Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe*, 35–85.

30. Ford to Earl of Rosebery, No. 159, 24 April 1893, FO 78/4479; No. 208, 26 May, 1893; enclosure, Chermiside to Ford, Position of German Military Mission at Constantinople.

31. White to Rosebery, 11 February 1886, FO 78/3869; White to Salisbury, 18 February 1888, FO 78/4098; İlber Ortaylı, *İkinci Abdulhamit Döneminde Osmanlı İmparatorlugunda Alman Nüfuzu* (Ankara: Ankara üniversitesi Siyasi Biligiler Fakultesi Yayinlari, no. 479, 1981), 65–68; Ollier, *Cassell's Illustrated History*, 1:140;

Undoubtedly the Germans profited from these sales, but Abdul Hamid acted as the decisive force in granting the orders to Germany and played a direct role in selecting the armaments. For example, in 1887 an Ottoman military commission deliberated whether to adopt the Mauser or the Martini as the new rifle system. Over the objections of the War Ministry and other Turkish military authorities, the Sultan ordered a provisional contract with Mauser. Only financial difficulties prevented the immediate conversion of the provisional contract into a final one.³² In spite of growing agitation in Istanbul against the Mauser contract, the Sultan considered the deal “as his own act and deed,” and in the end his will prevailed.³³ However, by 1890 none of the Mausers had yet been issued to the troops or training schools; instead, they remained uncrated in storage.³⁴

The year 1889 was a banner one for German arms sales to the Ottomans, who as a result of the Kaiser’s visit to Istanbul placed a massive new order for artillery from Krupp, rifles from Mauser and Loewe, and torpedo boats from Schichau. Such a large order required financing, and the Germans happily arranged a loan. The Deutsche Bank acted as contractor, and the income from the Public Debt’s fishing industry was pledged as security.³⁵ When put into context with the annual expenditures in the Ottoman budget, the enormity of this purchase becomes apparent: the loan represented an amount equal to 19 percent of the total military/naval budget and about 10 percent of the total Ottoman revenues for the year. In the years ahead, the Sultan continued to make large arms purchases from the Germans.³⁶

Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe*, 105. The 1882 order was for 1,206,987 liras worth of artillery. In 1888 Turkish war orders to German firms amounted to 2.2 million marks.

32. White to FO (telegraphic), No. 10, 30 January 1887, FO 78/4002.

33. White to Salisbury, 28 November 1887, FO 78/4001.

34. Chermside to White, 16 January 1891, FO 78/4342.

35. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe*, 105; Rafii-Sukru Suvla, “The Ottoman Debt 1850–1939,” in Issawi, ed., *Economic History*, 104. The Ottomans spent a total of 15.3 million marks in 1889. Justin McCarthy, *The Arab World, Turkey, and the Balkans: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1982), 160, 184. The amount of the loan issued was 1,617,647 gold lira, although the amount actually received totalled 1,132,352 lira, or roughly 70 percent of the issue. The sum actually collected by the Ottoman government in the financial year 1888–89 was 1,571,375,960 kurus (or approximately 15.7 million gold lira). The budget allocated for the Harbiye Nezareti and the navy was 807,203,175 kurus (or roughly 8.1 million gold lira).

36. Chermside to Fane, 5 July 1890, FO 78/4276; Ford to Rosebery, 24 April 1893, FO 78/4479; Lothar Rathman, *Berlin-Baghdad* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 18; Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe*, 105; Ortayli, *İkinci Abdulhamit Döneminde*, 68. In 1889 and 1890 the Ottomans spent six million marks for such items as one thousand field guns from Krupp and several hundred thousand rifles from Mauser and

The Germans also improved their arms trade position by the way they conducted the military reforms. For example, in 1893 von der Goltz declared that a number of Ottoman officers must become proficient in the handling and use of the rifles newly developed in Germany. He stated furthermore that the munitions factory at Tophane would have to produce “dummy” cartridges, and then these new rifles should be given to the troops. Clearly, the close German ties with the *Tophane-i Amire Nezareti* paid off. During this time the French and British were practically eliminated from the Ottoman arms market. By 1894 Krupp’s and Mauser’s exploitation of their complete market sovereignty brought accusations from foreign observers that the Germans were selling expensive and low-quality goods. Among the German items ordered by the Ottomans were torpedo boats, field artillery, coastal guns, rifles, and ammunition.³⁷

Meanwhile, it is difficult to gauge domestic production of military supplies, rifles, and other weapons for the army from the Hamidian period up to World War I. Clearly the Turks had trouble paying for the maintenance of plant and foreign experts. During the 1880s seven British workmen at Tophane filed petitions over wage arrears amounting to six thousand Turkish lira. The claims of these British subjects occupied the attention of the British embassy from 1882 to 1889, but owing to the “impecunious state of the Ottoman Treasury,” no settlement was forthcoming. Indeed, since April 1888 the Ottoman Bank had refused to pay anyone’s salary, including the German generals and the Ottoman diplomatic service.³⁸ Eventually the British employees at Tophane did receive back pay for the period from May to September 1888, but claims for arrears for the previous five years remained outstanding.³⁹

The fragmentary evidence of Ottoman domestic armaments production suggests a noticeable decline in capabilities after the 1880s. For example, during the 1890s, Tophane could turn out only ten Martini-Henry rifles a week, a production rate significantly lower than the one hundred rifles per week manufactured there in 1888.⁴⁰ In the years 1902 and 1903 the Turks attempted to manufacture six quick-fire field guns

Loewe. In 1891 they bought approximately 5.9 million marks worth of arms; for 1892 and 1893 the amounts were 10.1 million marks and 13.1 million marks respectively.

37. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe*, 77, 105; Ortayli, *İkinci Abdulhamit Döneminde*, 68. In 1895 an additional 12.2 million marks worth of goods came from Germany. All in all in the period 1885–95, no less than 100 million francs worth of orders for war material went to German enterprises.

38. White to Salisbury, 6 November 1888, FO 78/4105; 15 November 1888, Enclosure: memorandum 14 November 1888, FO 78/4105.

39. White to Salisbury, 7 December 1888, FO 78/4106.

40. Captain Sir W. Cecil Domville, Report 255, “Turkish Fleet and Dockyards, 1890,” 12, Admiralty (ADM) 231/18, PRO; Domville, Report 188, “Turkish Fleet and Dockyards, 1888,” 12, ADM 231/14.

on the Krupp model presented by the Kaiser, but Tophane's production proceeded rather slowly owing to want of funds.⁴¹ By the time of the Balkan Wars (1913), Tophane was manufacturing some hand grenades.⁴² The underdeveloped state of Ottoman industry generally becomes apparent when compared to other sectors of the economy. In 1894–95 there were approximately 186,000 factory workers compared to 185,000 government officials, and a combined total of servants, maids, and secretaries exceeding 186,000.⁴³

By and large the equipping of the Ottoman army became the province of foreign imports, especially from the Germans. During the 1890s, the mainstay of the Ottoman infantry became the Mauser rifles manufactured in Germany.⁴⁴ Here again, the Ottomans found it easier to buy the newer models. German dominance in orders for the army was still unquestionable. The Germans achieved their greatest sale—over twice the size of the large 1889 order—in 1905, when the Ottomans placed an enormous order for military equipment from Krupp. Because of the order's size, once again the Deutsche Bank contracted the loan. Since the Ottoman government found itself unable to pay arrears amounting to almost one million lira on its former contracts for Krupp guns and Mauser rifles, it was decided to pay off the old debt and at the same time arrange a new contract by means of a loan from the Deutsche Bank. Additional customs duties for military equipment and the 6 per cent additional revenues of the Public Debt Administration served as security for the loan.⁴⁵

41. Intelligence Department, War Office, "Reports on Changes in Various Foreign Armies During the Year 1902," 82, WO 106/6179; Intelligence Department, War Office, "Reports on Changes in Various Foreign Armies During the Year 1903," 85, WO 106/6180.

42. Captain Sir W. Cecil Domville, Report 188, "Turkish Fleet and Dockyards, 1888," ADM 231/14; Captain Domville, Report 255, "Turkish Fleet and Dockyards, 1890," ADM 231/18; Ortaylı, *İkinci Abdulhamit Döneminde*, 69; Ramiz Ertem, *Balkan Harbi Garp Ordusu Karadag Cephesi II. Cilt* (Ankara: Gnkur Basimevi, 1984), 40.

43. Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 59, 218.

44. Ford to Earl of Rosebery, 24 April 1893, FO 78/4479; "Reports on Changes in Various Foreign Armies During the Year 1902," WO 106/6179; Captain C. B. Norman, "The Turkish Army of To-Day," in *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, 16 (November 1897): 593–94.

45. "Reports on Changes in Various Foreign Armies During the Year 1905," WO 106/6182; A. S. Avetian, *Germanskii imperializm na blizhnem vostokeye* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Mezhdunarodye Otnosheniya, 1966), 109–10; Suvla, "The Ottoman Debt 1850–1939," 105. The Krupp order in 1905 was worth between 60 and 70 million francs. The new loan from Deutsche Bank amounted to 2.64 million gold lira, of which 2,098,800 (about 79.5 percent) was actually received.

Naval Production, 1885–1907

The late 1880s saw little new naval construction, and the domestic naval program of the latter part of Abdul Hamid's reign proved to be largely abortive. In 1886 the Turks did succeed in building torpedo boats in Istanbul by copying a one-hundred-foot boat built by the French firm Forges et Chantiers and purchased the previous year. Based on this initial success the Turkish dockyard laid down the keels for three additional boats.⁴⁶ British Admiralty Intelligence observed about these torpedo boats that "Everything was made in the dockyard, and it speaks highly for their factory that they should be able to run the engines without a hitch the first time they were tried, and to make 17 knots." Royal Navy observer Captain Henry Kane rated the Turkish dockyard in Istanbul as better than the Russian yards at Kronstadt or Nikolaev in 1886, although not as good as English yards. Captain Kane reported, "The factory is a large establishment, fairly fitted up with machines, and capable of good work. They have iron and brass foundries, a puddling house with several furnaces, mills for rolling armour-plates, angle-iron, bars, and sheets; two smitheries, with a 15-ton and 7.5-ton hammer; fitting, erecting, and boiler shops, and altogether, a very complete establishment."⁴⁷ However, just a few years later the conditions in the dockyard had deteriorated significantly. The steel factory proved to be dysfunctional, and most of the castings were useless because of insufficient heat from the furnace. By 1894 the dockyard had fallen into a neglected state. Construction had commenced for several ships, which remained in skeletal form for years. The yard lacked systematic management. For example, after designing new hulls that required years to build, the Turks put old engines and old guns into them. In one glaring case, the Turks left the armor-clad *Abd-ul Khadir* on an inadequate building slip, and for two years the ship sank into the ground. A comparatively large naval building program was initiated in the 1890s. Construction of two *Shadiye*-class cruisers commenced at Izmit, but neither was ever launched. Similarly, a battleship begun in 1892 was never completed. Although the domestic naval program of the late Hamidian period did have some degree of success regarding smaller ships, the Hamidian era essentially marked the end of domestic building programs in the empire.⁴⁸ In terms of domestically produced warships, the mediocre program of the 1890s was the last one

46. Trotter to White, 22 April 1886, enclosed in White to Rosebery, 23 April 1886, FO 78/3870.

47. Captain Henry C. Kane, R.N., Report 127, "Turkish Fleet and Dockyards 1886," 6, 11, ADM 231/10.

48. Captain Domville, Report 255, "Turkish Fleet and Dockyards, 1890," ADM 231/18; Captain Egerton, Report 385, "Turkey, Fleet, Dockyards, Guns, 1894," ADM 231/24; Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz*, 158–59.

to give any significant orders. Thereafter, especially during the Young Turk era, foreign-manufactured ships completely dominated the Ottoman naval building program.

The period 1885–95 also marked a point of departure in the pattern of Ottoman naval purchases, which the Germans came to dominate. Expediency, cost, and Abdul Hamid's personal involvement all played a part in bringing about the turning point for naval procurement in 1886. Initially, the Turks hoped to buy more boats from France, but the French informed the Turkish Admiralty that no torpedo boats would be available for immediate purchase. Faced with the need to place construction orders, the Turks solicited bids. The Germans sharply underbid the French and offered spectacular savings, agreeing to provide twelve boats at a lower total price than the French had proposed for only eight boats. The Sultan gave the contract himself.⁴⁹ In the ongoing competition with Armstrong, Krupp gained the upper hand. From 1886 to 1890 all five *Simub*-class wooden sloops were rearmed with Krupps. In 1891, many of the Ottoman ships replaced their previously mounted British Armstrongs with Krupps. Additionally, the torpedo gunboats and third-class cruisers built at Istanbul possessed Krupps. In terms of ship production, German firms also gained substantially. The Ottoman navy had no German-built ships in 1877, but in this new period the German firms produced thirteen torpedo boats (five built by Schichau in 1886, eight built by Germania in 1887–92). The French did sell six torpedo boats to the Ottomans in the years 1885–86 (La Seyne and Des Vignes built three each), but received no more orders after 1886.⁵⁰ Therefore, 1886 can be seen as the beginning of German hegemony in the Ottoman naval market.

Obviously, the big loser in all this was Britain. The true magnitude of German gain at this time showed in the almost complete removal of Britain from a naval market which she had commanded previously. Britain still had a minor market in supplying Whitehead torpedoes, but this was a mere fraction of her former business. Nevertheless, the Sultan did take a liking to the English-made Nordenfelt submarine and accordingly purchased a pair out of his personal funds. To an English observer, this purchase seemed more a vanity as "His Majesty has already paid, not only the value of the material obtained from England, but the cost of putting them together here, the latter operation having taken three times as long and cost three times as much as the estimate."⁵¹

The German hegemony in Ottoman naval orders turned out to be short-lived. From the late 1890s to 1907, the Ottoman government

49. White to Granville, 29 April 1885, FO 78/3751; Captain Henry Kane, Report 127, "Turkish Fleet and Dockyards 1886," ADM 231/10.

50. Chermside to Fane, 5 July 1890, FO 78/4276; Captain Henry Kane, Report 127, "Turkish Fleet and Dockyards, 1886," ADM 231/10.

51. *Ibid.*

embarked upon a foreign building and reconstruction program for its navy. During those years the British firm Armstrong made a rousing comeback. In 1898, the contract for rebuilding the ironclad *Mesudiye* went to Armstrong-Ansaldo, a branch of the British firm in Genoa. Armstrong completed the job in 1903, along with the new construction of the armored cruiser *Abdul Hamid*. In the reconstruction of 1903–7, Armstrong-Ansaldo modernized three ironclads. Only one ironclad was handed to a German firm (Krupp) in 1903–7, and this was only because Ansaldo had been unable to complete the work in 1899. The British even moved into the German domain of torpedo boats. Armstrong-Ansaldo built eleven of these craft in the years from 1901 to 1906. So, the period 1897–1907 marked the return of Britain to the Ottoman naval market. Meanwhile, the French and Germans also acquired some Ottoman naval orders in the 1903–7 program.⁵²

Naval Production, 1908–14

The Young Turk Revolution brought a change in naval affairs. By deposing Abdul Hamid II in 1909, the Young Turks removed the single most important impediment to revitalizing the Turkish navy. Accordingly, they planned for major improvements in the composition of the fleet and called for six battleships, twelve destroyers, twelve torpedo boats, and six submarines.⁵³ The Young Turks did not limit their ambitions merely to upgrading the class of their navy, but also sought to strengthen domestic production by developing the capacity to build their own dreadnoughts. To this end they pursued a naval docks contract which would put in place the necessary infrastructure for self-sustained warship construction within the empire.

However, the Young Turk program did not have the chance to develop fully. The Italian War, the Balkan Wars, and finally World War I interrupted and hampered it. As a stopgap measure, the government purchased a number of vessels which had originally been intended for other countries. In the end the Young Turk plans for self-sufficiency were frustrated by events, and expediency once again favored imports as the solution for Ottoman policy makers.

Having announced the new naval policy, the government set about achieving its goals. In 1909 the Young Turk government discussed the procurement of capital ships for the first time. The plan for 1910 called for two battleships of the *Reshadiye* class, and the corresponding order went to the British firm Vickers. Although Krupp lobbied hard for the

52. Report 841, "Turkey, Greece and Roumania. War Vessels. 1908," 30–36, ADM 231/49; Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz*, 134–35.

53. *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1906–1921*, 388.

order, Vickers won out by offering a particularly sweet deal to the Turks. Then in July 1911, Vickers' bankers Glyn Mills guaranteed a large advance to the Turks in respect of payment due to Vickers on the warships.⁵⁴

Vickers became the primary naval supplier in the final phase of Ottoman policy.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the battleship deal with Vickers turned out to be unfortunate for the Ottomans because the British retained the *Reshadiye* after its launch in 1913. In the meantime, the Ottomans tried to bolster their fleet as quickly as possible by buying two old German battleships in 1910. As another stopgap measure, in 1913 they purchased the *Rio de Janeiro*, which Brazil had intended to buy from Britain, at a reduced price.⁵⁶

For the last few years before World War I, Britain ruled the Ottoman naval market. This resurgence in Turkey was part of her improved naval trade worldwide for the years 1900–14, when British exporters of warships and naval ordnance had 63.2 percent of the world market compared with Germany's 7.6 percent. Vickers had in hand Turkish armament orders equivalent to 84 percent of British manufactured exports to the Ottoman Empire in 1913. The crowning British achievement that year was the acquisition of the docks contract for the Vickers-Armstrong Turkish Company, the result of collaboration between Vickers and Armstrong for the exploitation of Ottoman state docks and arsenals. The Ottoman government held the controlling share of the capital of this enterprise, with the minority divided between Vickers and Armstrong.⁵⁷

The dock commission triggered a war of threats between Germany and Britain. In October 1913, the Ottoman government planned to reach

54. Tyne and Wear Archive Service (TWAS) 130/1268, no. 3, Armstrong Board Meeting Minutes, 30, 131, 134, 171; Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz*, 185–86; Clive Trebilcock, *The Vickers Brothers: Armaments and Enterprise, 1854–1914* (London: European Publishers Ltd., 1977), 130. Vickers provided for six months' free credit with payment in ten equal parts, and paid for the startup costs. The Glyn Mills advance to the Turks was £600,000.

55. Trebilcock, *Vickers Brothers*, 121. In 1911 Vickers had contracts from the empire worth approximately 2.2 million gold lira, and promises for a further 5.5 million in 1913.

56. Avetian, *Germanskii imperalizm*, 116; Gülen, *Dünden Bugüne Bahriyemiz*, 181, 186. The ship was priced at £3.4 million, but the Ottomans bought her for £2.3 million.

57. Trebilcock, *Vickers Brothers*, 123–24; Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Milli İktisat 1908–1918* (Ankara: MAYA Matbaacılık-Yayincılık, 1982), 362; J. D. Scott, *Vickers: A History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 85; Suvla, "The Ottoman Debt, 1850–1939," 106. The capital of the Vickers-Armstrong Turkish Company was £250,000 sterling; its loan to the Ottomans was for 1.485 million gold lira at 5.5 percent interest.

an agreement with the British consortium about the construction of a dock at Izmit and a transfer of all Ottoman naval orders to Britain. The German representative in Istanbul wrote to Berlin that Germany could not allow this. He argued to the Ottomans that the late Mahmud Shevket Pasha had promised him to address orders concerning battleship construction to Germany; however, Germany would approve the deal with Armstrong if the Ottomans would buy a £500,000 dreadnought from Germany. In response, Armstrong threatened to refuse to construct the dock or arsenals if the Ottomans granted Germany's demand. After discussion in the Ottoman Council of Ministers, in December 1913 Armstrong got the agreement to manage the newly established dock for both shipbuilding and repair operations for thirty years.⁵⁸

In the wake of this coup, British firms pressed for more. By 1914 Vickers, Armstrong, and John Brown teamed up to secure Turkish orders for three superdreadnoughts, six destroyers, and two scouts. Joining forces, the three firms were at a tremendous advantage. According to Clive Trebilcock, "Able to offer in one vessel, Armstrong hulls . . ., Brown armour, and Vickers ordnance, mountings and engines, commodities separately of the highest international repute, here available in combination, this armourers' conclave could deliver a sales pitch which brooked few equals in overseas trade." In addition to these advantages, British armament products were also competitively priced and British producers could offer more rapid delivery (twenty-four months for the largest class warship, while German producers were 30 percent slower).⁵⁹ Once again, the elements of expediency and money manifested themselves in Ottoman armament policy.

The Young Turks also purchased ships from the French. On 30 April 1914, the Porte agreed to a contract with Schneider for the construction of two submarines. On 2 May, the French shipbuilder Norman won construction of six torpedo gunboats, and a subsequent agreement for twelve more. At the same time the St. Nazaire and Le Havre shipyards were set up for seven gunships for the Ottomans.⁶⁰

Military Production, 1908–14

Turning once again to the army orders, the Young Turks continued the Ottoman preference for Krupp and the Germans but kept their

58. TWAS 130/1268, 392; Avetian, *Germanskii imperialism*, 110–11; *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1906–1921*, 2, 388.

59. Trebilcock, *Vickers Brothers*, 125 (quoted), 126–27.

60. Avetian, *Germanskii imperialism*, 116. See also Djemal Pasha, *Memories of a Turkish Statesman, 1913–1919* (New York: Arno Press, 1973) 95, 102. The submarines cost 2.2 million francs each.

options open with the French. Like Abdul Hamid before them, the Young Turks requested and received a new German military mission to strengthen their position, and they put forth the question about the rearmament of the artillery and coastal fortifications of the straits by German factories with broad credit foundations. The French told Cemal Bey, the Minister of Marine, that they would not object to the German mission as long as France was not deprived of orders for war materials. The struggle between French and German firms became so bitter that Cemal Bey undertook negotiations with the business and government circles of each country.⁶¹

Just a year before World War I began, both German and French firms lobbied for war orders. In the fall of 1913 the Ottoman War Ministry was preparing to order about six hundred guns, of which two-thirds would be mountain guns and one-third field guns. Prospects for larger orders of shells lay ahead, since their number did not exceed two hundred for every field or mountain gun. The Balkan Wars had shown the superiority of Schneider artillery over Krupp guns, and therefore, Ottoman officials generally agreed that the mountain guns should be ordered in France.⁶² The Ottoman government's aspiration to support modern artillery and concentrate a large part of the order with Schneider compelled the Germans to take corresponding measures. At this time the number of Krupp pieces in the Ottoman army was twice as great as the number of artillery pieces of other manufacturers, and Krupp had no intention of letting this commanding position slip away.⁶³

The Ottoman officials used the French-German competition to obtain various concessions in negotiations about economic questions. By February 1914, Krupp presented to the Ottomans a financial package which would make it possible for the empire to pay Krupp for all received material. While the Grand Vezir assured the Germans that the Ottomans would turn away from France, Cavid Bey, the Minister of Finance, gave consent for government military orders with France for 376 mountain guns, fifty million bullets, two submarines, and six torpedo boats. A new French loan could be used to pay for these items; however, it was stipulated that French loans should not serve for payment of orders outside of France. The Porte accepted and placed the orders with France.⁶⁴ Having lost some ground to the French, the Germans recovered between

61. Djemal, *Memories*, 111.

62. Djemal, *Memories*, 102. According to Djemal Pasha, "We also ordered from France a number of mountain guns as soon as the superiority of the French mountain gun to that of Krupp had been ascertained by our leading artillery expert, General Hassan Riza Pasha."

63. Avetian, *Germanskii imperialism*, 112.

64. *Ibid.*, 112–14. See also Djemal, *Memories*, 73–74. Krupp's package involved six million lira. The Porte's orders to France were worth one hundred million francs.

February and May of 1914. First, Krupp moved to open Ottoman long-term credit and as a result acquired a large order. The Ottomans then placed massive orders in Germany for guns, rifles, and bullets.⁶⁵

Up to the war's start, Krupp and Schneider vied for orders for coastal artillery for the straits. In the summer of 1914, the French suggested that Schneider-Creusot be given the concessions for fortifying the Dardanelles. This would have been a staggering blow to German prestige; however, the Germans were too well entrenched in this section of the Ottoman defense system for this to happen. Under the German military mission, a special commission for the reorganization of the fortifications of the Dardanelles had been created, and through this commission all orders were given to Krupp. In mid-October 1914, Krupp received both the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus reconstruction orders.⁶⁶

The French made one last sales pitch before the war broke out. In July 1914 the Ottoman Minister of Marine visited the headquarters of the Creusot firm and chose what he wanted to order. Another French loan made this last order from Schneider-Creusot possible, but, according to an authority, "Unfortunately for the profits of Schneider-Creusot, hostilities were commenced before the deliveries could be made. The Turkish Minister of Marine therefore called upon Krupp of Essen on his return journey and spent the money he had raised in Paris to purchase a German supply of armaments instead of French."⁶⁷

For the sake of completeness, a brief look at the Ottoman air arm is in order. In 1912 the government ordered an assortment of reconnaissance planes for army cooperation duties. Among the planes were Bristol (British), D.F.W.s (German), and Nieuports and R.E.P.s (French). All were flown by foreign pilots.⁶⁸ The representation of British, German, and French imports in this force should come as no surprise, since none of the three had yet manifested any clear-cut superiority. This being the case, it appears the Ottoman government chose to play the field. This can be considered another example of taking the best of the West.

65. Avetian, *Germanskii imperialism*, 114–15. Krupp extended a credit of 2.5 million lira and received orders for 50 artillery pieces with shells, 150 self-detonating mines, seven field batteries, and additional rifles and machine guns. The other Ottoman orders involved 200 field guns, 100 Maxim guns, 200,000 Mauser rifles, 150 million bullets, and 1,000 Krupp naval guns of various caliber. From 27 February to 1 May 1914, some 31,200 boxes of rifle bullets, 1,900 boxes of field gun shells, 74 field guns, eight rapid-fire guns, 400 boxes of gun cotton (pyroxylin), 300 boxes of dynamite, saltpeter, and fuses arrived in Istanbul.

66. *Ibid.*, 114.

67. A. Fenner Brockway, *International Trade in Armaments Prior to World War II* (New York: Garland Publications, 1972), 41.

68. David W. Wragg, *World's Air Forces* (England: Osprey Publishing, 1971), 148, 181.

From the previous data, the weakness of Ottoman domestic military production can be inferred. Still, it is possible to obtain a fairly clear picture of the financial situation regarding the Ottoman military industry for the year 1910–11. For that year the budget for salaries and expenditures of the Ministry of War amounted to roughly 10.7 million gold lira, whereas the corresponding figure for the navy was approximately 1.6 million gold lira. The amount spent for salaries and expenditures on military production and manufacturing (*İmalat-i Harbiye*) was 432,000 lira, of which 412,000 went to the Central Administration Istanbul Vilayet, and the next highest was Izmit with approximately 3,500 lira.⁶⁹ From these figures one can see that domestic military production did not account for much of the empire's arms and war equipment.

Summary

The Ottoman slide into import dependency cannot be blamed on foreign suppliers. The Western armaments producers engaged in keen competition with one another and evinced no reluctance to supply or to establish production facilities around the globe. As we have seen, Britain and France each helped lay the basis for Ottoman ironclad construction under Sultan Abdul Aziz. Later, the intense competition created a buyer's market, wherein credit could easily be arranged. The Ottomans manipulated the various parties as best they could, and in turn were wooed by the lure of possible loans. The same market forces that made it easy for the Ottomans to acquire modern weaponry were also at play when the Young Turks contracted with the British firms to construct modern naval production facilities within the empire. In effect, competition in the world naval market was so intense that foreign producers offered to build factories within the buyer countries in order to avoid losing to other competitors. Thus, Vickers and/or Armstrong built modern shipyards simultaneously in Russia, Japan, Spain, Italy, and Turkey prior to the outbreak of the World War.⁷⁰

Ottoman preferences bore a striking resemblance to Japanese choices, as both opted for British models for their navies and German models for their armies.⁷¹ However, the Japanese case differed externally from the Ottoman situation in dramatic ways. Whereas the Ottomans found themselves constantly on the defensive due to the relentless pressures of Great Power rivalries entailed in the Eastern Question and the corresponding loss of Balkan provinces, the Japanese enjoyed the luxury

69. McCarthy, *Historical Statistics*, 194–95, 201.

70. Basil Collier, *Arms and the Men: The Arms Trade and Governments* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980), 138–42.

71. Conway's *All the World's Fighting Ships, 1906–1921*, 222.

of laying the ground for offensive wars against China in 1895 and Russia in 1904. The Japanese decisions to pursue war abroad encouraged technological development and successful industrialization based on domestic financial resources.⁷²

The absence of indigenous private defense enterprise distinguished the Ottoman case most clearly from the more successful cases of Russia and Japan, where private firms facilitated the domestication of foreign technology and fostered innovation based on their profit motive. Lacking a private sector, the Ottomans shared the same fate of import dependency as their counterparts in Latin America, the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and China.⁷³

Abdul Hamid II must shoulder most of the responsibility for the Ottoman defense erosion. He ruled more than thirty years, the longest of any sultan in the period, and while on the throne he decisively favored imports over domestic production. In fairness to the Sultan, the financial squeeze he inherited greatly debilitated the empire's options for war production. Like the case of Khedival Egypt, the Ottoman capacity for domestic production quickly withered as inefficient tax collection led to under-capitalization.⁷⁴ Abdul Hamid's use of foreign money to acquire foreign weapons effectively brought first-class equipment into the empire at the least expense, and the Turks owed their strong showing against Russia in 1877 to their superior imported weapons. Nevertheless, the cost to Ottoman industry in the long run proved disastrous.

However, Abdul Hamid's suspicion of his armed forces, especially the navy, had a tremendous detrimental effect. As David Stevenson has shown, it was in naval armaments that the private sector made its decisive breakthrough in Britain, France, and Germany.⁷⁵ Yet, naval armament was precisely the area most hindered by Abdul Hamid. The Young Turks tried to turn the situation around, but the world war terminated dock construction in Turkey. We will never know whether such an enterprise would have revitalized Ottoman domestic naval production; however, such an outcome was indeed possible.

The weak industrial base of Republican Turkey after 1923 was a direct legacy of the Ottoman policies. Because Atatürk's government confronted a similar set of conditions, Turkish policy makers in the

72. Kozo Yamamura, "Success Ill-gotten? The Role of Meiji Militarism in Japan's Technological Progress," *Journal of Economic History* 37 (March 1977): 113–35; William W. Lockwood, "Economic and Political Modernization," in Robert E. Ward and Dankwart A. Rustow, eds., *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), 120.

73. David Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War, Europe, 1904–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 19.

74. Dunn, "Egypt's Nineteenth-Century Armaments Industry," 254.

75. Stevenson, *Armaments and the Coming of War*, 29.

interwar years continued to use the methods employed by their Ottoman predecessors prior to the Great War. During this period Turkey received modern military equipment from a variety of suppliers without being dependent on any one of them. Furthermore, the supplier governments furnished the financial means to acquire the desired equipment on relatively easy terms.⁷⁶

In conclusion, the Ottoman armaments policy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was based on importation. During those years the significance of imported arms and ships increased in both number and value, while domestic war production decreased in importance. Over the course of this import policy, the Ottomans favored different countries during distinct periods. In the end, the Germans dominated the army orders and the British the naval ones. These two powers were the recognized world leaders in their respective realms of military and naval power, and Ottoman officials opted for them in their “Best of the West” import policy. The sorry condition of the empire can be seen in the state of affairs wherein the former Islamic power became dependent on the West for the means to defend itself.

76. Gotthard Jäschke, *Türkei* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt Verlag, 1941), 58–61; Arthur S. Gould Lee, *Special Duties, Reminiscences of a Royal Air Force Staff Officer in the Balkans, Turkey and the Middle East* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1946), 28–30.