

**Arařtırma Makalesi**

**Gunboat Diplomacy of the Great Powers on the Ottoman Empire: With Particular Reference to the Salonika Incident (1876) and Armenian Reform Demands (1879-80)**

**Fikrettin Yavuz\***

(ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3161-457X)

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**Abstract**

Throughout history, gunboat, a small vessel of a naval force, has been turned into a term of coercive diplomacy. Gunboat diplomacy, associated with chiefly the activities of the Great Powers, means the use of naval power directly or indirectly as an aggressive diplomatic instrument. It seems highly probable to see many examples of this coercive diplomacy in the world history, particularly after the French Revolution. Naturally, the Ottoman Empire, always attracted attention of the Great Powers, was exposed to this policy of the Powers. During the nineteenth century, the rivalry among the European Powers on the Ottoman territorial integrity became a common characteristic that led them to implement gunboat diplomacy on all occasions.

In this context, this article firstly offers a critical analysis of gunboat diplomacy of the Great Powers on the Ottoman Empire within the dimension of two specific examples: The Salonika Incident and Armenian reform demands. In addition, it aims to contribute to the understanding of gunboat diplomacy of the Great Powers and Ottoman response by evaluating it from native and foreign literatures.

**Keywords:** European Powers, Ottomans, Gunboat Diplomacy, Salonika, Armenian, Reform

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\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Sakarya University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of History, Turkey, fyavuz@sakarya.edu.tr.

## Selanik Olayı (1876) ve Ermeni Reform Talepleri (1879-80) Örneğinde Düvel-i Muazzama'nın Osmanlı Devleti'ne Yönelik Gambot Diplomasisi

### Öz

Donanmanın küçük bir parçası olan gambot, tarih süreci içerisinde devletlerin donanmalarıyla uyguladıkları bir cebri diplomasi enstrümanının ismine ilham olmuştur. Daha ziyade büyük devletlerin faaliyetleriyle ilişkilendirilen gambot diplomasisi donanma gücünün doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak saldırgan bir diplomatik baskı unsuru olarak kullanılması anlamına gelmektedir. Dünya tarihinde özellikle Fransız İhtilali sonrasında yoğunlaşan bu cebri diplomasinin birçok örneğini görmek mümkündür. Her daim büyük devletlerin dikkatlerini yoğunlaştırdığı Osmanlı Devleti de büyük devletlerin bu politikasına muhatap olmuştur. On dokuzuncu yüzyıl boyunca Osmanlı Devleti toprakları üzerindeki rekabet, Avrupalı devletlerin gambot diplomasisini her fırsatta uygulamalarına neden olmuştur. Bu çerçevede, bu makale öncelikle Düvel-i Muazzama'nın Osmanlı Devleti'ne yönelik gambot diplomasisi uygulamalarının mukayeseli analizini iki örnek (Selanik Olayı ve Ermeni reform talepleri) üzerinden yapmayı hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca çalışma yerli ve yabancı literatür üzerinden yapılan değerlendirmelerle, gambot diplomasisi ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin bu cebri diplomasiye karşı takip ettiği politikaların anlaşılmasına da katkı yapmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupalı Devletler, Osmanlılar, Gambot Diplomasisi, Selanik, Ermeni, Reform

### Introduction

Throughout history, imperial powers have sought to impose their interests or to increase their influence and prestige on smaller states by threatening with their powerful navies and especially by dispatching their warships to the territorial waters of targeted countries. Such practices of the powers are conceptualized as gunboat diplomacy<sup>1</sup>, which refers to any aggressive diplomatic activity carried out with the

<sup>1</sup> For the definition and details of gunboat diplomacy, see. James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919–1991: Political Applications of Limited Naval Force*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 1981; Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Gunboat Diplomacy and the old Navy, 1877-1889*, Greenwood Press, 1973; David Healy, *Gunboat Diplomacy in the Wilson Era: The U. S. Navy in Haiti, 1915-1916*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1976; Andrew M. Dorman, Thomas G. Otte, *Military Intervention: From Gunboat Diplomacy to Humanitarian Intervention*, Dartmouth, 1995; Aygül Ernek Alan, "Propaganda Aracı Olarak Gambot Diplomasi", *Propaganda, Algı, İdeoloji ve Toplum İnşasına Dair İncelemeler*, ed. Gürdal Ülger, Beta Yay., İstanbul 2015, pp. 83-110.

implicit or explicit use of naval power, usually associated with the activities of the Great Powers<sup>2</sup> principally in the second half of the nineteenth century and at the outset of the twentieth century<sup>3</sup>. Though it is a bit paradoxical to attempt a definition of this concept<sup>4</sup>, James Cable, in his ground-breaking work, defines it as "*the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state*"<sup>5</sup>. This description shows that it is a country's explicit exhibition of the threat or use of military force on another country to impose its own interests. In this sense, history records various examples carried out by the Great Powers.

We argue that many events occurred in especially the 19th century might be regarded within the concept of gunboat diplomacy. The Great Britain performed first known example of gunboat diplomacy in China in 1740<sup>6</sup>. Throughout the 19th century, British frequently sent out Royal Navy or gunboats and warships for the aim of gunboat diplomacy. They implemented it for example during the Second Barbary War (1815-1816) and the Opium Wars and even carried out it for just one British citizen<sup>7</sup>. From the mid-19th century, the other powers, France,

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<sup>2</sup> At the second half of the 19th century, the United Kingdom, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany and Italy were accepted as the Great Powers. For the position of the Powers, see. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of The Great Powers, Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, London Sydney Wellington, 1988, pp-202-249.

<sup>3</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> P. K. Ghosh, "Revisiting Gunboat Diplomacy: An Instrument of Threat or Use of Limited Naval Force", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXIV, No. 11, February 2001, p. 2006. For theoretical context of gunboat diplomacy see. Robert Mandel, The Effectiveness of Gunboat Diplomacy, *International Studies Quarterly*, (1986), 30, pp. 59-76.

<sup>5</sup> Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy*, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> For the first example see. Glyn Williams, *The Prize of All the Oceans*, New York: Viking, 1999, pp. 180-195. For the known early examples of the gunboat diplomacy see. Fikretin Yavuz, "Düvel-i Muazzama'nın Baskı Unsuru Olarak Gambot Diplomasisi ve Osmanlı Devleti", *Uluslararası Bilimsel Araştırmalar Kongresi (UBAK)*, 5 Sosyal Bilimler, ed. Sinem Yıldırım, Ankara 2019, pp. 33-35.

<sup>7</sup> Recorded as the Don Pacifico Affair, it was one of the best episode of gunboat diplomacy, occurred in 1850 and connected with a British subject. For details see. Songül Çolak, Metin Aydar, "İngiliz-Yunan İlişkileri Bağlamında 19. Yüzyılda Gunboat Diplomasisi -Don Pacifico Örneğinde-", *Belleten*, Vol. 82, No. 295, Ankara, Aralık 2018, pp.

Netherlands and the United States practiced this coercive diplomacy<sup>8</sup>. Particularly the USA seems to stand in the forefront in practicing it for protecting American citizens and their interests, principally in Latin America at the turn of the 19th century<sup>9</sup>. When considering the examples, it is undoubtedly evident that the Ottoman Empire, on which the Great Powers always attentively casting, was not free from this coercive diplomatic method.

The rivalry on the declining Ottoman territorial integrity among the European Great Powers became the characteristic in the late Ottoman Era. We can affirm that the Porte was exposed to gunboat diplomacy at a very early period following the Napoleon Invasion of Egypt (1798-1801). After a while, when Britain saw the French and Ottoman rapprochement, they delivered the Mediterranean squadron of the Royal Navy to Istanbul in order to compel the Porte to execute their demand about Bastien Sebastiani, the French ambassador to Istanbul<sup>10</sup>.

During the Tanzimat Era, major European Powers occasionally used gunboat diplomacy as a component of their political-diplomatic strategy in the events, exclusively regarding the non-Muslim subjects of the Porte. For example, they used gunboat diplomacy by sending their frigates in the events in Jeddah (1858), Syria, and Lebanon (1860-1861)<sup>11</sup>. Considering all the events, we could maintain that the Great Powers regarded the incidents, caused by non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire, as an opportunity to direct or intervene the Ottomans. Accordingly, grappled with the outbreak of several uprisings and wars in the 1870s, the Balkans became the pretext for the

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957-978; Dolphus Whitten, "The Don Pacifico Affair", *The Historian*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (February 1986), pp. 255-267; Geoffrey Hicks, "Don Pacifico, Democracy, and Danger: The Protectionist Party Critique of British Foreign Policy, 1850-1852", *The International History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 2004), pp. 515-540.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Michael Cullen, *A History of Japan, 1582-1941*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> *Imperialism and Expansionism in American History*, ed. Chris J. Magoc. vd., vol.1, California, 2016, pp. 266-267.

<sup>10</sup> The story is best described by Fatih Yeşil, "İstanbul Önlerinde Bir İngiliz Filosu: Uluslararası Bir Krizin Siyasî ve Askerî Anatomisi", *Nizam-ı Kadim'den Nizam-ı Cedid'e III. Selim ve Dönemi*, ed. Seyfi Kenan, İSAM İstanbul 2010, pp. 391-494.

<sup>11</sup> W. L. Ochsenwald, "The Jiddah Massacre of 1858", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Oct, 1977), p. 319.

intervention of Great Powers in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire.

### **The Balkan Crisis and The Salonika Incident**

Before discussing the details of the Salonika Incident, it is essential to give a general picture of the chaotic atmosphere in the Balkans in order to find out the motives of the deplorable episode occurred in Salonika. The Balkan Crisis or "Great Eastern Crisis" as termed began in 1875 with the events of Bosnia and Herzegovina and proceeded with the Bulgarian Uprising<sup>12</sup> and concluded with the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 (*93 Harbi*)<sup>13</sup> and ultimately ended with the Treaty of Berlin in July 1878. There were various reasons lying behind the emergence of such a turbulent atmosphere in the Balkan peninsula<sup>14</sup>. While discussing the factors behind the crisis, some researchers allege that the reason was the inadequacy and mismanagement of the Sublime Porte, but the others state that the reason for the crisis emanated from the Balkan nations' desire for independence<sup>15</sup>. The uprising sparked in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875 and rapidly spread among the other Balkan nations. The measures taken by the Ottoman Empire against the successive unrests eventually led to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 that ended in Turkish defeat. Then as the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano offered advantages to the Russians, British came forward and convoked the Great Powers in Berlin. And finally, the Treaty of Berlin were signed, reducing markedly the Ottoman territories and power in Europe<sup>16</sup>. At the beginning of this period, a turmoil broke out in Salonika/Thessaloniki and resulted a diplomatic crisis between the Ottoman Empire and European Powers.

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<sup>12</sup> See. Mithat Aydın, *Balkanlar'da İsyân: Osmanlı-İngiliz Rekabeti, Bosna-Hersek ve Bulgaristan'daki Ayaklanmalar (1875-1876)*, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> For details see. *The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78*, Ed. Ömer Turan, METU Department of History-Meiji University Institute of Humanities, Ankara 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Yuluğ Tekin Kurat, "1877-78 Osmanlı-Rus Harbinin Sebepleri", *Bellekten*, vol. 102, Ankara 1962, pp. 567- 591.

<sup>15</sup> Aydın, *İbid*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>16</sup> For various aspects of the War and the Treaty of Berlin see. *War and Diplomacy, The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz ve Peter Sluglett, The University of Utah Press 2011.

What triggered this incident, known as "the Salonika Incident" or "the Girl Incident"<sup>17</sup>, is a story of a young Bulgarian girl conversion to Islam. The name of the girl, who was the centre of the controversy, was Stephana. She lost her father at the age of 12 or 13, lived in poverty with her mother and two brothers in a small village, Avrethisar in Macedonia. Influenced by her Muslim neighbours, she voluntarily embraced Islam following her father's death<sup>18</sup>. When she was in 16 or 19 years old, she fell in love and associated with a Turk, Emin Effendi, and had to convert to Islam for marriage<sup>19</sup>. Although her mother was against her decision, she came to Salonika to complete administrative paperwork which would officially enact her conversion. When she arrived at the Salonika train terminal, she asked police officers to escort her to the governor's residence. Meanwhile, as her mother called for help from Christian bystanders shouting that "*is there any Christian here who will save my daughter from becoming a Turk?*"<sup>20</sup>, she was seized and as she wore a traditional Turkish attire, her clothes (Yashmak and Feraceh) were removed by a mob of Christians gathered around<sup>21</sup>. According to another version of the story during the struggle between the police and Greek mob, the girl's feraceh were torn and when they dragged her away, they made her almost naked. And the Muslims who were there intervened without knowing the course of the event. Meanwhile, when the girl asked for help by shouting, "*Don't touch me, I'm a Muslim,*" to save herself from the hands of the mob, the Muslims there intervened again. Those who attempted to kidnap Stephane compelled her into a carriage and rushed away. There was also her mother in the car who by chance found her daughter at the train station. Those in the carriage both lied on her so as not to be seen and covered her mouth, not to be heard from the outside. Then she was taken to the building of the American consulate<sup>22</sup>. The Ottoman archival records, also, describe the

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<sup>17</sup> For full description of the story see. Ahmet Oğuz, *1876 Selanik Vakası Osmanlı'nın Balkan Siyaseti*, Grafiker Yayınları, Ankara 2013; Berke Torunoğlu, *Murder in Salonika, 1876: A Tale of Apostasy Turned into An International Crisis*, Libra Yayınları, İstanbul 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Torunoğlu, *İbid*, p.49.

<sup>19</sup> Oğuz, *İbid*, p. 49.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, "Salonika After the Assassinations, Jun 03, 1876, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Torunoğlu, *İbid*, p.50.

<sup>22</sup> Oğuz, *İbid*, p. 51.

beginning of the event in the same line. At the end, they were taken to the residence of American consulate of Bulgarian origin, Lazzaro<sup>23</sup>.

The next day morning, as news of the violation and abduction of a Muslim girl by Christians spread in the city, a Muslim crowd began to assemble in front of the local governor's mansion demanded the rescue of the girl. At that time the consuls of France and Germany, Jules Moulin and Henry Abbott accompanied with Banikoglu<sup>24</sup>, learned of the disturbance in the city and decided to intervene and went there, tried to mediate. Seeing that their demand was not answered, the mob wrecked so much their anger on Abbot and Moulin that they lynched them<sup>25</sup>.

The murder of the consuls caused a diplomatic crisis between the Ottoman Empire and Great Powers, chiefly France and Germany, whose consuls were killed. In order to avoid the pressure and probable counter action of the Europeans, the Ottomans took prompt action as soon as they were informed. Abdulaziz sent the Grand Vizier to express his condolences and sorrows to the Ambassadors of France and Germany in Istanbul. The Grand Vizier affirmed that the incident would be investigated perfectly and those responsible would be punished instantly as two officials, Eşref Pasha and Vahan Efendi, has already been sent there<sup>26</sup>. As the Sultan felt that the Great Powers politically pressured the Porte, he at once changed the governor of the Salonika and dispatched the new governor and inspector to the city with four contingents<sup>27</sup>.

In a short time, the public order of the city was ensured with the immediate measures. Despite the dismissals and arrests, the publication of news in the western newspapers that Muslims would massacre Christians in Salonika had stirred the European public

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<sup>23</sup> *BOA. HR. SYS.* 1382-16, 9/1-2. For the Ottoman version of the details see. *BOA. HR. SYS.* 1382-16; *BOA. İ.DUİT*, 138-33.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, "The Salonika Assassinations", May, 17, 1876, p.6.

<sup>25</sup> *Le Temps*, "L'affaire de Salonique", 10 Mai 1876, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Sabah*, 27 Nisan 1876/15 r.ahir 1293, p.1, *The Times*, "The Salonika Assassinations", May, 11, 1876, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Oğuz, *ibid*, p. 61.

opinion<sup>28</sup>. These kinds of news instantly echoed in Germany, France, Russia and Italy. Thereupon, they implemented gunboat diplomacy and sent their warships to the port of Salonika. The French and Italians dispatched their frigates to the city, the former from Toulon and the latter from Brindisi<sup>29</sup>. By employing this coercive gunboat diplomacy, the Great Powers implied that they could suspend their relations with the Ottoman Empire<sup>30</sup>. In other words, they put forward an example of gunboat diplomacy.

It may be possible to understand the effects of the gunboats sent out by the Great Powers to the port of Salonika during the investigation and execution of the court decision. At the beginning of the incident and during the investigation, the ambassadors of the European powers in Istanbul continued their diplomatic pressure, steadily demanding information about the developments from the Porte. For example, both Italian and Austrian foreign ministers requested information about the measures taken by the Ottoman authorities<sup>31</sup>. Meanwhile, almost all the European Power representatives took a crucial decision in a meeting in Istanbul chaired by the Russian Ambassador Ignatieff: to implement gunboat diplomacy. From the very beginning of the Salonika Incident, western newspapers emphasized in their news and reports that there was no tranquillity and security in the city. Therefore, the Great Powers sent their warships to the city to put diplomatic pressure on the Ottoman Empire. The gunboat diplomacy, that is, the presence of warships off the coast of Salonika meant an increase in the existing diplomatic pressures on the Ottomans. Thus the Ottoman government dispatched its own ships and soldiers to the city in order to ward off the intervention of the Great Powers and to relieve their diplomatic pressure.

One could observe detailed information about the European attitudes and gunboat diplomacy in the foreign journals and

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<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, "Assassinations at Salonica", May, 12, 1876, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *BOA. HR. TO.* 124-84, 124-100.

<sup>30</sup> Mithat Aydın, "Sir Henry G. Elliot'ın İstanbul Büyükelçiliği (1867–1877) Dönemindeki Bazı Büyük Siyasi Olaylara Bakışı", *Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi (OTAM)*, No:18, Year: 2005, pp. 39-40.

<sup>31</sup> Oğuz, *ibid*, p. 64.



newspapers. According to the news, France dispatched "Gladiator" to Salonika port and Italy dispatched two warships named Maria-pia and the messengerio<sup>32</sup>, France, Austria and Florence would send their warships, too. This attitude of the powers right after the incident meant precisely the total blockade of the Salonika. After a while, the telegrams from the city to the Ottoman government confirmed that they carried out it. Accordingly, France and England sent two armoured warships to the city, while Germany dispatched two corvettes. Moreover, newspapers claimed that Austria and Russia intended to land troops in Bosnia and Russia decided to send off two armoured ships and two corvettes. Besides France had the intention of sending three more warships to the city. The Great Powers had literally lined up to show of strength. At the end, as the newspapers records both the types, number and soldiers of the warships, their number amounted to 15 that arrived and anchored off the Port of Salonika<sup>33</sup>.

In order to avert the diplomatic pressure, the Porte tried to execute and to conclude the court process as rapidly as possible. The Ottoman officials reported the court process to the Porte daily. Initially, the court sentenced six people to death. The rest of the culprits were sentenced to life imprisonment and sentences for various periods. During the execution of death sentences, the attitude of the warships in the port of Salonika clearly shows practicing of the gunboat diplomacy of the Great Powers. At this point, the death orders were executed immediately. In fact, the pressures of European powers led to the instant execution of court decisions. Actually, to avert the pressure, six culprits were executed at the edge of the quay walls, a place open to public and easily visible from the warships in the Salonika port. During the execution, the warships of the Great Powers, in accordance with the gunboat diplomacy, pointed their guns towards the Muslim quarters of Salonika<sup>34</sup>. In short, the Salonika Incident is one of the obvious example of gunboat diplomacy of the Great Powers, and it also showed that there was no other alternative for the Ottomans rather than compromise to surmount the harsh stance of powers. Shortly

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<sup>32</sup> *Le Temps*, 11 Mai 1876, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, "Salonica After the Assassinations", June 3, 1876, p.6; *Journal Des Debats Politiques et Litteraires*, 19 Mai 1876, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Oğuz, *ibid*, pp. 65-66.

afterwards, the Ottomans experienced similar coercive diplomacy of the Great Powers. Following the Treaty of Berlin, principally Great Britain implemented it for the Armenian reform demands.

### **Gunboat Diplomacy for the Armenian Reform**

During the last quarter of the 19th century, Armenian Question was one elements of the Great Powers to put pressure on the Ottoman administration. With the Armenian reform decision by the Treaty of Berlin, the European Powers occasionally resorted to gunboat diplomacy. Referred as "*numayış-i bahri* (naval operation)" in the Ottoman official correspondences, they implemented gunboat diplomacy notably during the Armenian events of 1890s.

Following the Treaty of Berlin, the signatory powers often raised the Armenian Reform issue. Pursuing strictly the issue, Britain officially delivered memorandums and notes to the Ottoman government. After the first note on 29 August 1878, Abdulhamid II appointed Said Pasha to Grand vizierate that annoyed the British. In his congratulatory visit to the new Grand Vizier, Henry Layard, the British ambassador, intimidated that the Ottoman Empire would be jeopardized if the Armenian reforms were not granted. Stating in his note to the Porte on 27 October 1879 that the reforms were not implemented and should be applied as soon as possible, Layard requested unacceptable demands from the Porte like an appointment of a Christian governor to Erzurum<sup>35</sup>. In fact, following the Treaty, he sharpened his attitude towards Abdulhamid II and the Porte. In his report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he underlined that the best thing was to make the Sultan's fears relapse and that if he did not implement the reforms at once, he would tell the Sultan that the British flotilla would come to Besige Bay on the Dardanelles<sup>36</sup>.

As understood from his statement, this time the prime mover of gunboat diplomacy was Layard. Probably because of his correspondence, the British Foreign Secretary Salisbury implemented

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<sup>35</sup> Cevdet Küçük, *Osmanlı Diplomasisinde Ermeni Meselesinin Ortaya Çıkışı (1878-1897)*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1984, pp. 23-24, 50-51.

<sup>36</sup> Yuluğ Tekin Kurat, *Henry Layard'ın İstanbul Elçiliği (1877-1880)*, Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, Ankara, 1968, p. 190.

gunboat diplomacy and set out the navy to get what they wanted from the Porte. The Porte learned this from a telegram published in Istanbul newspapers that announced the British fleet in Malta setting out to Ottoman waters<sup>37</sup>. The rumour that the British navy move to the Straits caused a stir in Istanbulians and the Porte. Upon this, Abdulhamid II sent one of his officials to Layard and demanded an explanation. Indeed, he claimed that the British government should stop the operation and stated aggressively that if they would not respond to his ultimatum within two days, he would promptly take counter measures. In his response, Layard boldly expressed referring the Armenian Reforms that British have recently employed the Royal Navy. Stating that the Sultan had told him a few months ago that reforms would be implemented and that Baker Pasha would be appointed as a commander to "Armenia", Henry Layard expressed that the Royal Navy was instructed not to set out to the Beshige Bay because of the Sultan's promise and that he, himself, could not intervene again if the Sultan would not fulfil his promises. The ambassador's words implicitly showed that British would continue to carry out gunboat diplomacy. He advised the Porte that from now on the Ottoman government should contact with the British government not through him but through the Ottoman ambassador in London<sup>38</sup>.

Musurus Pasha, Ottoman Ambassador to London, in his meeting with the Lord Salisbury expressed that the Royal Navy should end its operation. He also assured him that the Ottoman government's policy on this issue would not change and that the British reform proposals were considered and would be introduced without delay, and he hoped that foreign experts would also be assigned in Anatolia soon. Despite the Ottoman ambassador's calming demeanour, Lord Salisbury implied in his response they would continue to carry out gunboat diplomacy. In his point of view, there was no obstacle for the Royal Navy to go to the Aegean Sea, yet the British government ordered not to enter Turkish territorial waters. After notifying that he could not make future guarantees on this issue, Salisbury implied that the British government

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<sup>37</sup> *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, no. 411, 29 Teşrinievvel 1879/ 13 Zilkade 1296, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Sir. A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury*, FO. 424/88, no. 416, 29 October 1879, p. 310. Kurat, *ibid*, p. 200.

would continue this coercive diplomacy if the Sultan would not implement the promised reforms<sup>39</sup>. But it was absolutely nothing more than Salisbury's bluff. Because, in his telegram to Layard the same day, he noted that he had requested from the Naval Ministry to postpone the departure of the Navy for a while<sup>40</sup>. The probable reason for this was Abdulhamid II's ultimatum. On the same day, the Sultan delivered a strong ultimatum to Layard and notified that the British Foreign Office must abandon the idea of sending Navy within 24 hours, otherwise he would request help from Russia and send the Ottoman Navy to the Dardanelles. He extended his resolute policy stance expressing that "*If Great Britain attempts to follow the policy against the Porte like in Afghanistan, it will definitely see that this would not be so easy*"<sup>41</sup>.

Layard's telegraph dated on the same day to the British Foreign Office confirmed that the Great Powers have been practicing gunboat diplomacy against the Ottoman government for a while. According to the news, which he gained from a reliable source but considered sceptical, the French ambassador and the Russian chargé d'affaires had told the Turkish Foreign Affairs that the Ottoman government was not to be afraid of the British Naval Operation. Because the Great Powers had sent out their warships to the Ottoman territorial waters when asked for anything from the Porte, just as in the past. Layard stated that the Porte was more astonished by the French ambassador's attitude than the Russians. Saying that "*the French ambassador made himself scarce after the navy operation rumours has arisen*" and "*He was off the track*"<sup>42</sup>, he emphasized that the British should monitoring the French.

Shortly afterwards, Layard sent a telegram to the British Foreign Office that gave details on the subject. He wrote that the Sultan told him he was anxious for a probable British navy's move to the Ottoman waters. Also, he said Layard that even if the Council of Ministers would

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<sup>39</sup> *Mushurus Pasha to the Marquis of Salisbury*, FO. 424/89, no.12, 1 November 1879, p. 11. *The Marquis of Salisbury to Sir A. H. Layard*, FO. 424/89, no. 60, 62, 4 November 1879, pp. 56, 62.

<sup>40</sup> *The Marquis of Salisbury to Sir A. H. Layard*, FO. 424/89, no. 59, 4 November 1879, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> Kurat, *ibid*, p. 201.

<sup>42</sup> *Sir. A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury*, FO. 424/89, no. 71, 4 November 1879, p. 62.

pass the reforms and submit to his approval, he would not sign it because it might be regarded that the Sultan signs it because of his fears from the British fleet. Although Abdulhamid II asked a written record from the ambassador ensuring that the British navy would not set out to the Turkish waters, Layard did not give a positive response<sup>43</sup>. At the same time, the Ottoman Foreign Ministry sent a memorandum to the British government warning that the Royal Navy abandon to set out not only to Beshige Bay but also to the Ottoman waters<sup>44</sup>.

The response of the British Foreign Secretary to Layard's letter requesting instructions on this matter reveals that they thought to carry out gunboat diplomacy. Salisbury wrote that it is useless to tell that the Royal Navy move to Turkish waters is not for intimidating the Sultan receiving nothing in return. He also emphasized that if Abdulhamid II would grant a decree to Layard assuring that he had appointed Baker as commander of an independent gendarmerie unit comprising not less than five thousand in Anatolia, then Layard could give the written document requested by the Sultan<sup>45</sup>. As can be seen, the British did not abandon the coercive method. On the other hand, the Porte believed that the British attitude on this issue would prevent the application of requested reforms.

Sava Pasha, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, wrote to Salisbury on November, 14 that the rumours of the British fleet move to Ottoman waters made a negative impact on the Ottoman public and it could cause great troubles. Sava Pasha expressed that the Sultan wanted to implement the reforms, but using the Royal Navy as a threat would make the application of reforms more difficult. He also warned Musurus Pasha that he should see Salisbury and did his best to prevent probable gunboat operation<sup>46</sup>. Although the British hampered the navy issue, they stepped back because of Abdulhamid's determined attitude. Musurus Pasha acknowledged that Lord Salisbury ordered the Royal

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<sup>43</sup> Sir. A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, FO. 424/89, no. 117, 10 November 1879, p. 80.

<sup>44</sup> BOA. HR. TO. 497-97.

<sup>45</sup> The Marquis of Salisbury to Sir. A. H. Layard, FO. 424/89, no. 133, 12 November 1879, p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> Sawas Pasha to Musurus Pasha, FO. 424/89, no. 186, 14 November 1879, pp. 138-139.

Navy not to set out from Malta<sup>47</sup>. Soon after it was revealed that it has just dispatched to Urla, Smyrna. In fact, Admiral Horby has received the order to leave for there, the ordinary naval port during winters for all the foreign squadrons of the Levant<sup>48</sup>. Apparently British policy was to force the Sultan to implement reforms through demonstration of their power. It seemed that they aimed to bring Abdulhamid II to his knees with gunboat diplomacy. However, the correspondences among the British officials showed that there was a different dimension. Actually, they feared Turkish-Russian rapprochement<sup>49</sup>. According to the news they gained, the Ottoman Sultan agreed with the Russians to protect his throne and gave approval them to send their navy to Istanbul. Therefore, as the British aimed to keep abreast of developments closely, they mobilized the Royal Navy<sup>50</sup>. The primary purpose of dispatching their navy was the fear of Russian influence or control in Istanbul. In his interview with the Sultan, Layard personally asked him that showed the British were undoubtedly anxious<sup>51</sup>. At any rate, it was clear however that British gunboat diplomacy yielded results as the policy much annoyed Abdulhamid II, the Porte and Istanbulians. Needless to say that the British naturally noticed it, and the Royal Navy would appear in the Ottoman territorial waters soon. After a short while, reform issue became the pretext for the British fleets move to the Ottoman waters.

When W. Evert Gladstone, the leader of the liberal party, became prime minister, the Armenian reform demands, namely Armenian Question, was more apparent in the political agenda and public opinion. Gladstone's election of prime ministry was regarded by the separatist Armenians an opportunity and highly encouraged them<sup>52</sup>. Known as his anti-Turkish sentiments, Gladstone at once cooperated with the Great

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<sup>47</sup> BOA. *Y.A.Hus.*, 162-108.

<sup>48</sup> BOA. *HR. SFR.3.*, 268-24.

<sup>49</sup> BOA. *Y.A.Hus.*, 162-97.

<sup>50</sup> Kurat, *İbid*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>51</sup> Sir. A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, FO. 424/89, no. 268, 21 November 1879, p. 274.

<sup>52</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement, The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the 19th Century*, California University Press, Berkeley 1963, p. 84.

Powers in the Armenian Question and sent Goschen to Istanbul to have an audience with Abdulhamid II. Finally, in a collective note on June 11, 1880, the Great Powers declared that the Porte did not fulfil the assured improvements and reforms, and that they believed the reforms could only be possible with their interventions. At the end, they aggressively warned the Porte that the Ottoman government would be responsible for any further delays<sup>53</sup>. In reply to the collective note of the ambassadors, the Porte notified on 5th of July that the proposed reforms were not only for Armenians but also for all subjects of the Porte and that they would be applied immediately after the preparations. Despite the Porte guarantee, the ambassadors reminding Abdulhamid II of the promises of reforms secured in the Treaty of Berlin failed in a collective note on 7 September 1880 alleged that the Porte did not fulfil any of its responsibilities that undertook in the Treaty<sup>54</sup>. It is just following this note that the Great Powers, jointly, carried out gunboat diplomacy.

Meanwhile, there appeared a crisis about Ulgun in Montenegro, a city on the Adriatic coast, predominantly inhabited by Muslim Albanians but decided to be handed over to Montenegro. In order to intimidate the Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers dispatched their navies to the port of Ulgun and imposed sanctions on the Ottoman government<sup>55</sup>. As the inhabitants of the city were against this decision, they defied. Then the Great Powers dispatched their gunboats to the port of Dubrovnik, assuming that the Ottomans were procrastinating and they remained there approximately two months. Eventually, the Ottomans had to hand over it to Montenegrins<sup>56</sup>. This shows that Great Powers used gunboat diplomacy simultaneously both for the Armenian Reform demands and Montenegrin issue.

Following the Balkan Crisis and the Treaty of Berlin, the reform demands of the Great Powers both for the Balkan people and

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<sup>53</sup> Muşa Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia 1877-1897*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 2000, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Küçük, *İbid*, pp. 77,83.

<sup>55</sup> Şaşmaz, *İbid*, p. 95.

<sup>56</sup> Ayşe Özcan, "Berlin Antlaşması Sonrasında Karadağ'da Müslüman Emlakı", *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Cilt. 35, Sayı. 59, Ankara 2016, p. 89.

specifically for the Armenians living in Anatolia turned into a major motive. As in 1879 and 1880, they employed gunboat diplomacy in the next two decades, particularly during the 1890s, while there appeared Armenian's related events and uprisings in Istanbul and Anatolia. During this period, there were various instances that the Great Powers dispatched their navies to intervene<sup>57</sup>. In the course of those events, they sent out warships to the Ottoman territorial waters even to the Bosphorus claiming that they just sought to protect their own citizens. For instance, during the events of 1895 in Istanbul, the European powers requested to send extra stationeries to Bosphorus for their ambassadors in Istanbul<sup>58</sup>. Likewise, next year, the Ottoman authorities heard that Britain, France, Germany and the United States endeavoured to dispatch extra stationeries to protect their ambassadors and citizens during the raid on Ottoman Bank in August 1896<sup>59</sup>. These attitudes of the Great Powers in the 1890s certainly prove that on all occasions they brought forward gunboat diplomacy as an argument to put political pressure on the Ottoman government.

### Conclusion

In the 19th century, the Ottomans were exposed to the pressure of the Great Powers' gunboat diplomacy in many instances. It seemed natural, considering all these events, that the Great Powers implemented it by using their warships and gunboats as threatening arguments towards the Ottoman governments.

In this context, the Salonika Incident and Armenian reform demands were two considerable examples of the Great Powers' politics on the

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<sup>57</sup> For example, the British implemented it during the court of two Armenian teachers responsible for the riot in Merzifon in 1893. See. Zeynep İskefiyeli, "Ermeni Meselesi Çerçevesinde 1893 Ankara Mahkemelerinin Yeri ve Önemi", *Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü*, Unpublished Phd. Thesis, Sakarya 2008, pp. 229-235; Zeynep İskefiyeli, "Karabet Tomayan'ın Birinci Dünya Savaşı Öncesinde Ermenilere Nasihatleri", *Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü-Journal of Turkish Reseaches Institute* TAED-62, May 2018, pp. 465-480.

<sup>58</sup> Arman, J. Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and Armenian Question from 1830's to 1914*, Gomitas Institute, Princeton, 2003, p. 243; Salahi, S. Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians Victims of Great Power Diplomacy*, K. Rustem & Brother, London 1987, pp-193-194.

<sup>59</sup> For further information see. Fikrettin Yavuz, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Ermeni Terörü 1896 Osmanlı Bankası Baskını*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 2015, pp. 308-315.



Ottoman Empire. The European ambassadors in Istanbul played a crucial role during the Salonika Incident that turned into an international dispute. The subsequent developments show the effectiveness of gunboat diplomacy challenges of the Great Powers. Correspondingly, we may observe the same effect in several instances during the Armenian reform demands of the European Powers following the Treaty of Berlin and next decades. In short, the events and unfortunate occurrences in the Ottoman geography that an excuse for intervention put the Ottoman authorities in diplomatic dilemma. As may be seen by the two examples here discussed of, the show of force and hard-line policy of the Great Powers forced the Ottomans to act modestly and even in specific cases, like in the Salonika Incident, to make concessions.

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