



RELATIONS BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN WESTERN PRESS ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

BATI BASININDA BİRİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI ÖNCESİ OSMANLI DEVLETİ – JAPONYA İLİŞKİLERİ

Can Eyüp ÇEKİÇ

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1878'de II. Abdülhamid tarafından askıya alınan Osmanlı Meclisi, Jön Türk Devrimi'nin ardından nihayet 17 Aralık 1908'de yeniden toplandı. Bu önemli olay vesilesiyle, her Avrupa gücü ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ezeli düşmanı Rusya da dahil olmak üzere tüm ülkeler tebrik mesajları gönderdi - Japonya hariç. Japonya'dan bir tebrik mesajının gelmemesi, özellikle Japonya'nın feodal bir devletten ilerici bir güce dönüşerek II. Abdülhamid ve Jön Türkler için ilham kaynağı olması nedeniyle Osmanlılar için şaşırtıcıydı. Bu hayranlık, 1905'te Japonya'nın Rusya'ya karşı kazandığı zaferle zirveye ulaştı ve Doğulu ve Hristiyan olmayan bir ordunun bir Avrupa rakibine karşı zaferini simgeliyordu. Buna rağmen, Japon hükümeti Osmanlılara karşı mesafeli bir duruş sergiledi. Japonya, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında Britanya ve Rusya ile ittifak kurdu ve İstanbul'un işgali sırasında çıkarlarını korumak için ancak savaştan sonra Osmanlı başkentine bir elçi gönderdi. Japonya, 1908'de neden bir mesaj göndermedi? Japon hükümeti, Osmanlılarla diplomatik ilişkiler kurmaktan neden kaçındı? Bu makale, Japonya ile Osmanlı İmparatorluğu arasında Birinci Dünya Savaşı arifesinde bir ittifakın önündeki engelleri oluşturan çıkar çatışmaları ve siyasi kültürlerin rolünü araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

ABSTRACT

Suspended by Abdulhamid II in 1878, the Ottoman Parliament finally reconvened on December 17, 1908, following the Young Turk Revolution. On this momentous occasion, messages of congratulations were sent by all nations, including every European power and Russia, the archenemy of the Ottoman Empire—except for Japan. The absence of a congratulatory message from Japan was surprising to the Ottomans, especially considering Japan's rapid modernization, which had transformed it from a feudal state into a progressive power, serving as an inspiration to both Abdulhamid II and the Young Turks. This admiration peaked with Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, symbolizing an Eastern and non-Christian army's triumph over a European rival. Despite this, the Japanese government maintained a distant stance towards the Ottomans. Japan aligned itself with Britain and Russia during the First World War and only sent an envoy to the Ottoman capital after the war to protect its interests during the occupation of Istanbul. Why did Japan fail to send a message in 1908? Why did the Japanese government refrain from establishing diplomatic ties with the Ottomans? This article aims to explore how conflicting interests and political cultures prevented an alignment between Japan and the Ottoman Empire on the eve of the First World War.

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INTRODUCTION

Contrasting Diplomatic Strategies

Japan

Since 1902, Japan had been bound by an alliance with Great Britain, known as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. This agreement required Japan to maintain "strict neutrality" in the event that Great Britain became embroiled in conflict with another power (Hamilton & Herwig, 2012). This strategic partnership was mutually beneficial; it provided Japan with the security of British support while allowing Britain to secure its interests in East Asia without a substantial military presence (Best, 2021: 94-6; Şahin, 2001, p. 104).

Japanese leaders in Tokyo viewed the political and military turmoil in Europe as a potential opportunity to enhance Japan's status on the global stage. The alliance with Britain was particularly significant in this regard, as it not only legitimized Japan's burgeoning role as a major power but also provided a framework within which Japan could pursue its imperial ambitions without direct conflict with Western powers (Best, 2021: 80).

The early twentieth century was a period of intense modernization and military expansion for Japan. The nation sought to position itself as the "chief nation of the Orient," a vision supported by its rapid industrial growth and military successes, such as the victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. This triumph over a European power underscored Japan's military prowess and its capacity to challenge Western dominance in Asia (Jansen, 2002: 448).

Furthermore, Japan's strategic diplomacy during this period involved carefully navigating its relationships with other major powers. The alliance with Britain was not merely a defensive pact; it was a cornerstone of Japan's broader strategy to secure its interests in Asia, including Korea and Manchuria (Jansen, 2002: 439). By aligning with Britain, Japan could counterbalance the influence of Russia and other European powers in the region.

As Europe edged closer to the First World War, Japanese leaders foresaw that the imminent "great confusion" might create a power vacuum in Asia. This potential instability was perceived as a strategic opportunity for Japan to assert its dominance and expand its territorial and economic influence. The alliance with Britain, therefore, was more than a mere act of neutrality; it was a calculated move that enabled Japan to position itself for future conflicts and opportunities on the global stage (Hamilton & Herwig, 2012: 146). By the end of the First World War, as a British ally, Japan found itself on the victorious side, which allowed it to consolidate its status among the world's leading nations, and its economy experienced significant growth as a result (Kösebalaban, 1998: 81).

In summary, the early twentieth century was a transformative period for Japanese diplomacy, characterized by strategic alliances and calculated moves to elevate Japan's international standing (Best, 2021: 163). The Anglo-Japanese Alliance played a crucial role in this strategy, enabling Japan to pursue its ambitions with the backing of a major Western power, and setting the stage for its emergence as a dominant force in East Asia.

The Ottoman Empire

Abdulhamid II, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1909, was significantly influenced by the success of Japanese modernization. The Meiji Restoration, which began in 1868, had rapidly transformed Japan from a feudal society into a formidable modern state. This transformation was particularly notable for its ability to combine Western technological advancements with traditional Japanese culture, a feat that Abdulhamid II admired and sought to emulate within the Ottoman Empire (Worringer, 2004: 214).

Abdulhamid's admiration for Japan extended beyond mere modernization; he viewed Japan's achievements as a non-Western, Asian nation as a potential model for the Ottoman Empire. In a bid to bolster his political strategy, which included the politicization of Islam, Abdulhamid attempted to forge an alliance with Japan. He saw Japan as a potential ally that could be converted to his cause of Islamic unity against Western imperialism. However, this effort largely failed due to Japan's own strategic interests and its secular approach to modernization. The most prominent Japanese intellectuals of the period, such as Yukichi, had favoured a relationship with the West rather than the Islamic world (Esenbel, 2003: 12-3).

An illustrative example of this attempt is reflected in an article from *The Times of India* dated May 29, 1906. The article reports that a congress was to be held in Tokyo on June 1, 1906, where a Turkish mission would attend with both political and religious objectives. The mission, composed of influential Turks, aimed to

negotiate the establishment of Turkish and Japanese embassies in each other's capitals. Moreover, the Sheik-ul Islam declared that Islamism aligned with the religious sentiments of the Japanese and suggested it was the only religion that would be agreeable to them. This reflects a significant misunderstanding of the religious landscape in Japan, which was primarily influenced by Shinto and Buddhism (The Times of India, 1906).

Despite the symbolic significance of the Japanese victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, which demonstrated that an Eastern, non-Christian power could triumph over a major European empire, Abdulhamid's efforts to align with Japan were complicated by deeper ideological differences. While he admired Japan's military success and its challenge to European dominance, he also perceived Japan as a potential threat to autocracy (Westwood, 1986: 106). Japan's establishment of constitutional governance and reduction of autocratic power stood in stark contrast to Abdulhamid's absolutist rule, creating an ideological conflict.

This ambivalence is evident in Abdulhamid's nuanced views on Japan. On the one hand, he was inspired by Japan's achievements and sought to replicate their modernization efforts within the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, he was wary of Japan's political reforms, recognizing that they could serve as a catalyst for similar movements within his own realm, potentially undermining his authority. Reflecting this caution, the Sultan ordered strict surveillance of Japanese officers visiting Ottoman territories (Sonat, 2023: 238). Additionally, the Hamidian government's attempt to convert the Japanese to Islam reflects a certain condescension, failing to understand Japan's distinct religious and cultural context. This effort was not only unrealistic but also demonstrated a broader miscalculation of Japan's national identity and strategic priorities (Deringil, 1999: 113).

An article from The Washington Post dated February 26, 1907, highlights the tension between the Ottoman Empire and Japan. It dramatically describes how the strained relations between the two "polygamous courts" of Tokyo and Constantinople led to a suspension of efforts to convert Emperor Meiji and his people to Islam. The article even speculates on the dramatic possibility of a Japanese battleship presenting an ultimatum to the Sultan, illustrating the heightened tensions and the failure of Abdulhamid's regime to establish close relations with Japan (The Washington Post, 1907).

In this light, Abdulhamid's relationship with Japan was complex and multifaceted. While he was inspired by Japan's achievements and sought to align with it for mutual benefit against Western powers, he was also wary of Japan's influence on autocratic rule. This ambivalence highlights the intricate balance Abdulhamid tried to maintain between modernizing his empire and preserving his absolute authority.

A Difficult Relationship

Conflicting Interests

At the turn of the twentieth century, Japan was rapidly asserting itself as a dominant power in Asia. The success of its modernization efforts, combined with its military victories, particularly the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, positioned Japan as a formidable player on the international stage. Japan's ambition was clear: it sought to establish itself as the preeminent power in Asia, capable of influencing regional dynamics and resisting Western dominance (Jansen, 2002: 440).

In contrast, Abdulhamid II of the Ottoman Empire had a different vision for countering European imperialism. Recognizing the threat posed by European powers, Abdulhamid sought to use his position as Caliph, the leader of the Islamic world, to create a united front against imperialist encroachments. His strategy involved leveraging the religious and cultural ties among Muslim communities from Japan to North Africa. By emphasizing the unity of the Muslim Ummah (community), he aimed to foster solidarity and resistance against European expansion (Deringil, 1999: 47).

This policy of using the caliphate as a tool for political and military defence was a cornerstone of Abdulhamid's approach. He believed that by rallying Muslims under the banner of Islam, he could create a defensive line that stretched across the Islamic world, from the Middle East to Southeast Asia and North Africa. This line was intended to act as a barrier to European imperialism, protecting the sovereignty and integrity of Muslim-majority regions (Shaw, 1977: 260).

However, Japan's strategic interests conflicted with Abdulhamid's vision. While Japan was not a direct colonial power like the European nations, its ambitions in Asia were driven by a desire to dominate the region and secure its own economic and political interests (Best, 2021, p. 113). This included expanding its influence in Korea,

China, and Southeast Asia—areas that were also strategically important to Abdulhamid's defensive strategy. The Sultan, keenly aware of global developments, diligently monitored the movements of the Japanese army during the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, closely tracking their progress "by sitting in front of the Far East map" (Birbudak, 2018, p. 213; Aladağ, 2016, p. 581). He even sent a military observer with the Japanese Army during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 to report on their military operations (Akyüz, 2021, pp. 38-64). On the other hand, being aware of Japan's potential threat to Russian soil in the near future, the Sultan refrained from constructing bilateral relations to avoid provoking Russia (Gönen & Atik, 2015, p. 639).

Moreover, Japan's secular approach to modernization and governance was at odds with Abdulhamid's emphasis on the caliphate and Islamic unity. Japan's alignment with Western powers, particularly through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, further complicated its relations with the Ottoman Empire. Although Japan and the Ottomans shared common interests in resisting European domination, their methods and underlying motivations were different. Japan was focused on national power and territorial expansion, while Abdulhamid was committed to a broader ideological and religious defence against imperialism (Deringil, 1999: 47).

The conflicting positions of Japan and the Ottoman Empire highlight the complexities of early twentieth-century geopolitics in Asia. While both nations sought to limit European influence, their divergent strategies and objectives ultimately prevented them from developing substantial diplomatic relations. Japan's rise as a secular, modern power contrasted sharply with Abdulhamid's vision of a united Islamic front, leading to an inherent tension in their respective approaches to resisting imperialism.

The Extraterritorial Rights

In the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, Japan sought to secure extraterritorial rights in the Ottoman Empire similar to those enjoyed by European powers (Kayaoglu, 2010:8). These rights, known as capitulations, had been granted to European nations for centuries, allowing them to operate under their own legal systems within Ottoman territories. This system was initially designed to facilitate trade and protect foreign merchants, but it eventually became a symbol of European dominance and Ottoman subjugation (Shaw, 1977: 236).

Despite Japan's rapid modernization and its increasing influence on the global stage, both Abdulhamid II and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) resisted granting such rights to Japan. Abdulhamid II, who ruled until his deposition in 1909, was determined to prevent further erosion of Ottoman sovereignty and saw the extension of capitulations to Japan as a threat to his authority and the integrity of the empire (Deringil, 1999: 171).

The refusal to grant extraterritorial rights to Japan was a significant point of contention. The Japanese government perceived this decision as a slight, believing it indicated that the Ottomans did not consider Japan an equal to the European powers. This perception contributed to diplomatic tensions between the two nations. Japan's exclusion from the system of capitulations was interpreted as a failure to recognize its status as a modern and powerful nation (Best, 2021: 427).

An illustrative example of the tension surrounding this issue is provided by The Washington Post in an article dated February 26, 1907. The article describes the quarrel between the Sultan and the Mikado over the subject of capitulations. It highlights how Christian powers enjoyed extraterritorial rights in Turkey, considering it and other Oriental countries as "barbarous states" not sufficiently civilized to exercise authority over foreigners. This international law doctrine had previously applied to Japan, but through significant diplomatic efforts, Japan regained tariff autonomy in 1911, thus elevating itself to the status of a civilized power. Now, Japan sought the same privileges in the Ottoman Empire, but the Sultan vehemently refused, seeing it as an attempt by Japan to assert itself as a great power comparable to Britain, France, and the United States (The Washington Post, 1907).

The article further notes that the Sultan bitterly resented the presence of foreign consular courts in his dominions and the immunity of foreigners from his authority, viewing these as humiliating remnants of past treaties. He was unwilling to extend such indignities to Japan, a non-Christian, Oriental power similar to his own. On the other hand, Japan viewed the refusal as a failure to recognize its achievements and equal status among the world's great powers, reflecting a significant misunderstanding and lack of communication between the two nations (The Washington Post, 1907).

A subsequent article from *The Washington Post* dated May 13, 1907, provides additional context, highlighting the international factors influencing this dispute. The article acknowledges that granting extraterritorial rights to Japan would place the Sultan under pressure to extend similar concessions to other countries. This was particularly significant as the United States recognized Japan's growing global power. The article reports that Japan sought to establish diplomatic relations with Turkey and demanded to be treated on the same footing as the great European powers concerning capitulations. However, the Ottoman government was firmly opposed to extending such privileges to Japan, as this would undermine their recent efforts to restrict and ultimately abolish these rights for foreign powers (*The Washington Post*, 1907).

An article from *The New York Times* dated January 31, 1909, further highlights Abdulhamid's complex views on Japan. It describes how Abdulhamid personally resented Japan's awakening and its military success against Russia. When a Turkish General congratulated him on Japan's victory at Tsushima, Abdulhamid replied with a long face, expressing concern that Japan's defeat of Nicholas II, the only other autocratic monarch in Europe, was causing immense damage to the principle of autocracy. This response, documented in Sir Charles Eliot's book "Turkey in Europe," underscores Abdulhamid's keen awareness of the broader implications of Japan's success on autocratic rule worldwide (*The New York Times*, 1909). The Sultan's disappointment with the Japanese victory over autocratic Russia was not surprising, considering the historical context. It is worth noting that Russia had sent a field hospital to the Ottoman Army during the Greek-Ottoman War of 1897, and in reciprocation, the Sultan sent a field hospital to the Russian Army during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 (Akarca, 2007: 386).

The situation did not change significantly after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which brought the CUP to power. An additional source of disappointment and diplomatic tension arose when the Japanese government failed to send a message of congratulations to the Turkish Parliament on the occasion of its meeting on December 17, 1908. This omission caused much surprise and speculation in the Ottoman Empire. Every great legislature in the world had sent messages of cordial sympathy; the Russian Duma sent three separate messages. The Turkish legislators would have been prouder of a message from Japan than from any other state, with perhaps the single exception of England. According to the writer, this was because the Turks and the Japanese shared many commonalities. Both were Asian nations that had been menaced with subjugation by European races but managed to hold their own and even inflict significant defeats on Europe. Japan's successful modernization and the abolition of extraterritoriality inspired the Ottomans, who hoped to follow a similar path. Both nations were non-Christian, with histories where Christianity had appeared as a significant adversary, and both had Russia as a tremendous adversary (*The New York Times*, 1909).

The disappointment of the Young Turks with the absence of congratulations from Japan is understandable, given their admiration for the Japanese victory in 1905, which served as an inspiration for their own struggle to preserve the Empire. Among historians of Japanese-Turkish relations, the issue of the Russo-Japanese War and its impact on the Ottoman opposition has been extensively studied (see Esenbel, 2011: 150; Kuşçulu, 2022: 209). The *New York Times* correspondent in Istanbul overlooks the potential risks of drawing direct comparisons between the Japanese and Ottoman cases for the Young Turks. The Young Turks were aware that, although the political system in Japan was favorable to their cause, the militaristic symbolism surrounding the Japanese Emperor was a source of anxiety, given their prolonged struggle against the Hamidian Regime (Worringer, 2014: 253).

Further clarifying Japan's failure to send regards, *The New York Times* article elaborates that Japanese diplomats had previously attempted to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire (see Levent, 2020: 166). On several occasions, the Turks exhibited a certain coolness towards the Japanese envoys and refused to allow Japan to open an embassy or legation in Constantinople on the same terms as other nations. The Grand Vizier's statement, "We shall be glad to welcome a Japanese mission here, but your consuls will enjoy no extraterritorial powers," underscored this stance. Japan, therefore, felt disrespected and ranked lower than many European nations, which led to their decision to drop all communication with the Sublime Porte in frustration (*The New York Times*, 1909).

The Japanese reaction to the Ottoman refusal to grant extraterritorial rights was one of frustration and anger. Japan viewed the decision as an indication that the Ottomans did not respect Japan's achievements or consider

it on par with European nations. This diplomatic snub further strained relations and contributed to Japan's perception that the Ottoman Empire was not a reliable or respectful partner in international affairs.

On the other hand, the CUP, a group of reformist military officers and intellectuals, was even more committed to abolishing the capitulations altogether. They viewed these concessions as a relic of colonialism that undermined the economic and political independence of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, the Young Turk leaders, including Enver Bey, Talat Bey, Ahmed Cemal Pasha, and Halil Bey, decided that aligning with Germany would best serve their nation's interests. This alliance was seen as a way to establish economic independence, abolish the Anglo-French financial capitulations, and secure the crumbling Ottoman Empire. As Hamilton and Herwig (2012) note, "Germany became their last and unavoidable choice – to establish their economic independence, to abolish the Anglo-French financial 'capitulations,' and to secure their crumbling Empire." By the start of the First World War, the CUP had successfully abrogated many of these capitulations, signalling a move towards greater sovereignty and economic independence (Zürcher, 2004: 125).

In summary, the conflict over extraterritorial rights underscores the complex interplay of power, sovereignty, and international recognition in early twentieth-century geopolitics. While the Ottomans sought to assert their independence and resist imperialist pressures, Japan's demands and subsequent disappointment highlighted the shifting dynamics and emerging tensions among non-European powers during this period. According to Esenbel, Japan and Turkey would wait to establish modern diplomatic relations until the Treaty of Lausanne provided the newly established Turkish Republic the opportunity to abolish foreign concessions (Esenbel, 2003: 19). Only after this point did the two countries manage to construct a relationship independent of the interests of Western powers.

Two Different Worlds

At the turn of the twentieth century, the differences between Japan and the Ottoman Empire were striking, not only in their approaches to modernization but also in how they were perceived by Western observers. Japan's capitalist modernization offered Western commentators an opportunity to reinforce the narrative of Western supremacy by contrasting it against the so-called "immature" East (Özel, 2000: 24). A 1909 article from *The New York Times* provides a biased and possibly exaggerated Western perspective on the character of these two nations, reflecting the prevalent stereotypes and judgments of the era.

According to the article, one of the significant obstacles in establishing a cordial relationship between Japan and the Ottoman Empire was the "inordinate pride" of the Turks. The Turks saw themselves as mighty conquerors spanning three continents, yet they were regarded with contempt by the average Japanese, who viewed them as a degenerate and obsolete race. This perception of the Turks as "useless to themselves and to others" highlights a deep-seated prejudice against a people who once held significant power but were now seen as backward (*The New York Times*, 1909). The Ottoman Empire was often considered to be a dying country in the Far East at the beginning of the twentieth century (Ziomek, 2014: 505). The Ottomans, on the other hand, believed they upheld certain standards of manners and civilization, considering their leadership of the Islamic world.

The article further describes how the average Turk held a strong prejudice against those who did not believe in God, which compounded their negative view of the Japanese. The belief that the Japanese had no God was a significant concern for the Ottoman, overshadowing other diplomatic considerations. However, the Young Turks, many of whom had lived and studied abroad, did not share this theological animosity and genuinely admired Japan. Nevertheless, for the writer, the practical and materialistic nature of the Japanese led them to pay little attention to Turkey, a distant country unlikely to be of immediate use to them (*The New York Times*, 1909).

From the perspective of Western Enlightenment and the Japanese interpretation aligned with it, Japan was seen as a civilized nation because it had successfully Europeanized its ways, adopting Western methodologies and practices (Sakamoto, 2004: 179-192). In contrast, the Ottomans were perceived as backward, lacking methodological knowledge and clinging to outdated traditions. This dichotomy reflects the broader Western attitude towards "civilized" versus "uncivilized" nations, with Japan fitting the former category due to its rapid modernization and the Ottoman Empire fitting the latter due to its perceived stagnation.

The New York Times article also touches upon the idea of kinship between the Turks and the Japanese, suggesting that both peoples might share a distant common ancestry from Southern Mongolia. However, this notion of kinship was not sufficient to overcome the practical considerations of the Japanese. Military experts from Japan, who had visited Turkey, saw no parallel between the Turkish and Japanese revolutions and no resemblance between the races. This pragmatic view further underscored the disconnect between the two nations and their different paths (The New York Times, 1909).

Moreover, the article emphasizes the stark contrast between the orderly, clean, and methodical Japanese and the dirty, disorderly, and demoralized state of the Ottoman Empire. Japanese observers were reportedly astounded by the level of disorganization and corruption in Turkey (for one instance, see Erkin, 2002: 242). The streets were described as chaotic, with narrow footpaths occupied by porters carrying heavy loads and disrupting pedestrians. The Turkish army was seen as corrupt, with officers profiting from foreign orders for ammunition rather than utilizing domestic production capabilities. The reliance on foreign suppliers for military supplies, despite the potential for conflict with these same suppliers, was cited as evidence of Turkey's dire situation. The Japanese were baffled by England's confidence in Turkey, given these numerous issues (The New York Times, 1909).

Worse still, the article ends with a rationalist interpretation of the Ottoman army's weakness and the country's expected failure in an upcoming war. From the writer's perspective, Japan's disinterest in Turkey was rational and strategic, as Turkey, likely to be defeated in a future conflict, did not align with Japan's interests. The article states that the conditions in Turkey were worse than in China, and it criticizes European nations for their misplaced confidence in Turkey. The writer predicts that Austria, supported by Germany, would easily defeat Turkey and its Balkan allies in a war, leading to significant territorial losses for the Ottoman Empire. This bleak outlook further explains Japan's reluctance to engage with Turkey, as aligning with a soon-to-be-defeated nation would not benefit Japan's future interests (The New York Times, 1909; for Japan's expectations for the Ottoman Empire in a future war, see Esenbel, 2014: 258).

To sum up, the New York Times article highlights the deep-seated biases and stereotypes held by Western observers towards both Japan and the Ottoman Empire. While Japan was admired for its successful adoption of European methods, the Ottomans were looked down upon for their perceived backwardness. This Western judgment reflects the broader geopolitical dynamics of the time, where modernization and alignment with Western values were seen as the hallmarks of a civilized nation.

Conclusion

The relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire on the eve of the First World War were marked by a complex interplay of admiration, strategic interests, and cultural misunderstandings. The Ottoman Empire's fascination with Japan's rapid modernization and military success in the Russo-Japanese War inspired both Sultan Abdulhamid II and the Young Turks. However, the absence of a congratulatory message from Japan following the reconvening of the Ottoman Parliament in 1908 highlighted the underlying tensions and disconnects between the two nations.

Japan's strategic ambitions in Asia, driven by its desire to dominate the region and secure its own economic and political interests, often conflicted with Abdulhamid's vision of using the caliphate to unite the Islamic world against Western imperialism. The Sultan's attempts to forge diplomatic relations with Japan were hindered by Japan's secular approach to modernization and its alignment with Western powers, particularly through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

The issue of extraterritorial rights further strained relations. The Ottoman Empire's refusal to grant Japan the same privileges as European powers was perceived by the Japanese as a slight, indicating a lack of recognition of Japan's achievements and status as a modern nation. This diplomatic snub, coupled with Japan's pragmatic and materialistic approach to international relations, led to a significant cooling of diplomatic ties.

Western perspectives, particularly those reflected in contemporary newspaper articles, often portrayed the Ottomans as backward and demoralized, in stark contrast to the orderly and methodical Japanese. This dichotomy highlights the broader Western attitude towards "civilized" versus "uncivilized" nations and underscores the challenges the Ottoman Empire faced in its attempts to modernize and assert its sovereignty.

In conclusion, the failure to establish a robust diplomatic relationship between Japan and the Ottoman Empire on the eve of the First World War was rooted in conflicting strategic interests, cultural misunderstandings, and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the early twentieth century. While Japan's rise as a modern power was admired, the Ottomans' efforts to modernize and resist imperialist pressures were often overshadowed by perceptions of stagnation and decline. These factors ultimately prevented the formation of a cohesive alliance between the two nations, despite their shared interests in countering European dominance.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Birinci Dünya Savaşı arifesinde Japonya ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu arasındaki ilişkiler, zıt diplomatik stratejiler, karşılıklı hayranlık ve kültürel yanlış anlamalar açısından ilgi çekici bir örnek sunar. II. Abdülhamid ve daha sonra Jön Türkler, Japonya'nın hızlı modernleşmesi ve askeri başarısını taklit edilmesi gereken bir model olarak görmüşlerdir. Bu hayranlık, 1904-1905 Rus-Japon Savaşı'nda Japonya'nın Rusya'ya karşı kazandığı zaferle zirveye ulaşmıştır; bu zafer, Doğulu ve Hristiyan olmayan bir gücün büyük bir Avrupa imparatorluğuna karşı galip gelebileceğini göstermiştir.

1908 Aralık ayında, Jön Türk Devrimi'nin ardından Osmanlı Meclisi, 1878'den bu yana ilk kez yeniden toplandı. Bu önemli olay vesilesiyle, tüm dünyadan, her Avrupa gücü ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ezeli düşmanı Rusya da dahil olmak üzere tebrik mesajları geldi. Ancak, Japonya'nın tebrik mesajı göndermemesi, yıllar içinde gelişen karşılıklı hayranlık göz önüne alındığında Osmanlılar için sürpriz oldu. Bu yokluk, iki ülke arasındaki diplomatik gerilimlerin altında yatan nedenleri ortaya koydu.

Japon hükümetinin Osmanlılara karşı mesafeli duruşu birkaç faktörden etkilenmiştir. 1902'den beri Japonya, İngiltere ile yaptığı İngiliz-Japon İttifakı ile bağlıydı; bu anlaşma, İngiltere'nin başka bir güçle savaşa girmesi durumunda Japonya'nın "katı tarafsızlık" sürdürmesini gerektiriyordu. Bu ittifak, Japonya için stratejik olarak önemliydi; Japonya'ya İngiliz desteği sağlayarak Doğu Asya'da kendi çıkarlarını takip etmesine olanak tanıyordu. Japon liderler, Avrupa'daki siyasi ve askeri kargaşayı Japonya'nın küresel sahnedeki statüsünü yükseltmek için bir fırsat olarak gördüler ve İngiltere ile olan ittifak, Japonya'nın büyük bir güç olarak rolünü meşrulaştırdı.

Japonya'nın Asya'daki hedefleri, Kore, Çin ve Güneydoğu Asya'da nüfuzunu genişletmeyi içeriyordu; bu bölgeler aynı zamanda II. Abdülhamid'in savunma stratejisi için de stratejik öneme sahipti. Sultan, küresel gelişmeleri yakından takip ederek, 1895'teki Çin-Japon Savaşı sırasında Japon ordusunun hareketlerini basından izledi. Daha sonra 1904-1905'teki Rus-Japon Savaşı sırasında Japon askeri manevralarını raporlamak üzere Miralay Pertev Paşa'yı Japon ordusunda gözlemci olarak görevlendirdi. Abdülhamid, Japonya'nın Batı teknolojik ilerlemelerini geleneksel Japon kültürüyle birleştirme yeteneğini hayranlıkla izledi ve Japonya'yı Batı emperyalizmine karşı İslam birliği davasına katılabilecek potansiyel bir müttefik olarak gördü.

Ancak, Japonya'nın stratejik çıkarları sık sık Abdülhamid'in vizyonuyla çelişiyordu. Japonya, Avrupa ülkeleri gibi doğrudan bir sömürge gücü olmasa da, bölgedeki hakimiyet arzusu ve kendi ekonomik ve siyasi çıkarlarını güvence altına alma isteğiyle hareket ediyordu. Ayrıca, Japonya'nın laik modernleşme ve yönetim yaklaşımı, Abdülhamid'in halifelik ve İslam birliği vurgusuyla çelişiyordu. Bu ideolojik fark, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri daha da karmaşık hale getiriyordu.

Önemli bir anlaşmazlık noktası da kapitülasyonlar meselesiydi. Japonya, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Avrupa güçlerinin sahip olduğu ayrıcalıklara benzer ayrıcalıklar elde etmeye çalıştı. Kapitülasyonlar, yabancı güçlerin Osmanlı topraklarında kendi hukuk sistemleri altında faaliyet göstermelerine izin veriyordu ve bu sistem, başlangıçta ticareti kolaylaştırmak ve yabancı tüccarları korumak amacıyla tasarlanmış olsa da, sonunda Avrupa egemenliğinin ve Osmanlı boyunduruğunun bir sembolü haline gelmişti. II. Abdülhamid ve Jön Türkler, Japonya'ya bu tür haklar vermeye karşı çıktı; kapitülasyonların genişletilmesini, Osmanlı egemenliğine ve imparatorluğun bütünlüğüne yönelik bir tehdit olarak gördüler.

Japonya'ya ayrıcalıklar vermeme kararı, Japon hükümeti tarafından bir küçümseme olarak algılandı; bu, Osmanlıların Japonya'yı Avrupa güçleriyle eşit görmediklerini gösteriyordu. Bu algı, iki ülke arasındaki diplomatik gerilimlere katkıda bulundu. 1908'deki Jön Türk Devrimi'nden sonra durum önemli ölçüde değişmedi. Japon hükümetinin, Osmanlı Meclisi'nin 17 Aralık 1908'deki toplantısında bir tebrik mesajı göndermemesi ek bir hayal kırıklığı ve diplomatik gerilim kaynağı oldu. Dünyanın her yerindeki büyük yasama organları sıcak mesajlar göndermişti; Rus Duması üç ayı mesaj göndermişti. Türk milletvekilleri, belki de tek istisna olarak İngiltere'den daha çok Japonya'dan bir mesaj almaktan gurur duyardı. Çünkü Türkler ve Japonlar birçok ortak noktayı paylaşıyordu; her iki Asya ulusu da Avrupa ırklarının boyunduruğuna girme tehdidi altında kalmış, ancak yine de kendi başlarına kalmayı ve Avrupa'ya büyük yenilgiler yaşatmayı başarmışlardı. Japonya'nın başarılı modernleşmesi ve kapitülasyonların kaldırılması Osmanlıları etkilemişti ve onlar da benzer bir yol izlemeyi umuyordu. Her iki ulus da Hristiyan olmayan ve tarih boyunca Hristiyanlığın yerli halklar için büyük bir düşman olarak görüldüğü bir geçmişe sahipti ve her ikisi de Rusya'yı büyük bir düşman olarak görüyordu.

Jön Türklerin, Japonya'dan gelen tebriklerin yokluğundan duydukları hayal kırıklığı anlaşılabilir bir durumdur, zira 1905'te Japonya'nın zaferi, imparatorluğu koruma mücadelelerinde kendi davaları için bir ilham kaynağı olmuştur. Japon-Türk ilişkileri tarihçileri arasında, Rus-Japon Savaşı'nın ve Osmanlı muhalefeti üzerindeki etkisinin önemi geniş çapta incelenmiştir. Ancak Jön Türklerin, Japonya'nın siyasi sisteminin davalarına uygun olmasına rağmen, Japon İmparatoru etrafındaki militaristik sembolizmin, Sultan Abdülhamid Rejimine karşı uzun süren mücadeleleri göz önüne alındığında bir kaygı kaynağı olduğu göz ardı edilmiştir.

New York Times makalesi ayrıca Japon diplomatların Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile diplomatik ilişkiler kurma girişimlerini de açıklamaktadır. Çeşitli vesilelerle, Türkler Japon elçilere karşı belirli bir soğukluk göstermiş ve Japonya'nın diğer uluslarla aynı şartlarda İstanbul'da bir elçilik veya legasyon açmasına izin vermemiştir. Sadrazam'ın "Burada bir Japon heyetini ağırlamaktan memnuniyet duyarız, ancak konsoloslarınızın hiçbir ayrıcalıklı yetkisi olmayacak" ifadesi bu durumu özetlemektedir. Japonya, bu nedenle, birçok Avrupa ülkesinden daha düşük bir konumda olduğu için saygısızlık hissetmiş ve tüm iletişimi öfkeyle kesmeye karar vermiştir.

Japonya'nın Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na kapitülasyon hakları vermemesi, Japonya'da hayal kırıklığı ve öfke yaratmıştır. Japonya, bu kararı Osmanlıların Japonya'nın başarılarını takdir etmedikleri veya onu Avrupa uluslarıyla eşit görmedikleri şeklinde yorumlamıştır. Bu diplomatik küçümseme, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri daha da germiş ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun uluslararası ilişkilerde güvenilir veya saygılı bir ortak olmadığı yönündeki Japonya algısına katkıda bulunmuştur.

Öte yandan, reformcu askeri subaylar ve entelektüellerden oluşan Jön Türkler, kapitülasyonları tamamen kaldırmaya daha da kararlıydılar. Bu imtiyazları, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve siyasi bağımsızlığını zayıflatan sömürgeciliğin bir kalıntısı olarak görüyorlardı. Jön Türk liderleri, uluslarının çıkarlarına en iyi hizmet edecek olanın Almanya ile ittifak kurmak olduğuna karar verdiler. Bu ittifak, ekonomik bağımsızlığı sağlamak, İngiliz-Fransız mali kapitülasyonlarını kaldırmak ve çökmekte olan Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nu güvence altına almak için bir yol olarak görülüyordu. Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın başlangıcında, Jön Türkler bu kapitülasyonların çoğunu başarılı bir şekilde kaldırmış, daha büyük egemenlik ve ekonomik bağımsızlığa doğru bir adım atmışlardı.

Özetle, kapitülasyonlar üzerindeki çatışma, 20. yüzyılın başlarındaki jeopolitikte güç, egemenlik ve uluslararası tanınmanın karmaşık etkileşimini vurgulamaktadır. Osmanlılar bağımsızlıklarını korumaya ve emperyalist baskılara direnmeye çalışırken, Japonya'nın talepleri ve ardından gelen hayal kırıklığı, bu dönemde Avrupalı olmayan güçler arasındaki değişen dinamikleri ve ortaya çıkan gerilimleri gözler önüne sermiştir. Esenbel'e göre, Japonya ve Türkiye modern diplomatik ilişkiler kurmak için Lozan Antlaşması'nın yeni kurulan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne yabancı imtiyazları kaldırma fırsatı vermesini beklemek zorunda kalacaklardı. Ancak bu noktadan sonra, iki ülke Batılı güçlerin çıkarlarından bağımsız bir ilişki kurmayı başardı.