

Coastal Security Dynamics of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean (1891-1915)¹

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Osmanlı Devleti'nin Doğu Akdeniz'de Sahil Güvenlik Dinamikleri (1891-1915)

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Öz

Abstract

XIX. yüzyılda siyasi ve iktisadi rekabet sahasında kilit nokta özelliğini taşıyan Doğu Akdeniz'de Osmanlı Devleti güvenliği tesis etmek için sahil güvenliğe önem vermiştir. Bu çalışma, Osmanlı Devleti'nin 1891-1915 yılları arasında Doğu Akdeniz'de uyguladığı sahil güvenlik politikalarını ele almaktadır. Dönemin siyasi ve sosyal koşullarında kıyı güvenliğini gerekli kılan etkenler bağlamında değerlendirilmiştir. Beyrut, İzmir, Selanik ve Lazkiye gibi liman şehirleri başta olmak üzere Anadolu sahillerinde güvenliği sağlamak için önlemler alınmıştır. Arşiv belgeleri temelinde tarassud kuleleri, karakolhaneler, gambotlar, torpido istibotlar, tarassud vapurları ve Reji-Düyûn-ı Umumiye İdaresi araçları ile kolluk kuvvetlerinin işlevleri ele alınmaktadır. Bulgular, Osmanlı sahil güvenlik sisteminin, çok katmanlı ve dönemin jeopolitik rekabetine duyarlı bir yapı sergilediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, Osmanlı sahil güvenliği literatürüne Doğu Akdeniz odaklı bütüncül bir değerlendirme sunmaktadır.

In the nineteenth century, the Eastern Mediterranean, a key arena of political and economic rivalry, was of strategic importance to the Ottoman Empire, which prioritized the establishment of coastal security. This study examines the coastal security policies implemented by the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean between 1891 and 1915. It evaluates the factors necessitating coastal security in the political and social context of the period. Measures were taken to ensure safety along the Anatolian coasts, particularly in port cities such as Beirut, İzmir, Thessaloniki, and Latakia. Based on archival documents, the study discusses the functions of watchtowers, guardhouses, gunboats, torpedo steam launches, patrol steamships, and the vessels of the Régie and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, as well as the roles of law enforcement units. The findings reveal that the Ottoman coastal security system exhibited a multi-layered structure responsive to the geopolitical rivalries of the era. This study offers a comprehensive Eastern Mediterranean-focused assessment to the literature on Ottoman coastal security.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, Doğu Akdeniz, Sahil Güvenlik, Osmanlı Güvenlik Politikaları.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Eastern Mediterranean, Coastal Security, Ottoman Security Policies.

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

Paper Type: Research Article

1. Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean, with its strategic location, geographical features, and climatic conditions, has attracted attention in almost every period and has hosted various civilizations. With its vast plains, coastlines, and interconnected road network, it possesses a deep temporal and spatial history. As Fernand Braudel states, "The Mediterranean is not a single sea, but a series of seas linked

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together by more or less narrow gateways, forming a succession of watery plains” (Braudel, 2019: 180). Naturally, the interconnected Mediterranean coasts and their land routes have also brought about broad security challenges. Indeed, from the time the Ottoman Empire began to strengthen its dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean, coastal security became a matter of importance. For example, in 1566, instead of joining the fleet, troops were stationed in Rhodes to monitor the coasts (Özdemir, 2008: 193). In the subsequent period, with the Ottoman Empire establishing dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean—particularly after the conquest of Crete—its sphere of control expanded, leading to commercial developments. From the seventeenth century until the eighteenth century, the Empire experienced a phase of strengthening its commercial relations with Europe (Elibol, 2011: 175). During this time, while the Mediterranean held a central position in the world economy, the Eastern Mediterranean basin was under Ottoman control. The advantage of possessing a vast territory meant abundant raw material resources, which enhanced both domestic and foreign trade functionality. This abundance drew the attention of foreigners to Ottoman lands as a source of cheap and plentiful raw materials (Aygün, 2017: 4). This phenomenon became even more pronounced in the nineteenth century. The factors influencing the Ottoman Mediterranean and shaping the arena of political rivalry during this period testify to this fact. These include the Greek War of Independence, the Crimean War, the Cretan Revolt, the Russo-Ottoman War, and the Greco-Ottoman War (Erbaş, 2016: 134).

The political and economic transformations of the nineteenth century profoundly affected the security dynamics of the Ottoman Empire’s coastal regions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Owing to its extensive trade and transportation network, the Eastern Mediterranean—linked by an interconnected web of routes—occupied a strategic position, and every threat to its coasts was closely tied to the political circumstances of the period. For this reason, it is necessary to address the state of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century and the element of rivalry among European powers that was influential in Eastern Mediterranean politics. The colonial approaches of Britain, France, and Russia were particularly decisive. In 1830, Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt suppressed the revolt in Crete and then advanced toward Syria (Mansel, 2024: 127). At the same time, however, France’s expansionist policy in the Eastern Mediterranean—manifested in its conquest of Algeria in 1830, its support for Muhammad Ali Pasha, and its ambition to establish a foothold in the region—provoked Anglo-French rivalry (Armaoğlu, 1997: 132). In fact, the underlying reason for this rivalry was the British recognition, from the 1780s onward, of Egypt’s commercial significance, particularly its role as a corridor linking the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. However, France’s long-standing historical interest in Egypt likewise contributed to the emergence of this competition (Yeşil, 2017: 7). Although Muhammad Ali Pasha’s revolt brought significant changes to the political landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean, it was, in essence, exploited by France, Britain, and Russia as an opportunity. This transformed the Eastern Mediterranean into an arena of struggle entirely encircled by competing powers. One of the most significant manifestations of this dynamic can be observed in the Levant. Eastern Mediterranean port cities such as Thessaloniki, İzmir, Beirut, Alexandria, and Tarsus shared the common feature of being located along trade routes, thereby influencing commercial flows (Akıncı, 2023: 178).

From the 1840s onward, connections with Europe were established, and under the influence of modernization, certain cities began to grow (Anastassiadu, 2020: 15). Chief among these were developed, high-volume port cities such as Thessaloniki, Beirut, and İzmir, along with their linked ports—Jaffa, Latakia, and other Anatolian coasts—as well as locations along the maritime transit routes like the Cezayir-i Bahri Sefid. These coastal points developed security gaps in sea transportation corridors. They were confronted with increased smuggling activities, illicit trade, the dissemination of subversive publications, and various other security threats. In particular, the political pressures of European states and the cosmopolitan demographic structure of the region made it imperative for the Ottoman administration to ensure coastal security.

The main aim of this study is to examine in detail the coastal security policies implemented by the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean between 1891 and 1915. In the current literature, the most significant work directly related to the subject of coastal security in the Ottoman Empire during the period under examination is İlhan Ekinci's study titled "*Tarassud Vapurları ve Kıyı Güvenliği*". The study *Kıyı Nöbeti: Osmanlı Devleti'nin Akdeniz'de Kıyı Koruması* by Şenay Özdemir provides important information about coastal security measures during the Empire's expansion in the Mediterranean (Özdemir, 2008). Funda Songur's *II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Donanması'nda Teknoloji, Lojistik ve Kurumsal Yapı* offers insights into the technical characteristics of equipment used in coastal defense (Songur, 2021). Kibar Bal's dissertation *Osmanlı Modernleşme Sürecinde Sahil Güvenliği (1839–1918)* focuses directly on coastal security (Bal, 2024). Similarly, Özge Togral's *19. Yüzyılda Doğu Akdeniz'de Kaçakçılık* provides relevant information on coastal security in the context of combating smuggling (Togral, 2021). Unlike these works, however, the present study focuses exclusively on the Eastern Mediterranean and provides a detailed examination of the Ottoman Empire's coastal security policies in this region during the years 1891–1915.

2. Factors Necessitating Coastal Security in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Nineteenth Century

As previously noted, the interconnected nature of Eastern Mediterranean port cities, combined with the modernization of transportation networks and the expansion of transit trade routes in the nineteenth century, left many coasts and shorelines—caught in the grip of commercial competition—exposed and vulnerable. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in parallel with the political and social conditions in which the Ottoman Empire found itself, there emerged a number of threats that triggered the formation of a coastal security mechanism. One such factor was the cosmopolitan character of the region and the harmful activities carried out by certain minority groups. (Togral, 2021; 145-147).

The nineteenth century was a period in which the independence movements of Ottoman minority subjects were influenced by one another. Prior to the Armenians, the Serbian and Greek uprisings had taken place, and it is known that the Armenian community closely followed these separatist movements. Indeed, the Serbian Uprising of 1804 and the Greek War of Independence of 1821–1829 resulted in independence. In addition to these separatist activities, the policy pursued by Russia also encouraged the Armenians (Selvi, 2011: 42). What emboldened them to such an extent was Russia's interference in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs under the pretext of protecting the Armenians. Especially after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, the Armenians received support from Russia in their actions against the Muslim population in Eastern Anatolia. Seizing this opportunity, Russia promised assistance to the Armenians living within Ottoman borders (Gülñihal Bozkurt, 1989: 182). In the following period, the movements of the Armenians—who had begun to receive support from both Russia and Britain—acquired a revolutionary character (Selvi, 2011: 42). The Treaty of Berlin was particularly influential in fostering this revolutionary character, and within a few years of the agreement, Armenians began to organize. Between 1885 and 1890, the influential Hunchak, Armenakan, and Dashnaktsutyun committees were established (İşlek, 2022: 231).

Particularly in the nineteenth century, the harmful activities of Armenian committees in both developed and developing port cities—as well as in connected coastal areas with unprotected piers—prompted the implementation of coastal protection measures. The Armenians' subversive activities, which involved transporting arms and explosives from the coasts to the interior, compelled the Ottoman Empire to take preventive action. Indeed, in 1893, in accordance with orders received concerning Armenian sedition, the district governor of Alanya emphasized the seriousness of the matter, noting that some officials stationed at certain piers were performing their duties properly. However, according to information obtained, the leaders of the Armenian Committee's seditious activities were in Alexandria. In Antalya's trade, particularly in the procurement of timber products

from Damietta and Alexandria, between one hundred fifty and two hundred ships called annually at the shores of Teke Sanjak, making direct contact with forestry officials. It was further reported that these forestry officials in Teke Sanjak were Armenians, and therefore special caution was advised (BOA. BEO. 334/24988, p. 4).

In 1893, during a period when Armenian subversive activities were on the rise, certain islands with interconnected maritime routes became critical points of access. The coasts of Teke Sanjak faced the islands of the Cezayir-i Bahri Sefid, and from there extended a seventy-eight-hour stretch on both sides, from the Mekri District within Aydın Province to the borders of İçil Sanjak in Adana Province. This is a measurement based on the travel conditions of the period, as the same distance would take considerably less time today. From these locations, numerous ships arrived from Egypt and the island of Meis to procure timber and firewood products. As these areas lacked law enforcement and security, it was known that Armenian agitators smuggled seditious publications, arms, and similar items from the shore. This clearly revealed a coastal security gap, bringing the need for law enforcement measures to the agenda (BOA. BEO. 327/24500, p. 2).

It was also known that they used maritime transport to flee to different destinations. In 1903, two members of the Armenian committee undertook an operation in İzmir to raise funds. Inside a shop, they discharged two revolvers, killing one person, and then escaped aboard an Austrian-flagged steamer. Consequently, the issue of maintaining public order in İzmir from the sea came under consideration (BOA. DH. TMIK.S. 43/14, p. 2). Due to the severity of the situation, information received from Aydın Province confirmed that the killing in the Frenk district had indeed been carried out by Armenian agitators, and it was stated that the measures to be taken to prevent such incidents were directly related to coastal security (BOA. DH. TMIK.S. 43/14, p. 3).

Subsequent investigations led to the interrogation of two committee members who had arrived by sea, were connected to the murder case, but had been unable to escape. According to their statements, they had been provided with a travel allowance of fifty liras by the Armenian committee organized in Russia, and had reached İzmir aboard a steamer from Russia. Upon disembarking from the vessel, they paid a boatman eight meci diye to be taken ashore (BOA. DH. TMIK.S. 43/14, p. 9).

The activities of Armenian committee members along Ottoman coasts increased particularly in key port areas such as İskenderun. Indeed, due to the Customs Administration's failure to exercise full control at the İskenderun customs house, the passage of flammable materials and similar goods heightened the threat level (Ürkmez, 2016: 154). Alongside the activities of the Armenian committees, the banditry of Greek gangs must also be considered as a contributing factor. Especially due to the 1821 Morea Revolt, several developments emerged that threatened security in the Archipelago (the Aegean Sea). Indeed, as the Filiki Eteria intensified its activities on the island of Samos—located close to the Anatolian coastline—within the framework of its revolutionary program, the Muslims on the island were massacred (Keleş-Menekşe, 2023: 642). However, after the Greek War of Independence, Greeks from the Morea, seeking income, joined forces with island dwellers to engage in banditry along the western Anatolian coasts. Members of the Greek Orthodox community who cooperated with islanders gained control over certain islands and, from there, reached the western Anatolian coasts. They even hoisted foreign flags on Samos and Chios islands and carried out raids on Aegean coastal towns and Turkish boats (Başaran-Özçelik, 2022: 898). These gangs deliberately chose coasts lacking coastal protection, prompting the authorities to implement measures aimed at preventing their incursions and securing the shoreline. For instance, a Greek gang numbering around thirty was known to have formed near Manastır, later fleeing to Çayağzı and Ayranoz. The gang split into several groups, importing arms and ammunition, as reported by the Province of Thessaloniki (BOA. BEO. 3770/282732, p. 6).

The reason the gang was able to establish such a wide operational range may have been that it was formed by a Greek infantry lieutenant. Following the attack carried out by this thirty-man gang, the matter was reported by the Athens Embassy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BEO. 2864/214736, p. 1).

Both the activities of Armenian committees and the arms and ammunition shipments carried out by Greek bandits in coastal areas were significant in the context of smuggling. However, smuggling activities along the Eastern Mediterranean coasts in the nineteenth century were not limited to the illicit transport of arms and ammunition by Armenian committees and Greek bandits. Another major factor necessitating coastal protection was the smuggling conducted by steamships belonging to European powers. In the nineteenth century, ships flying the French, Austrian, and Greek flags brought a variety of contraband goods to the Eastern Mediterranean coasts. These goods ranged from tobacco, salt, and timber to firearms, gunpowder, and similar explosives.³ For example, in 1892, Austrian-flagged steamers belonging to the Lloyd Company, which smuggled tobacco, tumbeki, and firearms into Beirut and its surroundings, drew significant attention. Similarly, Greek-flagged steamers such as *Seleniça* and *Zefiros* were among the main vessels engaged in the shipment of prohibited goods to Beirut, a key port in the Eastern Mediterranean (Togral, 2021: 114). Reports indicated that the *Zefiros* was planning not only deliveries to Beirut but also to many strategically important locations in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Aydın, Adana, and Thessaloniki, prompting the implementation of preventive measures (Togral, 2021: 154). Italian shipping companies also played a role in smuggling that threatened the Ottoman coastal regions, even attempting to transport illicit arms loaded in Naples to the Syrian coast. Furthermore, French-flagged postal steamers of the *Messageries Maritimes* Company, which were involved in the importation of smuggled arms and explosives, posed a direct threat to state security and operated actively in the Eastern Mediterranean (Togral, 2021: 156–157).

Foreign-flagged steamships engaged not only in the smuggling of arms and explosives, which threatened the Ottoman Empire's economic and political stability, but also played a role in human trafficking. Moreover, local boatmen and small-craft operators acted as intermediaries for these smuggling activities carried out by foreign shipping companies. This was particularly evident along the coasts of Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Latakia, Aleppo, and Tripoli. Smuggling activities thus became a significant factor prompting the Ottoman authorities to implement coastal security measures. Indeed, such illicit trade, in violation of regulations, fueled unlawful activities from the coasts into the interior of the empire, especially in its cosmopolitan regions. For this reason, the nineteenth century saw a heightened emphasis on establishing deep and effective coastal security, which in turn shaped the very dynamics of the Ottoman coastal defense system.

3. Structures and Vessels Used in Coastal Security in the Ottoman Empire

3.1. Observation Towers

Structures that had long been used to avert threats from the sea were already in place. Even before the Ottoman administration, towers used for defense and surveillance existed in the Aegean. Fortresses were also employed for defensive purposes; however, in locations where no fortress was present, other structures serving the same function were constructed (Özdemir, 2008, 201). Indeed, in the nineteenth century, many coastal points saw the construction of structures referred to as observation (*tarassud*) towers or watchtowers. A ciphered telegram dated October 1907 from the Inspector of Explosives in İskenderun is noteworthy in this regard. It stated that on the coast located

³ For detailed information, see Özge Togral, 19. Yüzyılda Doğu Akdeniz'de Kaçakçılık, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul 2021.

three to four hours from İskenderun—specifically, in the Suveydiye subdistrict of İskenderun, situated between the Province of Beirut and the Province of Aleppo, and only an hour's distance from Beirut—there was no watchtower. Along this coast, there were caves leading into the land, and within these caves there were passageways (BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 212/6, p. 2). Armenian insurgents were transporting weapons and explosives through these routes using sailing ships. Furthermore, Armenians fleeing to America also took advantage of these unguarded paths (BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 212/6, Lef 2, 3). For all these reasons, emphasis was placed on the necessity of building a watchtower on the hill at the specified location (BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 212/6, p. 4). Its proximity to Beirut and its connection between Suveydiye and Aleppo made it important for the economic and political security of key port cities. In particular, the coastal cave between Suveydiye and Karaturan was one such location. Being a small port serving as an intermediate stop, it was a frequent destination for smuggler boatmen and a challenge for patrol forces to secure. Indeed, in 1907, by following the small coastline between Suveydiye and Karaturan, seven Armenians were abducted, and the incident was reported to the coastal inspectorate (BOA. TMIK.M. 250/32).

However, due to the small size and location of the Karamağara coast between Suveydiye and Karaturan, it was deemed unsuitable to patrol and secure the area through observation towers. Therefore, the Ministry of the Interior informed the İskenderun Customs Administration (*Rüsumat Nezareti*) that a customs hut should be constructed in order to establish security in the region (BOA. İ..RSM. 31/54, pp. 1–2). The locations of the observation towers and the security forces stationed within them were also of considerable importance. The absence of observation towers at strategic points turned certain stretches of coast into areas where smuggling activities took place without surveillance. For example, as the observation tower located to the north of Latakia was in a state of ruin, no law enforcement units were stationed there to ensure security. Taking advantage of this, smuggler boats—particularly those belonging to Hanacorci of Latakia, İbrahim al-Kari, and their associates—enabled the escape by boat of numerous Armenians and Fellahin from Jebel and Aleppo (BOA. DH.TMIK. 231/44, pp. 1–2).

Although generally perceived as measures aimed at preventing the increasing smuggling activities, the construction of observation towers was also considered essential for ensuring the continuity of political and economic order and for the creation of a secure commercial environment. In particular, regarding the necessity of building observation towers to curb smuggling within the Sanjak of Tripoli (*Trablusşam*), the Command of Tripoli, acting through the Imperial Coast Inspectorate (*Sevâhil-i Şâhâne Müfettişliği*), communicated this matter to the Commodore of the Fifth Imperial Army (BOA. BEO. 2493/220675, p. 2).

Within Tripoli, the safeguarding of the coasts involved not only the construction of observation towers but also the deployment of gendarmerie forces to these locations. Similar to the practice at the piers of İskenderun, Mersin, and Taşucu, the necessity of establishing a Pier Commission (*İskele Komisyonu*) was also emphasized (BOA. BEO. 2493/220675, p. 3). However, the abolition of Pier Commissions in certain locations left some coastal areas deprived of security and order. For instance, the Pier Commissions along the coasts of the provinces of Adana, Aleppo, and Beirut were abolished (BOA. DH. TMIK. 274-23, pp. 2–3). Moreover, following their dissolution, the duties of the soldiers stationed in the observation towers were also terminated. Nevertheless, considering the importance and strategic locations of these towers, it was communicated to the Extraordinary Command of Aleppo and Adana that some should be staffed with gendarmes, while others should be assigned customs guards (BOA. TMIK.M. 274/23, p. 3).

Structures unsuitable for seasonal conditions and geographical features were replaced by observation towers, as the construction of more sheltered and solid structures made their necessity apparent. For example, as reported by Beirut Governor Halil Bey in a telegram dated November 1906 to the Ministry of the Interior, although there were four tents along the coast of Tripoli and Latakia,

with four gendarmes stationed in each near the sea, both the sandy nature of the coastal terrain and seasonal factors meant that the tents could not withstand strong winds, making it impossible for the soldiers on duty to reside in them. For this reason, the Tripoli Province was informed of the necessity of constructing observation towers without delay (BOA. DH. MKT. 1130/92, pp. 1–2).

Of course, the procurement of materials necessary for the construction of an observation tower was just as important a process as selecting the site where the towers would be built. In 1908, along the coasts within the Adana Province, there were observation towers in need of repair. The timber—an essential construction material for repairing these towers—was obtained especially from the forests of that region. Indeed, a receipt listing the type, quantity, and dimensions of the required timber was approved by the Administrative Council (*Meclis-i İdare*) and then conveyed to the Adana Province Forestry Inspectorate (BOA. BEO. 3369/252653, pp. 1–2). Outside the coasts of Adana Province, there were also many observation towers at strategic points such as Aleppo, which served as a bridge with Eastern Mediterranean ports (BOA. BEO. 1386/103934, pp. 1–2).

3.2. Coastal Guardhouses

To ensure control over maritime routes and prevent any activity that might contravene regulations, coastal security was given considerable importance. In particular, in the nineteenth century, when smuggling had reached its peak in many locations, coastal guardhouses were constructed. As stated in a telegram dated 1892 from the Province of Beirut, the British Royal Steamer traveling from Latakia to the District of Basit and then to Süveydiye, as well as an American steamer arriving two days later, assisted in the escape of Armenians via the coast. The Basit coast, located within the Sanjak of Latakia—where both escapes and smuggling were prevalent—also heightened the risk of maritime threats. For this reason, it was deemed necessary to construct a total of six guardhouses—two large and four small—along the northern Latakia coast from the Aleppo border. Until such guardhouses could be built, particularly in older coastal areas and other locations in need of them, as well as at the Karaturan pier frequently used by smugglers, cavalry and other law enforcement units were temporarily deployed (BOA. Y.MTV. 139/93).

In the following period, even greater emphasis was placed on ensuring coastal security. In 1912, on the Latakia coast—an operational port of considerable importance—security measures were further reinforced. Specifically, it was decided to construct an observation tower on a hill in the District of Basit, along with the building of guardhouses and the repair of the Government House. According to Governor Halil of Beirut, the construction and repair costs were approved at thirty-five thousand one hundred fifty-eight kuruş (BOA. BEO. 327/24500, p. 2).

All these points are noteworthy in showing the importance that the local administration placed on coastal defense in order to competently ensure security in the region. In 1893, the coast of the Sanjak of Teke, lying opposite the islands of the Archipelago (*Cezayir-i Bahri Sefid*) and stretching from the borders of the District of Mekri within the Province of Aydın to the borders of the Sanjak of İçel in the Province of Adana, covered a distance equivalent to seventy-eight hours' travel, a measurement based on the transportation conditions of the historical period. Many ships arrived at this coastline from Egypt and the island of Kastellorizo (Meis) for timber and other forest products. However, these coasts were devoid of law enforcement presence. Therefore, the need arose to place these shores—especially from the land side—under strict security control. It was emphasized that, for the maintenance of security, guardhouses should be established and a steamer stationed in the area (BOA. BEO. 327/24500, p. 2).

In ports such as Beirut, whose hinterland was beginning to expand, and in piers located along coasts where control had become increasingly difficult under the conditions of the period, the construction of guardhouses also proved insufficient. Indeed, in 1895, it was considered that the

twenty guardhouses planned for construction to secure the coast of the Province of Beirut would be disconnected from one another due to the distances between them, and that the gendarmes stationed in them would not be able to maintain adequate and continuous protection of the shore. For this reason, a request was made for a steam launch to ensure coastal security (BOA. BEO. 716/536652, p. 4). In addition to securing the Province of Beirut's shores from the sea with steamships, measures were also taken to protect the coast from the land. In particular, the Governor of Beirut raised the need to establish twenty-five guardhouses to keep the shores of the province under land-based surveillance. Furthermore, steps were taken to secure the desolate parts of the coastline in Beirut and its vicinity by means of mounted gendarmerie patrols (BOA. DH.ŞFR. 168-28, p. 1–2).

In the following years, the monitoring and security of the port of Thessaloniki, a site of strategic importance in the Eastern Mediterranean, gained prominence. An example of this can be found in the security measures implemented in 1904 for the protection of the coasts within the Province of Thessaloniki. The six rowboats available for securing the shores of the province proved insufficient. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to construct around seventy guardhouses along the coastal road to safeguard approximately two hundred and ten miles of shoreline, including areas near the islands. Furthermore, a battalion of soldiers would be stationed in the newly constructed guardhouses, to be deployed from a location deemed suitable by the Command of the Third Imperial Army (BOA. BEO. 2745/205868, p. 1).

As in the construction of coastal observation towers, the Ministry of Finance was promptly informed regarding the expenses for building three coastal guardhouses to secure the shores of İskenderun, located on a transit route in the Eastern Mediterranean (BEO. 2419/181390). Beyond İskenderun, six additional guardhouses were to be built along the coasts stretching from Benghazi to the shores of Tripolitania (BEO. 2315/173594, p. 1). Guardhouses were also constructed along the shoreline in locations of strategic importance within the Eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, for the protection of the shores within the Province of Beirut, it was deemed appropriate to build twelve guardhouses from the Jounieh–Jaffa border, including the Antioch border and its connected coasts. In total, thirty-two guardhouses were considered necessary along the coasts of Beirut, Jerusalem, Yemen, Nablus, Acre, Tripoli, and Latakia, with construction already having begun in Beirut. Furthermore, twenty guardhouses were to be built from Jaffa to Antioch. The personnel to be stationed in the constructed guardhouses were to be cavalry troops. However, according to information obtained from the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate, it was deemed appropriate by the Council of Ministers to employ police officers, gendarmerie, and Customs Administration guards in these coastal guardhouses, and this decision was communicated to the Ministry of the Interior (BOA. BEO. 2315/173594, p. 2).

Indeed, according to a decision taken in 1894, each of the guardhouses to be built would accommodate 8 to 10 personnel, including cavalry, gendarmerie infantry, and customs guards, as well as space for a few animals. The expenses for these guardhouses would be covered by public donations and funds sent from the central government (Kütükçü Dayı, 2024: 46–47). In fact, to ensure comprehensive coastal security, the boundaries between provinces were taken as a basis for constructing guardhouses. An example of this can be seen in the year 1900, when six guardhouses were deemed necessary to secure the coasts stretching from Benghazi to the Tripolitania and Egyptian borders. Although the need for a guardhouse at the Port of Sollum was also recognized, it was not included in the reconnaissance register (BOA. BEO. 1595/119592, lef 1). In the following years, in 1901, the mouth of the Port of Sollum housed a gendarmerie command under which thirty soldiers served. The construction of a guardhouse there, as well as in locations along the coasts extending to the Benghazi and Tripolitania borders, was estimated to cost a total of 313,203 kuruş. This matter was reported to the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (BOA, MV. 102–28). The guardhouses were crucial not only for maintaining extensive security along the coastline but also for demonstrating the Ottoman Empire's authority in the region. Moreover, the guardhouses served both

administrative and military purposes, standing out as structures planned according to the strategic importance of their locations (Bal, 2024: 89).

3.3. Gunboats

In order to ensure coastal security and prevent smuggling, small warships known as *gunboats* were among the most actively used vessels in the Ottoman Empire (Bal, 2024: 174). Beginning in the reign of Abdulhamid II, these vessels took on the task of guarding the coasts (Songur, 2021: 19). They were frequently employed along the Eastern Mediterranean coasts during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Indeed, it is known that gunboats were assigned to secure many port cities such as Thessaloniki, Beirut, and Tripoli. By 1905, the demand for gunboats to ensure coastal security had become so urgent that it was necessary to negotiate the immediate ordering of gunboats from France (BOA. BEO. 2665/199837). Subsequently, the issue of ordering gunboats for the purpose of controlling the coasts from the sea and ensuring security was discussed by the Council of Ministers (Meclis-i Mahsusa-ı Vükela) (BOA. BEO. 2665/199836). The growing demand for gunboats paralleled the increasing threat from the sea. That same year, for instance, the threatening actions of Greek-flagged steamships along the Thessaloniki coast—especially the harmful activities of a vessel named *Zefiros*—prompted the need for an *observation steamer* as a precautionary measure (BOA. BEO. 2604/195254, p. 1). Since no suitable vessel for observation was available at the Imperial Arsenal (*Tersane-i Amire*), the Naval Council (*Şuray-ı Bahriye*) stressed the necessity of immediately acquiring the gunboats ordered from Europe (BOA. BEO. 2604/195254, p. 2). The importation from Europe of various types of vessels—such as gunboats and torpedo boats—continued for use in the field of coastal security. As reported in 1907 by the Minister of the Navy and Major Salih Efendi, among the vessels built by the Schnaider Factory and Company was one gunboat (BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 248/105, p. 1). This vessel was the *Imperial Gunboat Marmaris (Marmaris Ganbotu Hümayun)*, for which a detailed report was included in the official register (BOA. Y.PRK.ASK. 248/105, pp. 2–3).

Rather than *observation steamers*, there was a need for *ganbots* capable of swift maneuvering. As reported to the Ministry of the Navy (*Bahriye Nezareti*) in 1908, although the *Bandırma Steamer* was present along the Tripolitania (*Trablusgarb*) and Benghazi coasts, it was requested that a suitable ganbot be sent to ensure the security of the coastline. In this regard, as the President of the *İdare-i Mahsusa* Commission informed the Grand Vizierate (*Sadaret*), the *Bandırma Steamer*—owned by the *İdare-i Mahsusa*—had been dispatched to Tripolitania to perform patrol duties. However, by order of the Ministry of the Navy, the commission's decision to return the *Bandırma Steamer* to the administration was communicated (BOA. BEO. 3406/255433, p. 3). The Ministry of the Navy also concurred with the dispatch of the *Bandırma Steamer*. This was because the vessel, which operated postal services between Tripoli and Benghazi, had been unable to fulfill its duties in the open sea (BOA. BEO. 3406/255433, p. 4).

In 1908, due to the increasing threats to the ports with which it was connected and to coastal security, there was a remarkable rise in the number of gunboats required. Indeed, as reported to the Directorate of Public Security (Emniyet-i Umum Müdüriyeti) in 1911, the coasts within the Province of Tripolitania lacked protection, and it was learned that a large quantity of weapons would be landed from the Port of Piraeus onto the eastern coast of Tripolitania. Intelligence also indicated that arms smugglers, who had purchased significant quantities of weapons from European factories, planned to ship them at night, and that the local population of Tripolitania would take part in this illicit transfer. Since vessels engaged in such illegal arms trafficking had previously called at other coasts, it became necessary to deploy a gunboat to secure the coast and track smuggling ships in order to prevent any such illegal shipments to Tripolitania (BOA.DH. EUM.THR. 62/17, p.3). Subsequently, as reported by the Undersecretary on behalf of the Minister of the Interior to the Directorate of Public Security, eight gunboats were purchased for the time being in order to take decisive measures to halt smuggling.

These gunboats would be permanently assigned to maintain order along the coast (BOA.DH.EUM.THR. 62/17, p.1). Being an effective tool in coastal defense, gunboats were allocated at different times to safeguard the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly the open-sea type coasts. Due to its vulnerable position and its connection with the islands, the security of the coast of Alanya—within the Sanjak of Teke—was of great importance. In particular, when the issue of Alanya’s coastal security arose in 1908, it was proposed to send ships stationed in Beirut. However, it was considered that sending ships from Beirut to Alanya in open-sea conditions would be difficult and unmanageable in ensuring coastal security. For this reason, it was decided that the coast of Alanya would be kept under surveillance by ships based in Rhodes, and that security would be provided by the Marmaris Imperial Gunboat, based in İskenderun (BOA.BEO. 3378-253346, p.2). It appears that the existing or newly purchased gunboats proved insufficient, and eventually gunboats were ordered from Europe. Used directly for coastal defense, gunboats were capable of effective and rapid maneuver.

3.4. Torpedo Steamboat

The Ottoman Empire became acquainted with torpedo steamboat (torpido istimbot) only after their worldwide proliferation following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Based on Admiral Hobart’s report, the Empire began purchasing torpedo boats from the 1880s onward (Songur, 2022: 533). In the 19th century, ensuring that vessels belonging to the Ministry of the Navy remained stationed at coastal points—regardless of whether in wartime or peacetime—was of great importance for the Ottoman Navy. For example, in 1899, there were a total of 41 steamers and torpedo boats deployed at Thessaloniki, Preveza, Yumurtalık, the Red Sea, İzmir, Ayvalık, Tripoli, and Benghazi, as well as on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and other coasts (Songur, 2022: 528). Within the framework of naval reforms, torpedo boats played a significant role in maintaining coastal security. For instance, due to the strategic importance of Thessaloniki, torpedo boats were stationed there to ensure maritime security. According to the statement of the Thessaloniki Commodore in 1905, the torpedo boats *Şanaver* and *Berkefşan* were conducting coastal inspection patrols (BOA. BEO. 2604-195254, p. 2).

In 1906, attacks from Greece toward the coasts of Thessaloniki increased. To prevent these, torpedo boats were required. However, as reported to the Ministry of the Navy, although torpedo boats were available, they were in need of repair (BOA. BEO. 2809-210670, p. 1). In particular, coastal security in Thessaloniki relied solely on the torpedo boats *Ejder* and *Berkefşan*, along with the torpedo boat *Şanaver*. Of these, one was undergoing repairs in Thessaloniki, while the other had a defective shaft (BOA. BEO. 2577/193266, p. 3; BOA. BEO. 2560/191927, p. 1). A scene from the training exercises conducted aboard the *Berkefşan* torpedo boat is illustrated in the image below.



Figure 1. Imperial Ottoman Navy: During training aboard the *Berkefşan* torpedo boat

Resource: <https://nek.istanbul.edu.tr/ekos/FOTOGRAF/91090---0010.jpg>

Despite the state of these vessels, maintaining coastal security was so essential that an armed group of one hundred Greek bandits, equipped with weapons and various munitions, launched an attack on the shore belonging to the Kesendire District (BOA. BEO. 2577/193266, p. 5).

In fact, the need for torpedo boats along the Thessaloniki coast had increased. Although armored steamboats had been assigned for the protection of the Thessaloniki shoreline, these torpedo boats were in need of repair and therefore could not fulfill their coastal patrol duties. The available rowboats were insufficient to curb smuggling. This was because the threats facing the Thessaloniki coast were multi-faceted, with dangers from Kesendire, Ayranoz, and Şıra having become uncontrollable. Although guardhouses had once been built out of fear of bandit raids, they had proven inadequate. For this reason, the mere three torpedo steamboat available were insufficient for the defense of the coast from the sea, and the Thessaloniki Province requested that the existing launches be repaired and dispatched (BOA. BEO. 2745/205868, pp. 1–2).

In later years, torpedo steamboats continued to be dispatched to the Thessaloniki coast according to the nature of the increasing threats. As the Minister of the Navy stated on 31 May 1909, the *Antalya* torpedo steamboats would be sent the next day to ensure security along the coasts within the Province of Thessaloniki (BOA. DH.MKT. 2833/30, p. 1). Various numbers of torpedo steamboats and torpedo boats (torpido geçer) were assigned to Thessaloniki and its surrounding shores. In the same year, in addition to a torpedo boat and the surveillance steamer *Gökçedağ*, the *Demirhisar* torpedo steamboat was also dispatched. At the same time, to establish comprehensive security, the *Ankara* torpedo boat was assigned to the Preveza coast (BOA. DH.MKT. 2826/77).

As in Thessaloniki, activities threatening the coasts of Mount Lebanon increased in 1897 and 1899. Reports were received indicating that weapons and explosives were being smuggled by sea into Syria from the direction of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. According to information from the Province of Beirut, the *İsmail* steamer was tasked with keeping the coast of the mountain under constant surveillance to prevent the import of weapons and other contraband into the central district of Mount Lebanon. However, this vessel could only travel at a speed of four to five miles per hour and consumed excessive

amounts of coal. Therefore, there was a need for fast-moving torpedo boats and steam launches, and it became necessary to send the torpedo that had been transferred to the Port of Yumurtalık, or another steamboat, to perform coastal patrol duties (BOA. BEO. 999/74903, pp. 1–2). Torpedo steamboat, being faster and requiring less fuel, were of great importance for coastal security. In particular, in 1899, the security of the coasts of Jaffa and Gaza—considered the gateway of Jerusalem to the Eastern Mediterranean—came to the forefront. The Minister of the Navy stated that, in addition to these coasts, great attention was also paid to the security of the shores around Beirut and Yumurtalık, and this had been previously communicated to the Commander of the Mediterranean Mobile Fleet in Beirut (BOA. BEO. 1321/990007, pp. 1–2). In 1902, torpedo steamboat were also used for the security of the Syrian coast (BOA. BEO. 1940/145432, pp. 1–2). To establish comprehensive security, torpedo steamboat were deployed along almost the entire Eastern Mediterranean coastline. In later years, torpedo boats were also ordered from Europe according to need. For example, in 1907, a coastal torpedo boat was being built in France by the Schneider Company (BOA. Y. PRK. ASK. 248/105, p. 1). In fact, steamboats were not used solely to pursue banditry or smuggling activities that threatened the political and commercial security of the country. They also remained on patrol along the coasts in combating epidemics. For instance, in 1900, the *Tarık* steamboat inspected small boats arriving at the Beirut coast and directed them to quarantine (BOA. A.MKT. MHM. 580/19, p. 4). Indeed, the *Tarık* steamboat and other patrol vessels were considered sufficient to maintain security and control over the Beirut coast (BOA. A.MKT. MHM. 580/19, p. 2).

3.5. Surveillance Steamers

Surveillance steamers (tarassud vapurları) had long been deployed to ensure controlled security along the coasts. The Ottoman Empire dispatched surveillance steamers not only in the Eastern Mediterranean but also to every coastal area in the Black Sea where it perceived a threat. In this regard, the strength of the Imperial Arsenal (Tersane) was undeniable; however, the commodores of İzmir, Thessaloniki, Shkodër, Beirut, Preveza, Jeddah, Tripoli, and Hudaydah functioned as the central administrative bodies for the surveillance steamers serving coastal security (Ekinci, 2020: 303). It was possible to encounter surveillance steamers safeguarding ports whose hinterlands were expanding in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Tripoli, Benghazi, and Aleppo. For example, in 1895, the *Mesud* steamer patrolled and inspected the Thessaloniki coast to ensure its security (BOA. BEO. 650/48703). In 1907, due to an increase in bandit attacks in the Çağaçzı area, the *Nüru'l-Bahr* steamer was dispatched to observe, inspect, and search the coast (BOA. TFR. I. M. 17/1624, p. 1). To ensure coastal security and monitor the sea from the land, twelve guardhouses were built in 1895 along the Beirut coast, stretching from Jounieh to the Jaffa border (BOA. BEO. 716/536652, p. 2). Although land-based security measures were in place, maritime coastal protection was also prioritized. Accordingly, in 1905, the *Arkadi* steamer provided security for the Beirut coast (BOA. BEO. 716/536652, p. 1). In fact, the vessel assigned to protect the Beirut coast was the *Bandırma* steamer. However, in 1905, it was sent to Istanbul for repairs to its boilers (BOA. BEO. 2616/196148, p. 1). In 1908, the *Bandırma* was dispatched by the Ministry of the Navy to monitor the Tripoli coast (BOA. BEO. 3406/255433, p. 2). Nevertheless, because it was assigned to cover a wide area—particularly between Tripoli and Benghazi—and these were open-sea locations, it proved insufficient to fulfill its duties (BOA. BEO. 3406/255433, p. 4).

According to the records, there were steamers that could not be dispatched to their intended locations due to repairs. For instance, in 1905, a request was made for a steamer to curb smuggling activities carried out via Greek-flagged steamers along the Thessaloniki coast (BOA. BEO. 2604/195254, p. 1). In response to this request, the Minister of the Navy explained that although various steamboats were present along the Thessaloniki coast, the *Gelibolu*, *İzmir*, and *Bandırma* steamers were under repair, and that once repaired, the vessels would be sent to their designated locations (BOA. BEO. 2604/195254, p. 2). In 1905, considerable importance was attached to the security of the coasts of the

Province of Thessaloniki. The armored corvette *Necm-i Şevket*, along with the *Ejder*, *Berkefşan*, and *Şenaver* torpedo steamboats, maintained the security of the coast. (BOA. BEO. 2577/ 193266, p.2). The image below shows the *Necm-i Şevket* corvette, which was effectively used in coastal security operations.

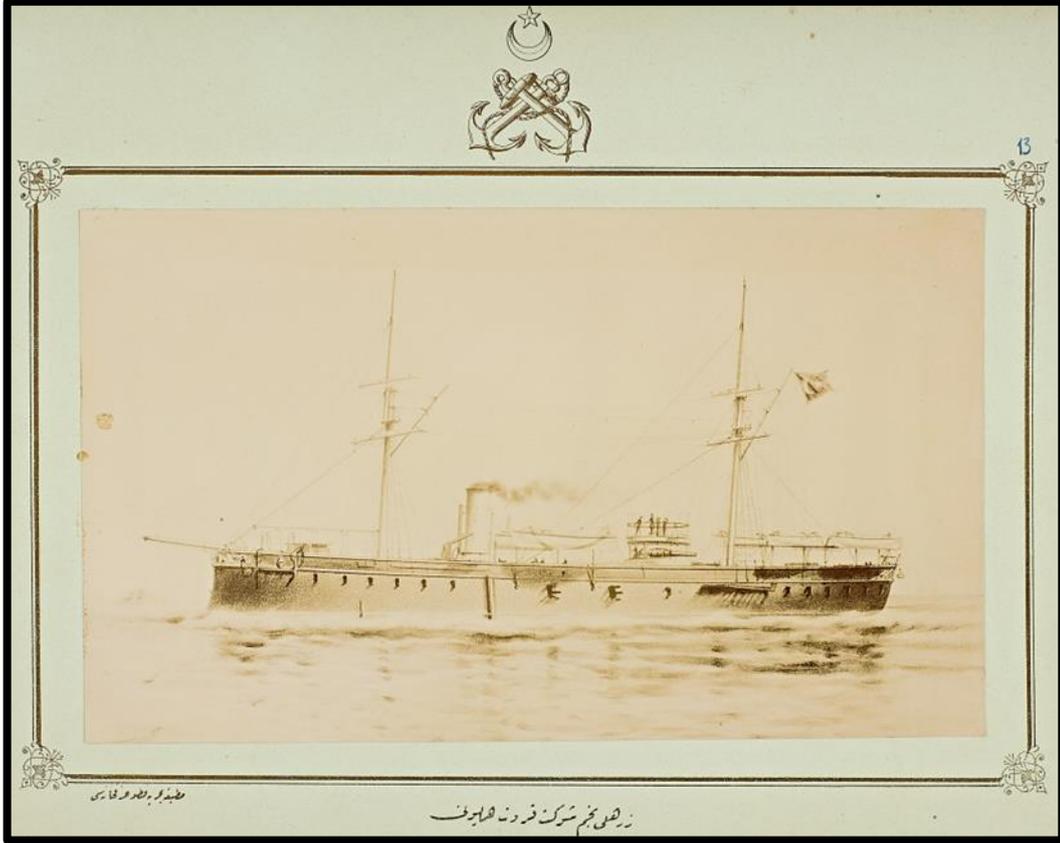


Figure 2. Armored Imperial Corvette *Necm-i Şevket*

Resource: <https://nek.istanbul.edu.tr/ekos/FOTOGRAF/91152---0013.jpg>

The primary reason for this heightened attention to coastal security was not only the political developments in the region but also the need to prevent arms smuggling and the transportation of prohibited goods, both of which posed political and economic threats. This was indicated in a telegram from the Thessaloniki Commodore dated 30 April 1905. Moreover, the *Beşiktaş* steamer stationed in Thasos and the *Canik Vapur-ı Hümayun* at Dereagzi were also assigned to ensure coastal security. The captains of these vessels were instructed to pay close attention to preventing smuggling (BOA. BEO. 2577/193266, p. 2). In fact, there were steamers deployed to maintain security along every shore of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, the existence of vessels in need of repair, as well as the necessity for fuel supply, were among the factors that disrupted coastal security. Notably, in 1902, the operational cost for the *Şems* steamer, which was to patrol the Benghazi coast during the summer season, amounted to eighty-four thousand kuruş (BOA. BEO. 1802/135110).

In fact, the eighty-four thousand kuruş was not solely the operational cost of the *Şems* steamer. The stated amount also included the cost of coal and other necessary supplies, bringing the total to eighty-four thousand kuruş. This expense was not to be covered entirely by the Treasury of Finance; rather, it was to be divided into four equal parts, with twenty thousand kuruş to be collected from each of the following institutions: the Treasury of Finance, the Customs Administration, the Public Debt Administration, and the Régie Administration (BOA. ŞD. 11/10, pp. 1–2). Notably, in 1904, the *Şems*

steamer served as a patrol vessel along the Benghazi coast to ensure coastal security. However, as the *Şems* lacked coal and it was not possible to procure the required coal in Benghazi, the vessel could not be utilized. Furthermore, during this period, Greek sponge divers had also begun to arrive at the Benghazi coast, prompting the Mutasarrifate of Benghazi to urgently request 3,500 tons of coal (BOA. BEO. 2400/180000, p. 1).

Between 1902 and 1905, coastal security was ensured primarily through the use of surveillance steamers. However, many of these vessels were in need of repair. One such vessel was the *Timsah* steamer, which patrolled the Syrian coastline. (BOA.BEO.1940/145432, p. 1) Indeed, the image below shows the *Timsah* steamer as it set out toward Haifa.



Figure 3. The Timsah steamer off the coast of Sidon

Resource: <https://nek.istanbul.edu.tr/ekos/FOTOGRAF/90522---0010.jpg>

While the *Timsah* was under repair, the *Sakız* steamer, already stationed in the area, together with other steamboats, assumed the task of maintaining coastal security (BOA. BEO. 1940/145432, pp. 1–2). The issue of repairs became almost a routine situation for maintaining security along the Eastern Mediterranean coasts, and steamboats were often used as substitutes for surveillance steamers. In 1901, the *Kılıç Ali* steamer was responsible for securing the coasts within the Provinces of Adana and Aleppo (BOA. BEO. 1621/121514, p. 1). However, as the *Kılıç Ali* was undergoing repairs in Istanbul, the transfer of a mobile steamer from Chios to the region was reported to both the Ministry of War (Seraskeriye) and the Ministry of the Navy (BOA. BEO. 1621/121514, p. 2). Subsequently, it was conveyed to the Commander of the Mediterranean Fleet in Beirut that, as a replacement for the *Kılıç Ali*, coastal security would also be ensured through the use of steam launches (BOA. BEO. 1621/121514, pp. 3–4).

The *İsmail* steamer was employed to ensure coastal security along the Mount Lebanon and Beirut route, particularly for the protection of the Mount Lebanon coastline. However, as the *İsmail* could only travel at a speed of four to five miles per hour and consumed a large amount of coal, steamboats were used in its place (BOA. BEO. 999/74903, pp. 1–2).

Due to the fuel requirements of the surveillance steamers assigned to protect each Eastern Mediterranean coast, various measures were taken to meet their coal needs. For example, in 1893, although guardhouses were built in Antalya to secure the coast from the land, a request was made for three steamers to patrol and inspect the shoreline from the sea. However, since these steamers were stationed at quarantine sites and the *Kılıç Ali* steamer lacked coal, a request was made for a fast-moving vessel (BOA. BEO. 327/24500, p. 2). At this point, it becomes clear that the role of surveillance steamers extended beyond coastal monitoring and maintaining maritime order, as they also inspected ports along transit routes and played an active role in combating epidemics. Moreover, the surveillance steamers played a major role in comprehensive measures taken to block smugglers along interconnected coastal routes. Indeed, in 1893, steamers on alert against smuggling boats operated in patrol duty from different points. In particular, along with the *Hanya* steamer based in the Port of Yumurtalık, the *Hayreddin* steamer carried out observation, inspection, and patrol duties along the Antalya coast (BOA. Y.MTV. 95/5, p. 1). Measures to ensure coastal security were taken at different times, depending on the severity of the threat and the length of the shoreline, to maintain control over all Eastern Mediterranean ports. For instance, in 1900, the imperial corvette *Mansure* (Mansure-i Korvet-i Hümâyun) came to the fore in the surveillance and inspection of the Tripoli coast (BOA. BEO. 1555/116568, p. 2).

3.6. Steamers, Boats, and Rowboats of the Régie Administration and the Public Debt Administration

In the nineteenth-century Ottoman economic structure, certain institutions played significant roles. One of these was the Customs Administration (*Rüsumat İdaresi*), responsible for overseeing customs control. However, the Public Debt Administration (*Düyûn-ı Umumiye İdaresi*) and the Régie Administration had a collective structure due to foreign debts. With the Muharrem Decree of 1881, in order to ensure the regular repayment of debts, important revenue sources such as salt, tobacco, and alcoholic beverages were allocated to the Public Debt Administration (Tabakoğlu, 2016: 776–777; Togrul, 2021: 34–35). Article 9 of the Muharrem Decree stipulated that tobacco would be operated by the Régie Administration and that the income obtained would be distributed among the Ottoman Government, the Régie company, and bondholders (Keskin-Yaman, 2013: 56–57; Togrul, 2021: 35).

Thus, two institutions that initially took control of the Ottoman production mechanism due to foreign debts also held an influential position in coastal inspection. As they had authority over matters such as the production, distribution, and transportation of tobacco, salt, and alcoholic beverages, they were notable as institutions responsible for overseeing the economic structure. The Public Debt Administration and the Régie Administration, by virtue of the privileges they possessed, established their own law enforcement units (Ekinci, 2020: 304). They were also active in maritime protection with the steamers they owned. For example, in 1894, in order to prevent illegal passenger transport from Beirut to Cyprus and Egypt—particularly the transfer of Mount Lebanon residents without passports by boat to steamers bound for America—as well as to prevent the shipment of prohibited goods, it was decided that a Régie steamer would patrol the Beirut coast (BOA. Y.MTV. 107/80). In 1896, although there were already steamers assigned to ensure and inspect the security of the Beirut coast, the Province of Beirut reported the presence of two additional steamers belonging to the Customs Administration and the Public Debt Administration (BOA. BEO. 795/59616). Not only steamers but also boats were employed in this work; for instance, in 1887, the Régie Administration used boats to patrol the coastal strip of the Antalya pier area to seize contraband salt, gunpowder, and tobacco, thereby attempting to curb smuggling (BOA. DH.MKT. 1418/47). During this period, tobacco smuggling

increased to such an extent that it had to be brought under control through newly issued regulations. These regulations defined the authority of the Régie Administration as well as the provisions concerning those who participated in tobacco-smuggling offenses. Indeed, penalties were determined according to the type of tobacco being smuggled. Moreover, even the reward to be granted to individuals who reported tobacco smugglers was to be paid from the monetary fines collected (Düstur, Tertib: I. Cilt: II, s. 676-677). Since tobacco constituted an important source of revenue for the Ottoman economy, every regulation related to tobacco, as noted above, was placed under strict administrative control. However, in contrast to tobacco—whose smuggling primarily affected state revenues—arms and ammunition smuggling directly threatened public order, prompting the Ottoman Empire to seek control through international agreements. As stated in Article 17 of the Trade and Navigation Treaty concluded between Germany, Prussia, and the Ottoman Empire on 26 August 1890, the importation of various weapons and ammunition, such as dynamite, gunpowder, and cannons, was strictly prohibited. The purchase and sale of arms and ammunition were to be carried out solely by the ministry responsible for such matters. Although the importation of weapons and ammunition was regulated through treaties and administrative decrees, smuggling nevertheless continued (Düstur, Tertib: I, Cilt: VI, s.734).

To ensure order along the coasts and shorelines in the context of preventing smuggling, the authority and operational capacity of the Régie Administration were expanded, and by 1903, the possibility of the Administration conducting inspections with both steamers and boats had come onto the agenda. Eastern Mediterranean port cities such as İzmir, Thessaloniki, and Beirut found themselves facing a serious threat. Foreign steamers were transporting arms and gunpowder at night via small boats. Although efforts were made to pursue smugglers by sea, the trade in weapons and other prohibited goods continued.

Smugglers operating over a wide area transported arms from the islands of the Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid such as Kastellorizo (Meis) and Syri (Sömbeki) to Anatolian coasts via Greece. Arms shipments were in fact made to many locations connected to the maritime transport network, including from Corfu, Syros, and other islands to the coasts of Italy and Albania. In this context, protecting the Anatolian shores, which had become both transit routes and unsafe harbors, was essential. Here, Régie steamers and Régie boats alike had a role to play (BOA. BEO. 2015/15056). Indeed, steamers belonging to the Régie Administration were effective in pursuing smugglers. For example, the İskenderun steamer, together with Régie guards from İskenderun and Aydın, seized smuggled arms and other prohibited goods around the island of Chios and its vicinity (BOA. DH.MKT. 560/20, pp. 1–2).

Boats belonging to the Régie Administration also provided coastal security at various points in the Eastern Mediterranean. Régie boats were assigned to protect the coasts of Antalya and Kaş. However, as these boats proved insufficient, the Governor of Kaş informed the Ministry of the Interior that a suitable Régie patrol steamer, capable of providing large-scale security appropriate to the Antalya region and its surroundings, should patrol the coasts (Togral, 2022: 151).

In addition to boats, rowboats used for policing duties along the Eastern Mediterranean coasts were also among the dynamics of coastal security. For instance, in 1901, it was decided to purchase eighteen Laz rowboats for the prevention of smuggling along the coasts of İzmir and Beirut, to be deployed alongside a steamer belonging to the *Customs Administration*. One of the rowboats to be brought from Trabzon cost twenty-eight liras, but with certain additional expenses, each came to thirty liras. In total, the cost amounted to 18,540 liras. In addition, the annual cost of repairs for the rowboats exceeded one hundred liras, and the salaries for the rowboatmen and their crew constituted another expense item (BOA. Y.PRK.MF. 4/42). Furthermore, police and gendarmerie rowboats were another type of craft used in coastal security. For example, because French-flagged steamers docking at the Port of Tripoli (Trablusşam) every fifteen days were assisting residents of Mount Lebanon in fleeing, police and gendarmerie rowboats played an active role in coastal security as a preventive measure

(BOA. ŞD. 2278/57, p. 3). Likewise, at the Port of Beirut, police and gendarmerie patrol steamers were used to prevent residents of Mount Lebanon from escaping to America (BOA. ŞD. 2278/57, p. 4). Such use was not limited to the waters of Mount Lebanon and Beirut; in 1901, a police rowboat deployed to Mersin also took part in inspections to ensure coastal security (BOA. DH. ŞFR. 272/20).

4. Law Enforcement Personnel Employed in Coastal Security

Along the Eastern Mediterranean coasts, the Ottoman Empire sought to prevent various threats that could arrive by sea through a range of law enforcement forces, such as gendarmes, soldiers, and Régie guards. For example, in 1894, a permanent coastal station composed of gendarme units, guards from the Customs Administration, guards from the Public Debt Administration, and guards from the Régie Administration was established at fourteen different points along the Beirut coast to form a security force. From the coasts within the jurisdiction of the Mutasarrifate of Mount Lebanon, residents of the mountain region were traveling weekly by boat to steamers without passports in order to go to America, and then escaping via Cyprus. As a preventive measure, it was ordered that one corporal's squad from the companies between Beirut and Tripoli be stationed in the area between Beirut and Sidon, and that two corporal's squads be deployed to patrol between Beirut and Tripoli. This directive was communicated by the Governor of Beirut on 28 October 1894 to the Command of the Fifth Imperial Army and to the Mutasarrifate of Mount Lebanon (BOA. Y.MTV. 107/80).

As noted, coastal protection was sought through law enforcement personnel belonging to various units. The number of these forces along the coasts was increased in proportion to the intensity of threats arriving from the sea. While coastal security was maintained at sea by patrol steamers (*kol vapurları*), gendarmerie cavalry bore a significant responsibility for safeguarding the coast. The statements of the Governor of Beirut confirm this, as they indicate that, in addition to patrolling the coast by Régie steamer, it was also necessary for law enforcement personnel to patrol the remote corners of the coast by land (BOA. DH.ŞFR. 168/128, pp. 1–2; Bal, 2024: 161). In 1896, as reported from the Province of Beirut to the Ministry of War (*Taraf-ı Valay-ı Seraskeri*), to curb smuggling activities along the Mount Lebanon coast, infantry were needed to be stationed in the guardhouses that had been constructed, as well as in mobile cavalry detachments. In addition to one hundred gendarmes, patrol detachments were also required (BOA. BEO. 864/64758).

As the number of threats and the coasts requiring protection increased, more personnel were needed. In particular, for the protection of the Beirut Province coastline—from the Jounieh–Jaffa border to the Antioch border—the guardhouses constructed along the shores of Nablus, Acre, Tripoli, and Mount Lebanon required not only gendarmerie forces but also police officers and customs enforcement officers (*rüsumat muhafaza memurları*) (BOA. BEO. 716/536652, p. 2). By 1908, the number of police officers stationed at coastal points had also increased. Indeed, on the Beirut coast, in addition to the security forces in the customs barracks, forty police officers were also required (BOA. ZB. 46/119).

In 1904, the situation regarding the employment of imperial troops (*Asâkir-i Şahâne*) and gendarmerie forces for coastal security against threats that could come from the islands connected to the Thessaloniki coastline was reported to the Naval Council (*Şûrâ-yı Bahriye*) (BOA. BEO. 2665/199863, pp. 1–2). As noted earlier, gunboats were to patrol from the Thessaloniki coast to the border. However, based on the statements of the military detachments and gendarmerie forces stationed along the Thessaloniki coast, it was decided to have gunboats patrol points considered to be under threat (BOA. BEO. 2451/183815, pp. 1–3). In addition, gendarmerie forces were stationed in coastal guardhouses to protect the coasts from the land. Just as gendarmerie forces were deployed in coastal guardhouses constructed at shore points, they were also stationed in coastal towers built as observation points (BOA. BEO. 2943/220675, p. 3; BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 274/23, p. 2). However, the

gendarmerie forces assigned to the coastal towers in Aleppo, who were positioned toward the desert side, abandoned their posts because they had not been paid (BOA. BEO. 1386/103934, pp. 1, 3).

Although problems were occasionally experienced regarding the employment and salaries of law enforcement personnel, in later years it is known that these forces fulfilled their duties at coastal points, ensuring security and even pursuing smugglers. Indeed, in 1907, at the pier in Latakia, there were police officers, assistant police officers, gendarmes, a gendarmerie captain, an assistant gendarmerie officer, and the Latakia Commission Officer (BOA. DH.TMIK.M. 250/32, p. 1). As noted, ensuring coastal security fell within the jurisdiction of many institutions. Particularly in preventing arms smuggling, it can be said that the Régie Administration and the Customs Administration were more competent than the police. However, in 1908, when news was received of an arms shipment from Piraeus to the east of the Province of Tripoli, measures were taken through the local police officers. Although the responsibility lay more with the Ministry of the Navy and the Customs Administration than the police, it was decided, for the time being, to establish Régie and Customs posts in the port and to station a police patrol there (BOA. DH.EUM. THR. 62/17, p. 3). Of course, the employment of law enforcement personnel along every shore of the Eastern Mediterranean was common. For example, in 1908, two guards were employed with a salary of 300 kuruş each, amounting to an annual sum of 7,200 kuruş (BOA. İ. RSM. 31/54, p. 2).

In addition to the gendarmerie, police, and guards from the Customs Administration, Régie Administration, and Public Debt Administration mentioned in connection with coastal security, it is also known that intelligence officers (*hafiye memurları*) were involved in coastal inspections. Indeed, in 1914, the Governor of Beirut stated that there was no other option but to make use of the intelligence officers sent to the interior of Mount Lebanon for coastal surveillance (BOA. DH.ŞFR. 438/117). These measures, aimed at transforming the Eastern Mediterranean coasts into a secure trade zone and establishing a defensive line against both internal and external threats, formed part of the dynamics of coastal security. In 1915, the number of officers responsible for the security of the coasts under the jurisdiction of the Teke District Governorship was approximately 700. In a telegram dated 1915 sent from the Ministry of War's General Supply Department to the Teke District Governorship, it was stated that some of the needs of the officers responsible for coastal security could be met (BOA. DH.ŞFR. 54-124).

5. Conclusion

The strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean and the concentration of European powers' political interests in the region during the nineteenth century compelled the Ottoman Empire to adopt strict measures. In particular, between 1891 and 1915, the coastal security activities carried out by the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean led the empire to pursue a multidimensional policy directly affecting both its internal and external security balances. During this period, the Eastern Mediterranean was not only significant in geographical and economic terms, but also a critical arena in terms of international rivalry, local resistance movements, and smuggling networks. Especially port cities with commercial hinterlands, such as İzmir, Thessaloniki, Beirut, and Latakia, along with their associated piers, were exposed to a variety of threats. Amid a rise in separatist activities, organized minority groups increased their harmful operations in coastal areas. A wide spectrum of threats—from arms and explosives shipments by Armenian committees, to attacks by Greek bands; from the illicit trade conducted by Austrian, French, and Greek-flagged vessels, to the security gaps created by the cosmopolitan nature of the region's port cities—prompted the Ottoman administration to take comprehensive coastal security measures. These measures varied according to needs and geographical features.

Archival documents examined in this study reveal that the Ottoman coastal security system was not composed of a single institutional structure. Observation towers and guardhouses were

constructed, while gunboats, torpedo steamboats, patrol steamships, and vessels belonging to the Régie and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, as well as boats and small craft, were employed to ensure coastal security. In addition, the Ottoman government deployed gendarmerie, police, and patrol detachments, as well as Régie guards and, at times, intelligence agents, to form a multi-layered security network. This network, coordinated between land and sea elements, aimed to maintain public order from both land and sea, while also safeguarding the economy and sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire.

Several factors structurally limited this coastal security network. These included shortages of patrol steamships, personnel deficiencies, maintenance and repair problems, difficulties in securing fuel for patrol vessels, and the geographical diversity of the coastline—all of which reduced the effectiveness of the measures taken. Nevertheless, through inter-institutional communication and the constructive role of the Imperial Arsenal in coastal security, commodores' offices were established to secure coastal points. Commodores' offices in Eastern Mediterranean ports such as İzmir, Thessaloniki, Beirut, and Tripoli functioned as central administrative units for the vessels responsible for security, and sought to maintain safety in connected piers and harbors. The establishment of commodores' offices brought a degree of organizational structure to coastal security. Even though the network was limited by the necessity of securing every harbor and pier connected to the islands, patrol steamships were deployed in ports whose hinterlands were expanding, such as Tripoli, Benghazi, and Aleppo.

In response to rising threats, the Ottoman Empire was able to rapidly build new guard posts and redeploy existing ships to threatened areas. If no steamship was available, fast-moving steam launches were dispatched, taking into account the length of the coastline. Various types of vessels, including gunboats and torpedo boats ordered from Europe, were also procured for use in coastal security. All of these factors indicate that the coastal security policies implemented in the Eastern Mediterranean between 1891 and 1915 were a typical reflection of the late Ottoman security approach: multi-layered and flexible, yet vulnerable due to resource and technological constraints.

In conclusion, the examination of this period is significant for understanding both the internal security and foreign policy dimensions of Ottoman maritime security strategies. The coastal security dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrate that, even during its period of dissolution, the empire developed a strategic sensitivity that took into account environmental, regional, and international factors simultaneously. However, the study also reveals that limited resources meant these strategies could not always be fully realized in practice. This work offers an original Eastern Mediterranean-focused contribution to the literature on late Ottoman maritime history and security policies, while providing a solid historical foundation for understanding how border and coastal security was shaped in the context of political sovereignty and international rivalry during the final stages of empires.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This study has been prepared in accordance with the principles of scientific research and publication ethics.

Authors' Contributions to the Article

The author conducted all stages of the study, including the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any person or institution.

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Extended Summary

Coastal Security Dynamics of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean (1891-1915)

Situated at the crossroads of continents, the Eastern Mediterranean was one of the most strategic maritime regions of the late Ottoman State. In the nineteenth century, the Eastern Mediterranean attained a prominent position in the sphere of international rivalry due to its combination of developed and developing port cities. Advances in transportation connected these ports with inland regions and islands, creating an intense commercial network. Consequently, the region became a hub not only for legal trade but also for illicit activities. Intense geopolitical competition, the penetration efforts of European powers, and the rise of nationalist movements compelled the Ottoman state to take measures in the Eastern Mediterranean. Constant vigilance was maintained against every possible external threat, and various precautions were implemented. These measures, which were primarily characterized by coastal security arrangements, laid the foundation for the Ottoman Empire's coastal security dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean. Between 1891 and 1915 in particular, the Empire's response to threats in the region involved the allocation of steamships for maritime patrols, the construction of fixed defensive structures along the coasts, and the deployment of law enforcement personnel to these sites—together forming a complex and multi-layered coastal security system. This study examines in detail the coastal security policies of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean between 1891 and 1915, analyzing, in light of archival documents, the security mechanisms established, the challenges encountered, and the strategic reasoning behind them.

In reality, the threats facing the Eastern Mediterranean coasts were numerous and interconnected. Armenian committees such as Hunchak, Armenakan, and Dashnaksutyun used coastal routes to transport arms and explosives into Anatolia. The significant role of foreign-flagged steamships in arms smuggling illustrates the scale of the threat to Ottoman shores. For example, attempts were made to ship illicit weapons loaded in Naples to the Syrian coasts. French-flagged postal steamers of the Messageries Maritimes Company, which were directly involved in the illegal importation of arms and explosives, also operated actively in the Eastern Mediterranean. Small piers in İzmir, Beirut, İskenderun, and the Teke Sanjak were among the principal centers of such activities.

In addition to the harmful operations of Armenian committees, Greek bands engaged in brigandage and raids along the Western Anatolian and Aegean coasts, using islands such as Samos and Chios as operational bases. Foreign vessels flying Austrian, French, Italian, and Greek flags brought not only arms and explosives but also dutiable goods—such as tobacco, timber, and salt—into Ottoman ports illegally. Above these localized problems loomed a broader rivalry between Britain, France, and Russia, which further fueled unrest in the Eastern Mediterranean and constrained the Empire's room for maneuver.

Focusing specifically on the years 1891–1915, this study is based on documents from the Ottoman Archives, particularly official correspondence, military orders, and secondary research. The chronological framework was chosen both because of the abundance of archival material for these years and because this was a period of rapid technological change in naval defense.

In response, the Ottoman state deployed a variety of physical structures, maritime vessels, and personnel. The most notable example was the construction of observation towers, strategically placed to monitor maritime traffic and report approaching threats. While some were in disrepair, others were rebuilt. The need for such towers in sensitive areas such as Süveydiye, Latakia, and Tripoli was repeatedly communicated to the central government. Although often perceived as anti-smuggling measures, these towers also played a crucial role in maintaining political and economic stability and securing safe zones for trade. The absence of towers in certain strategic points created blind spots that smugglers exploited; for instance, the watchtower north of Latakia, when in ruins, lacked stationed security personnel. In addition to observation towers, coastal guardhouses were built along vulnerable shoreline segments to ensure coastal security. These guardhouses, often situated where smuggling and infiltration were intense, served as fixed posts for gendarmerie, customs officers, and, at times, police. Examples can be found from Benghazi to the Tripolitanian coast, as well as in the waterfronts of major port cities like Beirut, Jerusalem, and Latakia. In some guardhouses, police, gendarmerie, and Revenue Protection officers were stationed together.

While observation towers and guardhouses ensured control from the land, a variety of vessels patrolled the Eastern Mediterranean by sea. Among them were gunboats, which maintained order on the open seas; torpedo steamboats and observation steamers, valued in their time for speed and maneuverability, though hindered by maintenance issues and coal shortages. Observation steamers were not solely tasked with countering political or social threats arriving by sea; they also conducted regular patrols to enforce quarantine measures and prevent the spread of epidemics, thereby reinforcing the state's maritime presence.

Economic institutions also played a role in coastal security. The Regie Administration and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration both holding concessions under the 1881 Decree of Muharrem, pursued smugglers to protect their own fiscal interests, using their own patrol boats and skiffs. The Regie guards and Public Debt guards acted like semi-autonomous enforcement units to prevent the illicit trade of tobacco and other high-revenue goods. Small boats and skiffs, used for accessing shallow coves and minor harbors, typically operated alongside larger patrol vessels to provide flexible operational capacity.

The human resources dimension of coastal security was equally complex. Gendarmerie, police, customs officers, Regie guards, and at times covert agents (*hafiyye*) formed the backbone of the system, conducting patrols and inspections both from land posts and aboard ships. Coordination and communication among these units were essential for maintaining coastal security. Yet delays in salary payments sometimes caused desertions, and the length of the coastline made full coverage difficult, even for well-equipped posts.

Archival records reveal both the adaptability and the limitations of this system. In some cases, the state responded quickly to emerging threats by redeploying ships to new areas or constructing new guardhouses. However, shortages of steamers or the repair needs of existing vessels could create dangerous security gaps. Coal shortages or vessels awaiting repair could leave even the best-equipped patrols ineffective. Nonetheless, the integration of land and sea measures, supported by intelligence operations, produced a multi-layered defense that, while imperfect, deterred many smugglers and insurgents.

This study demonstrates that between 1891 and 1915, the Ottoman coastal security system in the Eastern Mediterranean was characterized by a multi-actor structure, multi-layered strategies, and sensitivity to geopolitical developments. The integration of military, fiscal, and policing functions reflected the intertwined nature of late Ottoman governance and security practices. Yet the system's reliance on outdated technology, high operational costs, limited resources, and the geographical challenges of the Eastern Mediterranean constrained its effectiveness.

In conclusion, the 1891–1915 period represents a transformative phase in the Ottoman Empire's approach to coastal defense in the Eastern Mediterranean. The measures adopted reveal both the adaptability of imperial administration and the constraints it faced. Examining coastal security within its political, economic, and technological contexts contributes to a deeper understanding of late Ottoman maritime governance. In a period of mounting external pressures and internal unrest, the case of the Eastern Mediterranean underscores the necessity—and the difficulty—of implementing an integrated defense approach in a zone of constant interaction between state authority and foreign powers.