4· The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice, 1844–1918

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The introduction of conscription in the Ottoman Empire was of course closely linked to the introduction of a European-style army, but it did not coincide with it.

As is well known, the first attempt to create an army which was trained, equipped and dressed in the contemporary European fashion was made by Sultan Selim III in 1792. His *Nizam-i Cedid* (New Order) army was by all accounts quite an impressive achievement in itself. From an initial strength of about 2500, by 1806 the corps had grown to 22,685 men and 1590 officers, half of them stationed in the capital, the rest in provincial centres in Anatolia. When pressure against him and his new army on the part of the old army establishment, primarily the Janissaries, mounted, however, the sultan succumbed without any attempt to use the considerable strength of his new army and disbanded the corps in 1808.[1]

The *Nizam* troops constituted a professional army. They were not recruited on the basis of universal conscription, but rather in a fashion reminiscent of the system introduced by Peter the Great in Russia or the *bunichah* system in Persia.[2] Governors and notables in Anatolia (not in the Balkans or the Arab provinces) were required to send contingents of peasant boys to Istanbul for training. Those enrolled in the corps remained under arms for an unspecified period.

The reforming Sultan Selim was toppled in 1808, but the arguments for a wide-ranging reform of the army remained as compelling after his demise as they had been before. The great defeats of the Ottoman army by the Russians in 1774 and 1792 had shown up its weakness; the Napoleonic wars and especially the actions of the French and British

troops in Egypt and Syria in 1798–1800 had made a deep impression on those who witnessed them; and, from the 1820s onwards, the successes of the pasha of Egypt, Mehmed Ali, with his French-trained army served as a source of both inspiration and envy.[3]

When Mahmud II finally felt secure enough to take up the military reforms of Selim III in 1826, he first tried to avoid the clash with the army establishment which had been fatal to Selim, by forming his modernized army from within the active parts of the Janissaries (most of whom by this time were not soldiers at all, but shopkeepers who held a Janissary pay ticket and thus enjoyed the privileges of the military ruling class). When this, too, met with stiff opposition and even open rebellion, Mahmud had the Janissaries shot to pieces in their barracks. The next day the venerable corps was formally disbanded (although in some provinces Janissary troops continued to exist into the 1840s) and the forming of a new army, the *Muallem Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammadiye* ('Trained Victorious Muhammadan Soldiers'), was announced.

The new army, which was modelled closely on the earlier *Nizam-i Cedid* corps, quickly grew from 1500 to 27,000 men. It was organized along European lines, the basic unit being the regiment (*tertip*, later *alay*), consisting of three battalions (*tabur*). Once again, this was a professional army manned by volunteers and peasants recruited by the Sultan's officials in the provinces. There was no real system of recruitment, but the ranks of the army were filled according to need. Each year the army's requirements were determined in a decision (*kararname*) of the imperial council and then communicated to the provincial authorities, who were left a free hand in the way they filled their quotas.

Recruitment age was between fifteen and thirty years and the minimum term of service was twelve years. After twelve years the soldiers could opt for a civilian life, but in order to qualify for a pension they were obliged to serve until overtaken by old age or infirmity.

Parallel to the *Mansure* army, a second modernized unit was formed out of the old corps of Imperial Gardeners (*Bostancıyan*), who for centuries had guarded the imperial palaces and the seafront along the Bosphorus. They were now reconstituted as an imperial guard, called the *Hassa* (Special) army, whose strength reached about 11,000 by the end of the 1830s.[4]

In July 1834, a further momentous step in the modernization of the army was the establishment of a reserve army or militia, based on the Prussian *Landwehr*, called the *Asakir-i redife-i mansure* (Victorious Reserve Soldiers), or *Redif* for short. In each province between ten and

twelve battalions were established, manned with able-bodied men aged between twenty-three and thirty-two. They trained twice a year and added their strength to the regular army (now again generally known as *Nizamiye* (Regular), which name was reintroduced officially in 1841) in times of war. The establishment was 57,000 in 1834 and after a reorganization in 1836 grew to 100,000 men. During the nineteenth century the *Redif*'s main task was keeping law and order in the countryside. In conformity with the Prussian regulations of 1814, the *Redif* had its own separate officer corps, whose members at first were drawn from the younger members of the local notable families (who were supposed to take the role of the *Landjunker* in Prussia) and served for two days a week for a salary one-quarter of that of equivalent regular army officers.[5]

Universal conscription on the modern European model began to be discussed towards the end of Mahmud II's reign and there can be no doubt that this time the role model was very much Mehmed Ali, whose well-trained army of conscripted Egyptian peasants had shown its superiority over the *Mansure* army in Syria in 1831–3.

The Military Council (*Dâr-i Şûrâ-yi Askerî*) was established in 1837, and a year later proposed that a five-year term of military service should be introduced and this suggestion was incorporated in the famous Imperial Edict of Gülhane, the reform charter promulgated in 1839. The edict noted that the burden of defence had so far fallen very unequally on different areas and that lifetime service had damaged the population as well as the quality of the army.[6] The passage in question reads:

> As regards military matters, for the above-mentioned reasons these are among the most important. Although it is the duty of the subjects to provide soldiers for the defence of the fatherland, it is also true that up to now the size of the population of a province has not been taken into account and because some [provinces] had to provide more [soldiers] than they could, others fewer, this has become the cause of all kinds of disorder and chaos in useful occupations such as agriculture and trade. As life-long service for those who enter the army causes loss of zeal and decline in the population, it is necessary with regard to those soldiers who will be recruited in each province according to need, to establish some good rules and to establish a system of rotation with a term of service of four to five years.

This led to new army regulations, which were promulgated in September 1843 under Rıza Pasha. Primarily inspired by Prussian regulations, with some French influence, they established a regular *Nizamiye* army manned by conscripts (*muvazzaf*), who served for five years (later reduced to four, three and – finally – two years), and a reserve army, manned by those who had completed their service with the regular army and those who had drawn a low number in the *kur'a* (drawing of lots). The term of service in the *Redif* was seven years, during which time the reservists were called up for training for one month a year (this proved too disruptive, so was later changed to once every two years). Each of the five armies into which the Ottoman army was divided – the Guard, Istanbul, the European provinces, Anatolia and the Arab provinces – had its own separate reserve attached to it.[7] The *Redif* continued in this fashion until 1912, when a decision was taken to merge it with the regular army. Due to the upheavals of the Balkan war, the merger only took place in the course of 1914.[8]

The system of conscription was first established in detail under the *Kur'a nizamnamesi* (regulation on the drawing of lots) of 1848. It put the strength of the army at 150,000, which meant that, with five-year service, the army needed to recruit 30,000 volunteers and conscripts a year.

Conscription was done through the drawing of lots among those eligible on the basis of sex, health and age. Those whose names were drawn were drafted into the *Nizamiye* army, while the others were relegated to the *Redif*, without first having to serve with the regular army.

The system remained more or less unchanged until the new army regulations proclaimed in August 1869 under Hüseyin Avni Pasha, whereby the soldiers were divided into three categories: the *nizamiye* (regulars), the *redif* (reserve – *Landwehr*) and the *mustahfiz* (guards – *Landsturm*). The regular army was divided into two classes: those men actually under arms for four years, the *muvazzaf*, and those who, having completed their four-year service, were then incorporated for one or two years into the *İhtiyat* (active reserve) to serve in their region of origin, where they apparently acted as a kind of permanent 'backbone' to the local *Redif* battalion. The total active land army of the empire after the changes of 1869 is put at 210,000, 150,000 under arms and 60,000 in the active reserve.

Those who had completed their service with the regular army, those who had been allowed to return to their homes because they were sole

breadwinners and those who were over thirty-two years of age served with the *Redif* for a further six years, as did those whose names had not come up to begin with. In 1869, the strength of the reserve was put at being slightly over 190,000.[9]

The *Mustahfiz* reserve was the least active, least well armed part of the army. It was not expected to take the field in time of war, but rather was to take over garrison duties and general law-and-order work when the regular army and the reserve were at the front. It consisted of (relatively) able-bodied men who had done their service in the *Nizamiye* and/or *Redif*. They served for eight years, between the ages of thirty-two and forty. Total strength was 300,000.

In March 1870 the whole system of recruitment was reviewed and codified in a new *kur'a kanunnamesi* (conscription law), published in 1871. This remained the basic set of regulations until after the constitutional revolution of 1908, but some of its provisions were modified during the army reforms of 1879 (after the disastrous defeat in the war against Russia) and those of 1885–7, when the German military advisers led by Colmar, Freiherr von der Goltz, worked in Istanbul.

The law consisted of seventy-seven articles, grouped in seven chapters: general ground rules for the conscription; reasons for exemption from military service; treatment of those who dodged the draft or intended to use trickery to evade military service; execution of the draft; measures to be executed after the draft; conditions for the acceptance of volunteers in the army; and conditions pertaining to the people who sent replacements or paid the exemption tax.

The way the draft should be executed was described in great detail. First, conscription councils were to be formed in each recruiting district (which coincided with the *Redif* districts). Three months before the drawing of lots was to take place, the population records were checked and lists of possible recruits drawn up. All those who figured in the records were then ordered to appear in person in the district capital. After those who could show that they had a right to exemption on the basis of health or other reasons, separated, had been all those who were going to be included in the draft were arranged around a square or open place. Two bags were put in the centre, one filled with envelopes, each containing a small piece of paper with the name of one of the men on it; the other containing an equal number of pieces of paper in envelopes. Depending on the number of recruits needed, that number of slips of paper in the second bag were inscribed with '*asker oldum*' ('I have become a soldier'), the rest being left blank. The envelopes were then

taken from the first bag and the names read, one after another, and they were matched with papers from the second bag. This went on until all the slips with '*asker oldum*' on them, had been read.[10] Later legislation, such as the military service law of 1916, is even more detailed and specific. Under article 14 of this law all males who had reached the age of eighteen before 1 March in any given year had to report in person and in the company of their village headman to the authorities in the district capital before the end of October. Recruitment started on 1 May and included all those who had turned twenty before 1 March.[11]

It seems, however, that this regular procedure was not always followed in areas (Albania, Kurdistan) where feudal relationships were strong. According to one report, conscription in Albania was purely a façade and recruits were really selected and sent by their tribal chiefs.[12]

In the reforms of 1879 (which also introduced the division as the basic unit of the army) the term of service with the regular army was brought up to six years, of which three were spent under arms (at least in the infantry) and three in the active reserve. The period of service in the *Redif* was brought down from eight to six years, of which three were classed as *Mukaddem* (vanguard) and three as *Tali* (rear). Service with the *Mustahfiz* was likewise brought down from eight to six years. In 1887 the *Redif* districts were reorganized.

At the end of empire the Young Turks changed the term of service with the regular army again. In 1909 it was brought down from three to two years for those soldiers serving in particularly unhealthy climes: for instance, with the Sixth Army in Iraq and the Seventh in Yemen.[13] With the passing of the last Ottoman conscription law in May 1914, the term was brought down from three to two years for the whole infantry, but, as mobilization started almost immediately afterwards, this measure was largely theoretical.

The problem of exemptions

In introducing conscription as the basis for its recruitment system, the empire of course faced the same problems as European states. Conscription presupposed the existence of a fairly reliable census to determine where the potential manpower could be found. This required a sizeable growth in the state, and especially the provincial, bureaucracy. A census in the strict sense of the word, that is, a population count of the whole empire at one and the same time, remained outside the possibilities of the Ottomans until the very end of the empire. Only the republic was

able to introduce it in 1927. The Ottomans had a tradition of population registration, however, and the first one of modern times (counting only male heads of households) was held in the years 1831–8. A second registration, specifically for the purpose of enabling conscription to work, was conducted in 1844. As actual counting was impossible in many areas due to lack of manpower or to popular resistance (particularly on the part of tribes), the results were no more than a rough estimate, and certainly a serious undercount of the population. European writers working from the 1844 results put the total population of the empire (excluding Africa) at about 32 million, while the much more reliable data from the later nineteenth century, particularly the registration carried out between 1882 and 1890 and published in 1893, give a total of about 17.5 million, which is not entirely incredible given the large losses in land and population suffered during the 1877–8 Russian war, but certainly represents an undercount.[14] For 1914, at the beginning of the last large-scale war ever fought by the Ottomans, the number is put at 18.5 million for the core provinces,[15] or between 23 and 25 million if all of the outlying provinces are included.[16]

The lack of an accurate census made it especially difficult for the Ottoman authorities to get all those who were liable to serve to take part in the draft. Although some wars, such as the 1897 war with Greece and the 1912 Balkan War did arouse enthusiasm in some places, resulting in quite large numbers of volunteers,[17] under normal circumstances military service was very unpopular. This was due primarily to the length of service. The lack of manpower, especially in combination with the attrition caused not so much by the great wars as by never-ending guerrilla warfare, in Albania, Macedonia, the Hawran and above all Yemen, meant that conscripts were very often kept under arms for far longer than their legal term. Some reports speak of conscripts serving for ten years and more.[18] Even when there was initially an enthusiastic response, this tended to evaporate very fast when recruits were faced with conditions in the army.[19] The lack of an industrial base meant that the state had the greatest difficulty in feeding, clothing and equipping its soldiers. Pay was regularly in arrears. The conditions under which the army had to fight in wartime were atrocious. In the 1877–8 Russian war, in the Balkan war of 1912–13 and in World War I, large parts of the army were starving and many more soldiers died of cholera, typhus and dysentery than died of wounds.

In the countryside it was relatively easy to go into hiding, even for those who were registered. ‘Leaving for the mountains’ to stay out of the

hands of the representatives of the state was a well-established tradition in the Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia. Like other countries, therefore, the empire had a system of heavy penalties for draft-dodgers and people who hid or helped them. The regulations adopted in 1909 also included a system of material and personal sureties, whereby those who had no property were required to have a male family member (father, brother or uncle) vouch for them.[20]

What made the manpower problem even more serious was the exceptionally large proportion of the population exempted from military service. Like most countries which introduced conscription, the Ottoman Empire, had a set of regulations about exemptions. Broadly speaking, one can say that there existed two types of exemption: individual and collective. Groups which were exempted were women; non-Muslims (formally until 1856, in practice until 1909); inhabitants of the holy places, Mecca and Medina; religious functionaries and students in religious schools; and a whole range of professional groups. Exemption from the draft was a prime attraction of membership of each of these groups. It is even reported that young men went on pilgrimage to Mecca when recruitment threatened. The regulations of 1871, 1886, 1909 and 1916 all contain provisions about exemptions. The 1916 regulations are particularly specific, with long lists of exempted professions. Some (top civil servants, judges, *mufti*s (Islamic jurisconsults) were exempt under all circumstances, while others (for instance, lower-ranking civil servants, policemen, railway clerks) were exempt except in case of mobilization.[21]

Nomads, even if not legally exempt, by and large were so in practice. Istanbul with its outlying districts (and a population of over a million) also did not deliver a single soldier to the army.[22] The Ottoman army was therefore an army of sedentary Muslim men, and, as over 80 per cent of the population was rural even at the dawn of the twentieth century, primarily one of sedentary Muslim peasants.

Individuals who belonged to those sections of the population which were obliged to serve could claim exemption if they could show that they were *muinsiz* (without support, or sole breadwinner in their household). The actual regulations are quite complicated and interesting as they clearly reflect the realities of life and family relationships of the time, as in this example:

> The father-in-law is not to be considered the supporter of a husband, but he may be so considered in a case where the wife inhabits the home of the father-in-law of her husband [i.e. of her own father].

> A young married man whose wife is dead or divorced leaving children is exempted. The care of the latter is the duty of the young father, even though natural supporters of the young woman exist, as, for example, her father, father-in-law and brother. This is in order that the orphans may not be allowed to fall into the hands of the stepmother.[23]

The essential point was that men were considered *muinsiz*, and therefore exempt, if they could not be replaced as breadwinners of their households.[24]

Those who were not without support could escape conscription only by a lucky draw or through payment. Anyone drawing a blank for six years in a row, and so escaping service in the regular army, was enrolled in the reserve, but any Muslim man liable to serve could also buy exemption. The first conscription law of 1848 allowed a conscript to send a personal replacement (*bedel-i şahsî*) – in other words, he could send someone else if he could force, persuade or pay anyone to go in his place – but the 1870 regulations, while still mentioning personal replacement as a possibility, also detail the way in which service could be bought off. Exemption could be bought for 5000 kuruş or 50 gold lira (a very considerable sum at the time). Those seeking exemption were not allowed to sell land, house or tools in order to pay.[25]

This payment, called *bedel-i nakdî* (cash payment-in-lieu) in the sources, should not be confused with the – much lower – sums paid by non-Muslims until 1909. Those who had bought their exemption, like those who drew a lucky lot, were declared reservists, until a change in the law in May 1914, which stipulated that they should serve for six months with the active army and only then be classified as reservists. The same law made the *bedel* applicable in peacetime only, but it seems doubtful that the Ottoman government, always hungry for money, actually suspended the practice during World War I. The regulations for payment of the *bedel* also found their way into the first military service law of the republic (of 1927), but by then the amount was determined as 600 lira.[26]

With the famous exception of the Janissary corps, which had been recruited from among the Christian peasantry (but whose members converted to Islam), primarily in the European provinces, the empire had only rarely employed non-Muslims for its land forces. Traditionally the bearing of arms had been the prerogative of the ruling elite, the *askerî* (military) servants of the Sultan, and when lack of manpower forced the government to start arming members of the subject class

(*reaya*), in the form of irregulars (*levend*) drawn from the peasantry and the town roughs, this use was again confined to Muslims.

The Reform Edict of Gülhane, the first conscription law of 1844 and the regulations of 1871 all specified that all Muslims (*bilcümle ahaliyi müslime*) were liable to serve in the army. At that time, the idea that non-Muslims should be allowed, or forced, to serve seems to have been as alien as the idea of female soldiers. But the reform edict which 'Ali Pasha drew up in 1856 in close cooperation with the French and British ambassadors, and which formed the empire's entry ticket to the 'Concert of Europe', emphasized equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Application of this principle meant that the dicriminatory practice of conscription would have to cease and non-Muslims would have to take part in the drawing of lots as well.[27] In reality, there was very little enthusiasm for the idea on either side. The army feared that an intake of Christian peasants would be a burden to it and that non-Muslims would damage morale. This was a serious point, because, as all observers of the Ottoman army between 1850 and 1918 agree, the fighting spirit of the Ottoman troops was to a very high degree religious. Attacks were always carried out to shouts of 'Allah, Allah' and 'Allahüekber' (God is great). It would be hard to envisage a religiously mixed army doing the same. Most Muslims, especially in the countryside, disliked the idea of Christians bearing arms (one observer compares their feelings to those in the southern United States on the equality of blacks).[28]

Most Ottoman Christians were equally unenthusiastic. By and large they felt themselves to be subjects of the Ottoman state, not members of an Ottoman nation. The idea of Ottoman nation-building (known at the time as the idea of the 'Unity of the Elements') always was limited to a small, mostly Muslim, elite.

The Ottoman government, finally, had the strongest incentive of all not actually to conscript Christians. The emphasis on equality before the law in the 1856 edict also meant that the *cizye* tax, which Christians and Jews traditionally paid as a tribute to the Islamic state in which they lived, had to go. Although the number of Ottoman Christians went down considerably during the last century of the empire due to the loss of European provinces, they still represented nearly 30 per cent of the population in Abdülhamid's reign and close to 20 per cent on the eve of World War I; the *cizye* was the state's second most important source of tax revenue (after the tithe) of the state. No wonder, then, that the state actually preferred that the Christians should pay an exemption tax

(called first *iane-i askerî* – military assistance – and then *bedel-i askerî* – military payment-in-lieu) of their own, rather than serve. This indeed remained universal practice until 1909. The *bedel* was much lower than that required of Muslims and, like the *cizye* before it, was paid collectively by Christian and Jewish communities to tax-farmers and, later, salaried treasury officials.

That the recruitment of Christian subjects into the army was never a serious option before 1909 is shown clearly by the text of the 1870 regulations. Its first article reads: 'All the Muslim population of the Well-protected domains of His Majesty are personally obliged to fulfil the military service which is incumbent on them.' There is no mention of non-Muslims, which clearly suggests that in the Ottomans' eyes they did not come within the compass of the military service law.

Military service for non-Christians thus remained a theoretical option until 1909. This is not to say that there were no Christians in the army – there were, but they were officers, primarily in the medical corps, which consisted for a large part of Armenian and Greek army doctors who held the ranks of lieutenant and captain.

The Young Turks, who came to power in July 1908 and for whom unity and equality between the different ethnic 'elements' of the empire were a top priority, started work on the change of the recruitment law soon after they had suppressed the counter-revolution of April 1909 in Istanbul. In July 1909 military service was made compulsory for all Ottoman subjects. At the same time a number of Muslim groups – for instance, students in religious colleges who had failed their exams, but also the inhabitants of Istanbul – lost their exempt status. In October 1909, the recruitment of conscripts irrespective of religion was ordered for the first time.[29]

The reactions of the Christian communities to the new law were mixed. There was no enthusiasm. The spokesmen of the Greek, Syrian, Armenian and Bulgarian communities – in other words, the members of the elite – agreed in principle, but with the all-important proviso that the members of their communities serve in separate, ethnically uniform, units officered by Christians. The Bulgarians also insisted on serving in the European provinces only.[30] This was totally unacceptable to the Young Turks, who saw it as just another way to boost the centrifugal forces of nationalism in the empire – the opposite of what they were aiming for. At grass-roots level, many young Christian men, especially Greeks, who could afford it and who had the overseas connections, opted to leave the country or at least to get a foreign passport.[31] Those

who could not leave, change their nationality, or pay the much higher *bedel-i nakdî* (along with well-to-do Muslims), were indeed recruited when World War I broke out, but the Ottoman government continued to mistrust its Christian subjects to such an extent that almost without exception they were left unarmed. Instead they served in labour battalions, doing repair work on the roads and railways and, especially, carrying supplies to the front.

The result of the extensive system of exemptions was that the empire, already far less populous than its rivals, drew fewer concripts from its relatively small population as well. Its yearly required intake of recruits in 1913–14 (when the term of service was still three years) was 70,000 or about 0.35 per cent of the population. In reality the intake was probably lower. In Bulgaria the ratio at that time was 0.75 per cent. Fully mobilized, as in early 1915, only 4 per cent of the population was under arms and on active duty, compared with, for instance, 10 per cent in France.[32] The true strength of the army on the eve of World War I is not altogether clear, but it is certain that it was relatively small by contemporary continental European standards. A report by the British military attaché in January 1910 gives the nominal peacetime strength as 300,000 and the term of service in the regular army as three years. This means that 100,000 recruits per year were needed, but the actual annual contingent was put at 90,000, of whom, after exemptions, 50,000 were enrolled. This meant that the actual peacetime establishment was only about 150,000 and the inclusion of large numbers of *Redif*s was necessary to bring the army up to strength. A British report written in 1914 puts the peacetime strength of the army at 230,000 before the Balkan wars and 200,000 thereafter. Larcher, on the other hand, states that in 1914 the active army was composed of two classes of about 90,000 each, which would mean an army of between 180,000 and 200,000 men.[33] The peacetime establishment of the Russian army (which also recruited a low percentage of the population, but could afford it because of the sheer size of that population) was five times its size in the early twentieth century. The Austrian army was at least twice the size of the Ottoman one.[34]

When fully mobilized, the Ottoman army was of course much bigger – that, after all, was the main advantage of the conscription system – but mobilization was painfully slow, taking four to five months to complete (if transport to the front is included). The mass mobilizations of 1912 and 1914 showed up all the inherent weaknesses in the Ottoman system. The slow mobilization of 1912 (due mainly to lack of good roads, but also to

confusion and the inability of the armies to absorb, equip and feed the reservists) meant that the Balkan war had been lost before the troops from the Asiatic provinces even reached the European fronts. With only one single-track railway available for supplies and troop movements, the troops at the front (only thirty miles from Istanbul for most of the war!) were starving and when the Syrian reserves finally arrived the cholera they brought with them killed thousands of soldiers. At the outset of the war, though there seems to have been little enthusiasm, there was nevertheless a genuine and quite widespread readiness to serve, but it evaporated quickly under the harsh circumstances. Even during the first days of marching after leaving their depots, supplies ran out and the troops had to live off the land; Large-scale desertion started.[35]

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 again saw a very slow process of mobilization (even slower than that of the Russians). This time it had to take place in winter, which made the whole process more burdensome, especially in eastern Anatolia. On the other hand, warfare was practically impossible in winter on the Caucasian front and, if Enver Pasha had not squandered 72,000 soldiers' lives (out of 90,000) by ordering an attack over the mountain passes at Sarıkamış, the Ottoman army could have been at full war strength in the spring. Once again, the call to arms was answered relatively well, in Anatolia if not in the Arab provinces, but as in the Balkan war, the conditions in the army (payment with worthless paper money, undernourishment, lack of medical care, epidemics of typhus, cholera and dysentery, bad or non-existent clothing and shoes) were so bad, that desertions soon started to become a problem of enormous proportions. By the end of the war the number of deserters was four times that of soldiers on the front.[36]

The conclusion would seem to be that the Ottomans, over a period of sixty years and as part of a more general programme of modernization, managed to put in place quite a sophisticated system of recruitment through conscription modelled on that of Prussia/Germany, but that by the early twentieth century the lack of infrastructure and an industrial base meant that they could not really cope with the mass army they had so diligently created.

Conscription failed as an instrument of Ottoman nation-building, too. The system of exemptions through the *bedel-i nakdî* and the *bedel-i askerî* meant that the burden never fell equally on all Ottoman subjects. Even at the end, the Ottoman army remained an army of Anatolian Muslim peasants, in a sense foreshadowing the establishment of a Turkish nation-state in Anatolia after World War I.

Notes

1 On the reign of Selim III, see Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Selim III, 1789–1807* (Cambridge, MA, 1971). On Selim's fall, see *Between Old and New*, p. 345 ff. On the *Nizam-i Cedid* army, see Stanford J. Shaw, 'The Origins of Ottoman Military Reform: the Nizam-i Cedid Army of Sultan Selim III', *Journal of Modern History* 37 (1965), pp. 291–306.
2 See Chapter 9 in this volume.
3 See Chapter 3 in this volume.
4 Mahmud II's army reforms are described in Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2, *Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808–1975* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 41–5, and in Fahri Çoker, 'Tanzimat ve Ordudaki Yenilikler', in Murat Belge, ed., *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (6 vols., Istanbul, 1985), vol. 5, pp. 1260–66.
5 Jean Deny, 'Redif', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* (9 vols, Leiden, 1995, vol. 8., pp. 370–71.
6 There are several editions of the Edict of Gülhane. I used [?] Petermann (with Ramis Efendi), *Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der neuesten Reformen des Osmanischen Reiches, enthaltend den Hattischerif von Gülhane, den Ferman von 21 November 1839 und das neueste Strafgesetzbuch* (Berlin, 1842). The quote is taken from pp. 11–12.
7 'Redif', in *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 9 (Istanbul, 1971), pp. 666–8.
8 Deny, 'Redif', gives 31 August 1912 as the date of the decision to abolish the *Redif*, on the authority of the official collection of Ottoman legislation known as *Düstur*, vol. 4, p. 615.
9 Murat Belge, ed., *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (6 vols Istanbul, 1985), vol. 5, p. 1263.
10 *Qur'a qânûnnâme-i humâyûnu* (Istanbul, 1286/1870–71), parts 1 and 4.
11 *Mükellefiyet-i askeriye qânûn-u muvaqqatı* (Istanbul, 1332/1916), articles 14 and 21.
12 PRO/FO 195/2323: report of 20 June 1909 by military attaché, Constantinople (H. Conyers Surtees).
13 FO/PRO/2323: report by military attaché, Constantinople, of 28 May 1909.
14 Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914. Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, WI, 1985); Justin McCarthy, *The Arab World, Turkey and the Balkans: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston, 1982); Nuri Akbayar, 'Tanzimat'tan Sonra Osmanlı Devleti Nüfusu', in Murat Belge, ed., *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (6 vols, Istanbul, 1985), vol. 5, pp. 1238–46.
15 Stanford J. Shaw, 'The Ottoman Census System and Population', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9 (1978), pp. 325–38.

16 Ahmed Emin [Yalman], *Turkey in the World War* (New Haven, 1930), p. 79.

17 See, for instance, Ömer Sami Coşar's biography of Atatürk's bodyguard, *Atatürk'ün Muhafızı Topal Osman* (n.p, n.d), p. 5, describing recruitment in Giresun. However, when the British consuls reported on the reactions to mobilization in their stations at the request of the Committee of Imperial Defence (request by Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary to the CID, dated 25 October 1912), they described a very patchy response: Salonica was 'prompt', Gallipoli 'sullen', Izmit 'willing', Adana 'unwilling', Adalia (Antalya) 'reluctant' and Alexandretta (Iskenderun) 'prompt and willing' (FO/PRO 195/2445, pp. 260–322).

18 PRO/FO 195/2346 Report by military attaché, Constantinople (Tyrrell), of 10 April 1910. The same general picture emerges from many eyewitness reports.

19 Reports by the British consuls in Damascus and Antalya are illustrative. The consul in Damascus, in his report of 7 December 1912, says that in the first weeks of October there was much enthusiasm to go to the war, and 60–70 per cent of Muslims presented themselves. But after reverses, and because of bad treatment, enthusiasm dropped and by the end of October only 30 per cent of Muslims responded. People started to flee and hide. Of a company of 130 regulars sent from Damascus to Aleppo, 40 deserted on the way (PRO/FO 195/2445, pp. 291, 311).

20 PRO/FO 195/2323. Report from embassy Constantinople containing a summary of the new recruitment law in translation.

21 *Mükellefiyet-i Askeriye Qânûn-u Muvaqqatı* (1916 conscription law), Articles 91, 92.

22 Ahmet İzzet [Furgaç], *Denkwürdigkeiten des Marschalls Izzet Pascha* (Leipzig, 1927), p. 169.

23 PRO/FO 195/2323, report of 26 September 1909.

24 For a full discussion, see Chapter 5 in this volume.

25 *Qur'a qânûnnâme-i humâyûnu* (Istanbul: Matba'a-i Âmire, 1286/1870–71), Article 70.

26 H. Bowen, 'Bedel', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* (9 vols., Leiden, 1960), vol. 1, p. 855.

27 Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856–1876* (New York, 1973; reprint of 1963 edn.), pp. 94–5.

28 PRO/FO 195/2323, report of 20 June 1909.

29 At this time, the measure may well have been largely symbolic. In 1912 only 5 per cent of those liable to serve seem to have answered the call (PRO/FO 195/2445, p. 291) and according to one report (PRO/FO 195/2456/60, annual military report, Constantinople) no Christians were called up in 1914.

30 PRO/FO 195/2323, report of 20 June 1909.

31 According to reports from Gallipoli and Rhodes in 1912 (PRO/FO 195/2445, pp. 275, 363).
32 Maurice Larcher, *La Guerre turque dans la guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1926), pp. 589–90.
33 PRO/FO 195/2346, report of 17 January 1910, p. 126; PRO/FO 195/2456/60, report of 1914; Larcher, p. 590.
34 F. Schrader et al., *Atlas de la géographie moderne* (Paris, 1914), maps 28, 33.
35 There are quite a few eyewitness reports from the Turkish side of the front in the Balkan War. Among the best are Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *With the Turks in Thrace* (London, 1913), and Lionel James, *With the Conquered Turk: The Story of a Latter-Day Adventurer* (London, [1913]).
36 Erik Jan Zürcher, 'Between Death and Desertion. The Ottoman Army in World War I', *Turcica* 28 (1996), pp. 235–58.