CHAPTER 13

Rewarding Success in Military Enterprise: Forms Used for the Incentivizing of Commanders and their Troops in the Ottoman Military System of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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The excesses of the system of military procurements based on decentralized modes of private contracting that were commonplace in European armies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries – making almost inevitable the emergence of conflict of interest between commanding officers with responsibility for keeping their troops well-fed and disciplined and contractors whose main concern was the maximization of profit – are well known. The inherent tendency among members of the latter group (the contractors) to supply too little too late to commanders in the field led, not only by accident but all too frequently by design, to situations where troops were forced, for their very survival, to live off the land to supplement short rations. This was clearly to the detriment, not only of the civilian populations who bore the brunt of their expropriatory excesses, but to the successful prosecution of campaign and delays in engaging the enemy, as common soldiers broke ranks in search of food and fodder and overruled their commanders’ insistence on keeping to set timetables and priorities dictated by tactical concerns.¹ The ravages wreaked upon the German countryside by marauding soldiers of the Thirty Years’ War era is eloquently captured in the testimony of Johannes Plebanus in his account of a raid carried out in 1637, which was cited in Geoff Mortimer’s 2002 book Eyewitness Accounts.² The particular form of military entrepreneurship that was prevalent in Europe up to and beyond 1648 was based upon the in-built premise that the violence and victimization inflicted on both peasant and urban

¹ On the effects of the privatization of army supply on troop morale and discipline in early modern European armies, see R. Murphey, in F. Tallett and D.J. Trim (eds.), European Warfare 1350–1750 (Cambridge, 2010), 150.

² On the wider psychological and social dimensions of events of this description see also the chapter by Hans Medick, ‘The Thirty Years’ War as Experience and Memory’, in Lynne Tatlock (ed.), Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany (Leiden, 2010), 25–50.
populations who lived in the vicinity of an active front was not an unfortunate consequence of war and the last resort of soldiers left destitute by accident due to unforeseen and unpredictable supply disruptions, but more the inevitable result of a system that prioritized private profit for private contractors over ensuring the prompt and comprehensive meeting of the dietary needs of soldiers and their mounts and, by inference, any serious concern over the state’s responsibility to ensure the safety and security of the non-combatant residents of the war zone.

In the Ottoman Empire of a near contemporary period it is possible to trace the developmental trajectory of military supply systems between c. 1500 and c. 1700 from the highly centralized form that regulated military procurement and financing the provisioning of armies in the decades around the middle of the sixteenth century, to its increasingly devolved forms of the later decades of the seventeenth, when the fiscal pressures brought about by the intense phase of continuous wars fought on a defensive footing on multiple fronts between 1684 and 1699 forced them to adopt a system relying on ad hoc or inadequately financed provisioning practices. By the end of this period, Ottoman military supply systems had begun, compelled by circumstances, to bear a close resemblance to the provisioning models and supply practices found in contemporary Europe. In our account of methods employed by the Ottomans to motivate and incentivize their soldiery and extract from their optimal levels of loyalty and service, we will focus, in particular, on two key aspects of military planning:

a Guarantees concerning the conditions of service which, by custom and tradition, ensured provision of an adequate and calorie-rich diet and limits on the duration of active mobilization for campaign.

b Pay incentives for exceptional or exceptionally dangerous service, which took the form of cash bonuses in advance of battle and promises of promotion after the successful conclusion of campaign.

In covering the second of these two topics we will focus particularly on the role of volunteers and irregular soldiers who joined campaigns with the expectation of deferred reward, and examine how rates of volunteering and levels of willing and dedicated service were affected when commanders failed to deliver on their

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3 For an overview account of the essential elements in the Ottoman military supply system and its exceptional organizational sophistication in comparison with what prevailed in contemporary practice, see R. Murphey, ‘Provisioning the army’, in Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700* (London, 1999), 85–103.