

Britain and the Ottoman Empire in the First World War: Clashing Interests of Two Belligerents

*Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda İngiltere ve Osmanlı Devleti: İki Muharip
Devletin Çatışan Çıkarları*

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Abstract

Course of the relations between the British and the Ottoman Empire affected the future of extremely large areas including The Balkans, Anatolia and the Arab territories. Intersection of the mutual interests of the two states throughout the 19th century allowed them to continue the relations at a certain stable level. But since the last quarter of the same century the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Britain started to deteriorate. In addition to developments in European politics, with some political events arising from Ottoman's own internal dynamics, the relations between the two states had become an area of conflicting interests over time. The British and the Ottoman Empire's fighting each other during the world war meant that so called conflict of interests reached its peak in 1914. At the end of the war while Committee of Union and Progress could not achieve any of war aims, the Ottoman Empire was even in worse situation than the case before the war. On the other hand, British gained a perfect victory in the war and achieved almost all of its aims successfully.

Key Words: The Ottoman Empire, The British Empire, The First World War, War Aims.

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Öz

Osmanlı Devleti ile İngiltere arasındaki ilişkilerin seyri Balkanlar, Anadolu, Arap coğrafyasını içine alan son derece geniş bir alanın geleceğine etki etmiştir. İki devletin karşılıklı çıkarlarının 19. yüzyıl boyunca paralel seyretmesi, ilişkilerin belli düzeyde istikrarlı sürmesini sağlamıştır. Fakat aynı yüzyılın son çeyreğinden itibaren Osmanlı Devleti ile İngiltere arasındaki ilişkilerin bozulmaya yüz tuttuğu söylenebilir. Avrupa siyasetinde yaşanan gelişmelere Osmanlıların kendi iç dinamiklerinden kaynaklanan bazı gelişmeler de eklenince, iki devlet arasındaki ilişkiler zaman içerisinde çıkar çatışmasına dönüşmüştür. Nitekim İngiltere ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda karşı saflarda yer almaları söz konusu çıkar çatışmasının had safhaya ulaştığı anlamına gelmektedir. Savaş neticesinde Osmanlı Devlet yönetimini elinde bulunduran İttihat ve Terakki'nin savaş hedeflerinin hiçbirisi gerçekleşmediği gibi Osmanlı Devleti savaştan önceki durumundan çok daha kötü bir duruma gelmiştir. Öte yandan İngiltere savaş neticesinde tam bir zafer elde etmiş ve hedeflerinin neredeyse tamamını başarıyla gerçekleştirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, İngiliz İmparatorluğu, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Savaş Hedefleri.

Introduction

Relations between the British and the Ottoman Empire have an important place in the history of modern Europe. Especially after Monroe Doctrine in 1823, Ottoman geography had been a unique opportunity for the British Empire who wanted to dominate the eastern ports. After acquiring the privilege to make free trade within the borders of the Ottoman Empire according to its own interests in 1838, Britain tried to eliminate any threat to the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire which also would likely be a threat to its interests. Continuing until the last quarter of the 19th century, this understanding had tended to change with a number of developments occurred at the end of the century. Despite Disraeli's support for Ottomans in the suppression of the Bulgarian rebellion in 1876, economic collapse of Ottomans, Balkan crisis and Russo-Ottoman war in its aftermath led to the weakening of the British sensitivity on the protection of territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Suffered a heavy defeat by Russia and with great insurmountable economic problems, supervision of the Ottoman Empire had ceased to be a sustainable situation for Britain. On the other hand with the arrival of Gladstone's Government in 1880, Britain revised the methods used for maintaining the interests overseas, especially in the Ottoman lands. As a result of the British occupation of Egypt that was a strategic importance for the eastern colonies in 1882 traditional British policy based on protection of territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire partly lost its importance.

In addition to disagreements arising between London and Istanbul since 1880s and developing relations between Ottoman Empire and Germany, entente agreements among France, Britain and Russia largely destroyed British idea of protecting Ottoman integrity. Continuing stable during the reign of Abdulhamid II and although regain momentum shortly after 1908, the course of the relations between the two states entered a tense period by some political events occurred in Istanbul in 1909. Meanwhile it should be noted that after 1908, the control of the Ottoman Empire gradually passed into the hands of a kind of civil-military bureauc-

atic minority most of whom were the members of the Committee of Union of Progress(CUP). Therefore, in this study the Ottoman Empire refers to the governments established by the members of this minority and their acts. While with a military coup by this minority group in that year, Abdulhamid II was removed from the throne, at the same time, the political life of Istanbul was started to be dominated by pro-German actors. This made almost impossible for the Ottoman Empire to make an alliance with the British Empire.

While the CUP was increasing its influence in the country, the British Empire began to lose its former strong position in the Ottoman lands. Thus, Britain perceived the CUP as pro-German and a serious threat in terms of its own interests. Although refraining from entering direct engagement about the Ottoman geography prior to the First World War, the British Empire was sure about clashing of the CUP's, which came to power through a military coup in 1913, pro-German policies with its own interests in the short term. Thus before the First World War, by turning back a number of proposals from the CUP Government, the British Empire showed clearly that it did not want to be allied with the Ottoman Empire under then conditions. With the entry of the CUP to the war alongside the Germans, the relation between the two states was fully severed. During the war not only the British and the Ottoman armies but also economic and political interests of the two sides also began to clash openly.

This study, through the war aims revealed with entry to the First World War, will try to put forward the conflicting areas of the Ottoman and the British Empire. Content of then conflicting interests between the two states was important because this process affected directly the future of the Ottoman territories and dragged the people of these regions into an utterly different status quo. The nature of the conflict between the two states can be easily understood through the war aims of the two governments. Based on this idea, one of the main problems of this study was to reveal for which aims the British and the Ottoman Empire was in the war. Thus it contributes to the understanding of basis of British realpo-

litik which had a long historical background. On the other hand, emerging as a decisive factor in the politics of the Ottoman Empire after 1908, the CUP's expectation from such a war was very high and its aims were directly contrary to the British interests. One of the main objectives of this study is also to discuss and analyze the results of this antagonism.

What this study will contribute to the area is in contrary to the studies mostly evaluated First World War as only a war history in Turkish historiography, this study approaches it in context of conflicting interests and framework of international relations. Yet it is not possible to find any monographic, international and originally Turkish studies on hundred-year-old First World War. Most of the studies on this war were not able to get rid of certain ideological point of views. Unfortunately, nation-state contextualized historiography which has emerged in Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire has put deep distances between the people living in Turkey and understanding of the past. This at the same time ended the hopes for people's understanding of what really happened in the past and led historical facts to be discussed in a completely inexpedient ground. Even in this case, historical knowledge which generally was used as an instrument of internal political conflicts could not go beyond the individually selected patterns of events. Historical events which have converted to instruments of a kind of internal political struggle rather than understanding the realities in the past by local historians and politicians, have also gradually become a mythical instruments of the emerging Turkish nation state in the history of Turkish Republic. Thus, this study, which has emerged from the effort to understand historical facts on their own realities, at the same time, by reflecting the past, will contribute to the understanding of current Anglo-Saxon realpolitik, strategy and the geostrategy.

Ottoman War Aims in the First World War

Abdulhamid's deposition in 1909 and especially the Balkan Wars accelerated the project of transforming the Ottoman Empire into a

nation-state by the policies of the the CUP¹. The First World War period was the most productive years of the CUP for being a nation-state in the history of the Ottoman Empire². During this period, war aims of the Ottoman Government were summed up as full independent state, territorial integrity and founding a nation state based on Turkish elements³. Until the end of the war, the Ottoman Government tried to realize these aims but political and economic situation of the state was not sufficient to achieve these very hard objectives.

The idea of creating an independent Turkish national state was one of the most important war aims of the CUP. This policy was based on protecting the territorial integrity of the empire and also an independent economic system⁴. Fuad Selim Bey, Turkish Minister at Berne, declared that *"We demand the integrity of the whole Ottoman territory. We reject even veiled cessions of territory disguised under the names of autonomy or suzerainty. The recognition of our right (which is admitted by the States allied to us) to be our own masters at home, politically and in the economic sphere. With these terms we stand or fall " What applies to Austria-Hungary applies to us. We wish to be masters in our own house, but also to provide a home there for all inhabitants corresponding to the spirit of the age..."*⁵. During the war period, such policies as the removal of capitulation and independent tariffs were to reveal an independent state and so an economy⁶. While French and English railway concessions were nationalized, a number of cultural policies implemented by the CUP again co-

1 Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Euroasian Borderlands*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.550.

2 *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, Edited by Marian Kent, London 1984, pp.16.

3 *The Present State of Mind in Turkey*, CAB/24/53, May 25th, 1918.

4 Kent F. Schull, *Difference During the Second Constitutional Period, Religion, Ethnicity and Contested Nationhood in the Former Ottoman Space*, Edited By: J. Rgen Nielsen, Jorgen S. Nielsen, Boston 2012, pp.87.

5 *The Present State of Mind in Turkey*, CAB/24/53, May 25, 1918.

6 Stanford Jay Shaw, *The Ottoman empire in World War I: Prelude to War*, Turkish Historical Society, 2006, pp.319.

uld be seen as steps towards becoming a nation state. The adoption of Turkish as official language, expansion of Turkish educational institutions, restrictions on foreign schools can be considered as some other policies in the transformation of the empire to a nation-state⁷. On the other hand with all these policies, the control of Committee of Union and Progress reached its peak in the country during the war years⁸.

The CUP's policies during the world war based on protecting the territories and increasing the prestige of the Ottoman Empire were at the same time accompanied by some kind of irredantism⁹. With this policy the CUP was also trying to get the support of Muslim world living under the rule of Europeans and seeing the Ottoman Empire as a hope for salvation. Being the only Muslim country in the world maintaining its independence, raised expectations of Muslims for the success of the Ottoman Empire¹⁰. In the war process, being aware of this, the CUP tried to use some political and religious instruments such as holy war, caliphate, panislamic movement in order to be successful¹¹. Although Bolshevik revolution provided a suitable environment in terms of the spread of panislamic and panturanian movement, the growth of Arab nationalism during the war led to the fall of Islamism against panturanism¹². This was mostly because of panturkist policies which alienated Arabs¹³. On the other hand, after the occupation of Jerusalem by

7 Alexander Lyon Macfe, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923*, New York 2013, pp.63.

8 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

9 Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.550.

10 Report on the Panturanian Movement, CAB 24/33, October 1917.

11 Nurullah Ardiç, *Islam and the Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern Modernization in the Early 20th Century*, London 2012, pp.192.

12 John Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East, 1916-1919*, London 1999, pp.167.

13 Alexander Lyon Macfe, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923*, New York 2013, pp.238.

the British, the idea of Zionism began to gain importance. Meanwhile with emancipation of the Jews living in Russia after the revolution and American intervention gave significant momentum to the movement of Jews and Zionism¹⁴. In contrary to irredantist policies, occupation of eastern Anatolia, Hijaz, Iraq and Palestine during the war led to the narrowing of the territories dominated by the Ottoman Empire. While the CUP's turkification policies ended due to the occupations, these regions had also become a center for Arab, Jewish and Armenian nationalist movements. Although Russia declared that it would refuse the partition projects of Ottoman Empire, nationalist ideas had become stronger among the Armenians living within the borders of Russia after Bolshevik Revolution¹⁵. And in western frontiers another important problem for the CUP was that after Venizelos had come to power in 1917, Greece entered to the war alongside the Entente and thus Hellenism and Megali Idea projects started to raise again¹⁶.

For being an independent state, the CUP aimed to completely remove the foreign control over the economy, justice system, education, finance, taxation system and the tariffs which was established by European states in the past in the Ottoman Empire. They also expected from other states to respect the independent policies of the Ottoman state¹⁷. These objectives adversely affected the interests of all the Allied states and even of the Ottoman Empire's allies directly. In this case especially European companies doing business in the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman bond holders from European countries would be deeply affected. Actually the Allied Powers thought that they would somehow collect their

14 For more detailed information see Valdas Anelauskas, Zionism and Russia, https://archive.org/stream/ZionismAndRussia-ByValdasAnelauskas/ZionismAndRussia-Zionismandrussia-anelauskas_djvu.txt, erişim tarihi: 10.04.2016.

15 The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire, Edited by Marian Kent, London 1984, pp.67.

16 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

17 The Present State of Mind in Turkey, CAB/24/53, May 25th, 1918.

debts from the Ottoman Empire but real danger in front of achieving this for them and even for Ottomans was the possibility of positive discrimination for German national investments in Ottoman markets. In such a case, Germany would gain an advantage against Britain and France in Ottoman markets¹⁸. Such a condition providing Germany's dominance on Ottoman markets was also undesirable for CUP who aimed to end all foreign influence over the Ottoman Empire¹⁹. At this point the CUP did not feel gratitude towards Germany since it was believed that the Ottoman Empire did much more for the Germans than Germany's help for Ottomans. Meantime the CUP was aware that the Ottoman bonds obtained by Germans during the war was a serious problem in terms of the state's future financial situation. Being aware of the CUP's concerns about the Germans, the Britain were regarding that support for the independence project of the Ottoman Government would contribute their interest much more than their opposition²⁰. Therefore, most of the British statesmen were in favor of absolute support for an independent Turkish state in the post-war period. But they also thought that boundaries of this state would be determined during the negotiations after the war and the extent of this support would never be such as injuring the British interests. Britain also thought that this support would facilitate the resolution of other issues in its favor that might be the subject of negotiations.

It was obvious that the abolition of capitulations during the world war would somehow effect the empire's future economy and its relations with the European states but as war was still going on, it was not clear yet for the post war period. In other words, how this would reflect on Britain, France and the United States foreign

18 Naci Yorulmaz, *Arming the Sultan: German Arms Trade and Personal Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire Before World War I*, London 2014, pp. 157-158.

19 Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Euroasian Borderlands*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.550.

20 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

policy was still uncertain. By the way settlement of the railways which appeared to be a determining factor in the foreign relations of the CUP with the great powers, did not result in as they desired. Even though the railways in the hands of British and French were nationalized, running of some railways still by Germans actually meant that some were still being operated by foreigners.

By the way after 1914 with increasing impact of the Germans on Ottoman Empire, Germany's preferences also became effective on the Ottomans' imperial foreign policy. Although the French and American missionaries had gone during the war, more German professors and technical instructors had been imported by the government for some advisory boards and schools²¹. At this point the amount of the Ottoman Empire's debt to Germany had considerably increased. It could be considered that the Ottoman Empire probably would not be able to pay its debts to Britain and France but under all circumstances debts to Germany had to be paid which means a serious economic liability. When evaluated in this respect, it could easily be said that during the war period the Ottoman Empire became more dependent on foreigners than in the past and also was less national than ever before. In this period the Ottoman army, economy and finance was completely under the control of Germany. However German support for the CUP Government was because of the policies they followed were totally consistent with the interests of its own²².

Another important goals of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War was to avert the danger of Russia²³. Being aware of the aspirations of Tsarist Russia for the Bosphorus and Istanbul, the CUP had been in constant vigilance against Russia²⁴. With the emergen-

21 Justin Mccarty, *The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923*, New York 2013, pp.358.

22 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

23 Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Euroasian Borderlands*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.551.

24 Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 43-45.

ce of the German threat in Europe, Russia, Britain and France reached an agreement among themselves and temporarily united to be a guarantee against the common enemy, Germany. Meanwhile Russia's traditional policy and agreement on partitioning of the Ottoman Empire especially Istanbul and the Straits led the CUP to be more cautious against the Russian threat²⁵. Moreover, issues such as the policy followed by Russia during the Balkan Wars, its insistent attitude towards the Armenian reforms, intervention in the Kurdish issue²⁶ and its approach to the Ottoman Empire operations near Iran were considered as indicators of Russia's traditional foreign policy by the CUP. On the other hand reorientation of the Persian Anglo-French Agreement of 1907, their policies regarding Italy's attack on Tripoli and also their diplomacy after the Balkan Wars completely led to shake the confidence of the Ottoman Empire to Britain and France²⁷.

By Russia's withdrawal from the war, this threat for the Ottoman Empire had been parried in 1917. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Russian declaration about renouncing Istanbul had a great effect in the Ottoman Empire²⁸. Moreover, Bolsheviks who was not satisfied only with this, issued a telegram for the Muslims living in Russia and also in other parts of the world and declaring that the agreements related to the partition of the Ottoman Empire was invalid. But although averting the danger of Russia, with the emergence of Bolshevism, Ottoman Empire faced a new threat not existed before. This was coming from the British Empire. If Britain had considered the new situation emerged after the revolution in Russia as a threat to her security, she could have prioritized se-

25 For a detailed study on Russia and the Straits see, Sergey Goryanof, *Rus Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Boğazlar ve Şark Meselesi*, Ötüken Yayınları, İstanbul 2006.

26 Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 61-70.

27 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

28 Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Search for Peace, February-October 1917*, California 1969, pp.101.

curity concerns in the process of determining the status quo of the Ottoman Empire in the post war period. So this could have made peace conditions much heavier than the Ottoman Empire's expectations in case of defeat²⁹.

Realization of all Ottoman Government's war aims depended on the victory of the central power especially of Germany. Towards the end of 1917 however, there was no indication that the Germans would win the war. When Talat Pasha went to visit Berlin and Vienna in the summer of 1917, Germans had been assured him that they would defeat the Allies with a submarine attack and also in this period Talat had hoped to sign a separate agreement with Russia³⁰. But considering a possible defeat, the Ottoman Government agreed with Bulgaria that in case of a defeat they would act together. Despite the Ottoman Empire's hopes for these developments, the course of the war prevented the realization of these events expected by the Ottoman Empire. Submarine attack, which would speed up ending the war in favor of the Germans never accomplished.

Meanwhile, although the possibility of a separate agreement with Russia for the Ottomans continued for a while, how this agreement would contribute to the Ottoman Empire was an issue discussing in political circles until the end of the war. Those who believed the direct contribution of this was extremely limited and constituted the majority. This would not have a military return to the Ottoman army that had not performed any operation in the east since 1916. In terms of the Ottomans, fighting with British army by all military forces in Mesopotamia and Palestine, defeat of Britain was more important than a separate agreement with Russia. In case of an agreement with Russia, it was only provided the release of German soldiers fighting with Russia and it might be possible that these soldiers would be sent to assist the Ottoman

29 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

30 For a detailed German submarine war see; R.H Gibson-Maurice Prendergast, *The German Submarine War 1914-1918*, England 2002.

Empire to evacuate the areas occupied by the British. But the war going on the Italian front was a barrier to break on the western front and prevent German soldiers from going to Jerusalem to support. Thus, Ottoman Empire was abandoned to its fate in the Middle East by its allies who believed that a military success on the western front would be more effective in the evacuation of the Ottoman territories than a military operation in the Middle East³¹.

Although the CUP was not so willing to put into action this strategy, there was not an alternative but to accept the situation and to wait results of Germans' western offensive. Talat Pasha agreed with the Germans during his visit to Berlin that Germany would not make any agreement with the Allied unless the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire was guaranteed by the Powers. This meant that Talat Pasha would wait and not to take a separate step until Hindenburg finished the operation. As can be seen here towards the end of 1917 the Ottoman Government was still maintaining hopes for victory of the Germans and their support for preserving integrity of the Ottoman territories. From this, one can easily understand that the most important goals of the Ottoman Empire in the process of the First World War were to eliminate the threats directed against the territorial integrity of empire. Talat Pasha emphasized in the party convention in September 1917 that they were fighting for empire's territorial integrity, existence and independence. He also stated that these were the minimum requirements for Ottoman Empire to stand the negotiating table and they might negotiate with all parties respecting these principles. Again in parallel to these statements, in response to the note sent by the papacy in September, the Ottoman Government replied that their struggle was for existence, liberty and free development of country. The interesting point here is that before the Ottoman Empire joined the war, Britain had already made some proposals to respect the territorial integrity of Ottoman Empire if they

31 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

remained neutral³².

Above all Government claimed securing the rights of empire's complete sovereignty over the whole extent of dominions. Of course these kinds of statements by Ottoman Government was because of guarantees received from Germany but at the same time government officials with carefully chosen words were trying to explain why the Ottoman Empire was included the war and also the war objectives of the empire to the world community. It can be understood from the statements of government circles that the Ottoman Empire's war objectives were based on three important basics which were independence, national development and territorial integrity. At a time when the planned German attack did not take place yet, Ottoman Government still maintained the hope to realize these goals, but if the German attack failed, Ottomans would be forced to sit at the negotiating table or Germans would be forced to negotiate with the Allies and in this case, the war coherently come to an end for the Ottoman Empire³³.

The British War Aims in the First World War

Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister at the beginning of the war, believed that the Ottomans should have been pushed out of Europe and also Istanbul should have become an independent place or free port³⁴. On the other hand David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister of War Cabinet after 1916, when declaring the war aims of the empire stated that *"While we do not challenge the maintenance of the Turkish Empire in the homelands of the Turkish race with its capital at Constantinople, the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea being internationalized and neutralized, Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are in our judgment entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions. What the exact form of that recognition in each particular case should be need not here*

32 Stanford Jay Shaw, *The Ottoman empire in World War I: Prelude to War*, Turkish Historical Society, 2006, pp.253.

33 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

34 David French, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916*, New York 2014, pp.46.

be discussed, beyond stating that it would be impossible to restore to their former sovereignty the territories to which I have already referred"³⁵. Paul Kennedy when writing about the British foreign policy, stated that as a world wide great power, Britain would fight for the security of India, protecting the sovereignty overseas and the balance of power in Europe³⁶.

In parallel with these statements in an official document, British war aims were defined as:

- The evacuation of Belgium and her full independence,
- The evacuation and restoration of Serbia, Montenegro and Roumania,
- The evacuation and restoration of the occupied regions of France and satisfaction of the claims of France to Alsace Lorraine.
- Satisfaction of the Italians for a union with the people of their own race and tongue,
- The restoration of the former Polish Kingdom,
- The territory of the Ottoman Empire must be confined to Asia Minor with Constantinople as its capital and the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea must be neutralised and placed under international control.
- Arabia should receive complete independence; Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine should become autonomous under the protection of the great Powers.
- Ottoman public debt to be adjusted accordingly.
- German colonies should be placed under the control of administrations according to their interests and wishes,
- All belligerents must pay for the damage they have inflicted by

35 "British War Aims." *The Times*, 7 January 1918, 6 Apr. 2016.

36 Paul Kennedy, *Büyük Güçlerin Yükseliş ve Çöküşleri (16. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Ekonomik Değişim ve Askeri Çatışmalar)* Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2002, s. 285.

acts done in contravention international law³⁷.

British policy makers first and foremost, wanted to divide all the territories of the Ottoman Empire. When putting such a plan into practice, they claimed that the majority of the people living in these regions were non Turkish elements of the empire. Moreover they were claiming alleged atrocities by the Ottoman Government towards these non-Muslim elements to legalize this partition project. On the other hand according to the British plans the Turkish portions of the present the Ottoman Empire, in which the Turks were in a numerical majority should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which were under the Turkish rule would be assured an undoubted security of life. These territories should have also been separated completely from the Ottoman Empire and an assured absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development with the reservation regarding participation in the Ottoman debts³⁸. They thought that this plan could easily be applied to Armenia³⁹. The Armenians living under the control of the Ottoman Empire should have had an independent state was a very common thought among the British statesmen⁴⁰.

On the other hand at this point, British policy makers tended to give more attention to the people to whom they made some promises in exchange for cooperation against the Ottoman Empire during the war. These were Jewish people, the followers of Huseyin, Ibn Suud and people living in occupied Mesopotamia⁴¹. Arab populations formerly subjected to the Ottoman Empire should have to be liberated completely from Turkish rule and from all

37 War Cabinet, Statement of War Aims, CAB/24/37, January 03th, 1918.

38 PRO.FO. 608/83, No: 7442, Statement of British Policy in the Middle East, April 16th, 1919.

39 PRO.FO. 608/83, No: 7442, Statement of British Policy in the Middle East, April 16th, 1919.

40 Alexander Lyon Macfe, The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923, New York 2013, pp.215.

41 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

political connection, even nominal, with the Ottoman Government with the same reservation that they should participate in the pre-war Ottoman debts on an equitable principle that was in proportion to the ratio of their pre-war revenues to the total revenues of the Ottoman Empire⁴². By the way with Balfour Declaration in 1917, British declared that it would support foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine. In House of Commons during a debate on British war aims Robert Cecil said that the Ottoman domination over Arab territories was impossible and they would not tolerate any offer about these lands on behalf of the Ottomans. He also expressed his opinion about Palestine, Armenia and Mesopotamia in same direction⁴³.

British attached great importance to Anatolia which was a strategic passage between Europe, Asia and Africa. This position of the Ottoman Empire meant to be a potential sea power in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Red Sea. After taking part in the war alongside Germany, Ottoman control of these strategic regions was perceived as a threat to the British realpolitik by policy makers for the future. In parallel to this, as a Muslim state, any policy of the Ottomans towards the Muslim people of Caucasus, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia also had been recognized a direct threat to the British control over India and Egypt. Hence, the British policy makers had strongly opposed to any political power in Turkey whose policies were potentially addressed to the Turkish and Islamic population of the world. They had also pointed out clearly that new Turkish state had to determine its policies according to British interests⁴⁴. Against these objectives of British, Ottomans tried to keep insistently all the lands within the boundaries of empire which was very hard to achieve.

As it was stated above one of the most important targets of the

42 PRO.FO. 608/83, No: 7442, Statement of British Policy in the Middle East, April 16th, 1919.

43 "War Aims." *The Times*, 17 May 1917, 6 Apr. 2016.

44 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

British foreign policy on the lands owned by the Ottoman Empire had been the security of the Straits since the beginning of the 19th century⁴⁵. The most important thing for the British about the Straits was continuation of free trade steadily⁴⁶. After the Ottoman Empire closed the Straits on 1 October, the British Cabinet abandoning their support for the Ottoman territorial integrity was an indication of this importance⁴⁷. According to British traditional policy the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles should have been permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees. The British Government considered that the free passage of the Black Sea Straits, on footing of equality for ships of all nations, in peace or war, under international control, could be secured only by removing the shores of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and the part at least of the littoral of the Sea of Marmora, from Turkish sovereignty, dismantling all fortifications and introducing some external authority to secure the maintenance of the desired conditions⁴⁸.

As it is understood here, British who did not want to risk the future of free trade, was absolutely opposed to the rule of the Straits by the Ottoman Empire alone especially after being allied with the Germans. On the other hand, it was likely that Ottoman Empire would perceive any discussion on the Straits as to interference with its own sovereignty. During the war, against the possibility of debates on the status of the Straits in the future, the Ottoman Empire and Germany carried on a propaganda that by some applications British had also in violation of the status of the Suez Canal. Considering that new emerging nationalist movement in the Ottoman Empire never compromise on establishing a special status on the Straits, British statesman thought that military control

45 Erik Goldstein, "Great Britain and Greater Greece 1917-1920", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Jun., 1989), pp. 339-356.

46 David French, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916*, New York 2014, pp.43.

47 David French, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916*, New York 2014, pp.43.

48 PRO.FO. 608/83, No: 7442, Statement of British Policy in the Middle East, April 16th, 1919.

over the Straits was necessary in order to obtain the desired result successfully in the post-war negotiations⁴⁹. In such a case British would easily provide the status quo on the Straits which was most appropriate to its interests.

Turkish national movement emerging while partition of the Ottoman territories steadily was another important issues for the British policy makers. Towards the end of the First World War the British were afraid of the reactions emerged in Anatolia gradually turning into a nationalist reflex. British policy makers were aware of the situation and took seriously the claims including the idea of a probable Turkish state in central Anatolia after the war. In the greater part of the Anatolian peninsula, the population was predominantly Turkish and the British government consider that an independent Turkish national state should be left in existence in this area. The Turkish nation should be assured a secure sovereignty subject to the reservation that in view of the bankruptcy of the Ottoman Government, it should be required to accept foreign advisers, nominated by various Powers⁵⁰.

British statesmen believed that support of some war aims of the Ottoman Empire that would not damage the British interests, could be an instrument of bargaining during the coming negotiations. In other words, while British was opposed to nearly all war aims of the Ottoman Empire, it found it useful for their own interests to support little of them not clashed with its own. British policy makers thought that by allowing Turks to establish an independent state in those territories, they were able to maintain empire's interests and would not do much more than sacrificing the some minorities living on these lands⁵¹. Meanwhile, the British in order to convince the Ottomans for the adoption of the conditions

49 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

50 PRO.FO. 608/83, No: 7442, Statement of British Policy in the Middle East, April 16th, 1919.

51 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

best suited their own interests, intended to use Greek and Italian ambitions about Anatolia as a diplomatic instrument.

Although the British policy makers agreed on foundation of a Turkish state, ideological basis of this new state was extremely important for the protection of British interests in the Middle and the Far East. They claimed that Turkish nationalist movement in this period was developing through two different ideas. The first of these was panturanian movement aiming also the Turks living in Russia and Iran. British opposed directly to the panturanist idea because they considered that it would reveal the danger of division of Russia and Iran which was contrary to the British interests. Although being a potential threat, due to the fact that this idea was still on intellectual level, British did not care too much to problem⁵². On the other hand the British saw this policy as a practical political tool used by the CUP during the war⁵³. They believed that nothing have any national aims, it was only for increasing the power of the Ottoman Empire or bargaining during the negotiations.

However on the other side of the nationalist movement there was a different idea considered to be much more effective than the others. This movement was based on the idea of a national state of Turkish people living within the Ottoman lands, in other words Anatolia. Compared to the panturanian movement British policy makers believed that the latter was much more adopted by Turkish elements living within the Ottoman Empire whether they were from upper classes or not. Even if the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire could not be preserved, British considered that Turkish military-civilian bureaucracy and local people adopting this idea would fight together for founding an independent national state. Therewithal these parties would reject any status quo which was directly contrary to the principle of independence. British defined this process as national awakening of Turkish peo-

52 The Present State of Mind in Turkey, CAB/24/53, May 25, 1918.

53 Appreciation of the Attached Eastern Report, No: XL, CAB/24/144, November 1th, 1917.

ple like Greeks, Serbs or Bulgarians which before resulted in successfully. The British thought that opposing this movement that completely concerns the internal dynamics of Turkey would not provide any interest for their imperial idea. On the other hand they strongly opposed the panturanian movement which had an external aim and detrimental to the interests of the British Empire.

At this point in context of Turkish national state, which was going to sovereign over Istanbul arose as a new problem for the British interests. In terms of Turkish people, the problem of protecting sovereignty over Istanbul was almost as much important as of the national independence of Turkey. Istanbul was also an extremely important place for Turkish political circles and British policy makers thought that giving the control of Istanbul to another state or converting it into an independent district actually meant to take the reaction of all local politicians with whom they might conduct future negotiations⁵⁴. Even the liberals in Istanbul who had diametrically opposed to the views of the CUP and sympathy to the Allied, were not in favor of compromise on the future of Istanbul. Seeing the excitement aroused among the Turkish people during the Grand Vizier's speech about Istanbul in December 1917, the idea of leaving Istanbul to Turks had become more powerful around British political circles⁵⁵.

While Britain were totally opposed to the idea of leaving the old Ottoman territories again to the control of the Turks after the war and thought that varying degrees of autonomy given to these territories would bring about the end of the Ottoman Empire, they saw new rising Turkish nationalism and the CUP as an obstacle to this easy partition project. The CUP did not accept the conversion of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire into an international problem and with some political explanations and prom-

54 Erik Goldstein, "British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question: The Political Intelligence Department and the Eastern Committee, 1918", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), pp. 419-436.

55 Memoarandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

ises had tried to placate the people living within the Ottoman territories. By promising Arabs autonomy, they tried to frustrate the promises which the Allies made for the Arabs during the war⁵⁶. Even in this period, British policy makers argued that in the mind of the some CUP leaders there was a Turkish-Arab state project and they claimed that it would be contrary to the interests of the British Empire in the region⁵⁷.

On the other hand, after the British Empire declared a national home for the Jews in Palestine Talat Pasha gave an interview to a newspaper correspondent and said that *"as soon as Jerusalem was again in Turkish hands, the Jews and Christians would see their problems regulated to their satisfaction"*⁵⁸ In parallel to this, Javid Bey in December 1917 stated that after the war, they thought to make some special treatment for the Arabs and Armenians and also he added that Ottoman Government were preparing to repatriate Armenians peacefully after the war⁵⁹. But while these kinds of promises had no longer a response in those communities, the British statesmen perceived such a situation that would be similar to the old status quo which was a direct threat to the interests of the British Empire. As a result of this fact the British policy makers believed that separation of all the nations living under the rule of the Ottoman Empire was the most beneficial solution for protecting the interest of the British Empire⁶⁰.

As well as territorial questions one of the main problematic of the world war for the British policy makers was the status quo of the Ottoman Empire. Although the CUP decided to reconstruct the empire again, no matter what the conditions were, the British Empire wanted to prevent Ottoman Empire from being a great

56 Isaiah Friedman, *British Miscalculations: The Rise of Muslim Nationalism, 1918-1925*, New Jersey 2012, pp.1.

57 Report on Panturanian Movement, No:2, CAB/24/33, October 1917.

58 *The Present State of Mind in Turkey*, CAB/24/53, May 25th, 1918.

59 *The Present State of Mind in Turkey*, CAB/24/53, May 25th, 1918.

60 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

power in the future. The most important conflicting matters for both sides were about the future of the Muslim world. As a non-colonized Muslim country, Ottoman Empire was perceived as a leader state by other Muslim countries⁶¹. On the other hand the British Empire, whose colonies mostly consisted of Muslims, was very interested in leadership issues in the Muslim world. Britain, to facilitate the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and to eliminate its leadership position, were willing to give more political rights to the Muslims under their control. By this way, they believed that Muslim world satisfied with equality and freedom, would give up the search for a leader from the outside world⁶². However despite the Britain's concerns during the First World War, as another external political tool for the Ottoman Government, call of holy war had failed. While the idea of regaining of Egypt, the Caucasus and Persia had broken down, this also led to a new wave of counter occupations in the Ottoman territories. Meanwhile, the revolt of Mecca sheriff against the Ottoman Empire had been a heavy blow to the institution of the caliphate. In this process Britain wanted to establish a new Caliphate in Egypt and other Arab provinces⁶³ and Sheriff was used for the British project of creating a new Caliphate which would be weak and harmless for its own interest⁶⁴.

Towards the end of the war, Ottoman Government was still waiting and had hope for a victory of Central Powers against the Allied and at a time when the course of the war had not become clear, Ottoman Government had no intention to discuss the issues about future status quo with the British or any other foreign states⁶⁵. But

61 Cemil Aydın, *Civilization and World Order: Geopolitics and Cultural Difference*, Edited by Fred Dallmayr, M. Akif Kayapınar, İsmail Yaylacı, USA 2014, pp.130.

62 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

63 Joseph Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire 1908-1914*, Great Britain 1983, pp.182.

64 John Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East, 1916-1919*, London 1999, pp.101.

65 Memorandum on the Turkish Attitude Towards Peace, CAB 24/39, January 16th, 1918.

in the event of the defeat of the Central Powers, to discuss these issues with the Ottoman Government would be much easier for Britain and the possibility of resolving problems in her favor would be higher. Other than this, thinking that any military failure for the Ottoman Empire would be useful to its own interest, Britain exerted serious efforts to achieve this so that conflicting aims of two sides could be reconciled in favor of the British Empire.

Conclusion

Ottoman Empire's entry into the First World War, led to a serious deviation in the course of the war. Above all, the war spread into large areas and this revealed a heavy cost in terms of Britain and its allies. Moving an important part of its military forces to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, British suffered heavy losses in the war and it also was a member of the Allies who had to take the maximum cost of the war. Almost all of the British war aims, which related to the Ottoman Empire raised by the authorities during the war, were to compensate for heavy costs of the war and rebuild international status quo according to British interests permanently. On the other hand, governing the Ottoman Empire, the war objectives of the CUP, were largely conflicting with the interests of British Empire. CUP's war aims for recovering lost territories, state ideas based on panturanist model, policies for the protection of territorial integrity and a fully independent state project were directly in conflict with the interests of the British Empire.

Narrow passages, in other words straits, were the most strategic areas in the world wide trade system dominated by the British Empire. All of the passages like the Panama Canal, The Bab el-Mandab Strait, the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal were very important for the Britain and attaining the desired status quo for these places was seen necessary to protect the interests of the empire. Having a big share in east-west trade, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles were among the most valuable straits in the world. At the beginning of the war the CUP removed the capitulations and after a while the Straits were also closed to the passage of trade ships. Thus, shipments of some critical needs for the European states such as oil and wheat from east to west was stop. In terms

of Britain, the most significant gains could be achieved from the war with the Ottomans was reestablishing free trade system on the straits. Finally, unwilling to face with such a crisis, the British policy makers aimed to establish the status quo they wanted on the Straits permanently and had largely been successful on this.

Among the British war aims, which would mostly affect the Ottoman Empire were no doubt the plans of the Allied about founding many nation-states in the Ottoman territories. On the other hand the CUP's policies for protecting the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and even for obtaining more, were diametrically opposite to these plans of the Allied Powers especially Britain. While carrying out the policies in favor of territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire for a long time, the CUP's policies in this regard led Britain made a clear stance about the future status of the Ottoman Empire. Britain then wanted to partition and collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The British policy makers foresaw the establishment of a Turkish nation state eventually but boundaries of this state would remain limited to the Central Anatolia and also would not harm the British-based trade system. In other words the new Turkish nation-state should not conflict with the British interests was an indispensable condition for the Britain. In this context, while British policy makers opposed to a panturanist national movement, they were in favor of accepting a Turkish national state in a limited area in Anatolia including Istanbul. On the other hand having Muslim identity, the Ottomans embodied the Caliphate was a serious threat to the British colonies most of whom were Muslims. This could be a factor leading instability in the Muslim colonies of the British in the future. Therefore, London aimed to end this threat in the war and shortly after the war by the abolition of the caliphate, British aim to create a new Caliphate achieved successfully.

The British, who had lost position against increasing German influence on the Ottomans after 1890's, assessed the First World War as an opportunity to consolidate its power. The First World War, offered a unique environment for the projects to establish new independent proxy states in Anatolia, the Middle East and the Bal-

kans for the British policy makers. Thus, Greek and Armenian state projects in Anatolia; Arab states projects in the Middle East and a Jewish state project in Palestine had the opportunity to take life and as a result of these, the Ottoman Empire was partitioned virtually. Britain, that was may be the only victorious of the First World War, used every means of realist diplomacy and updated relations with its allies fastest as a member of the Allied Powers. British policy makers persuaded Italy to change its allies during the war and also they succeeded in putting Greece and the United States into the war on its side. This was a kind of constantly updating system of foreign policy of a state according to conditions and worked almost flawlessly by the British policy makers during the war. Thus, Britain was the only country achieving all close and distant aims in the war.

Britain's mostly having accomplished its aims concerning the Ottoman Empire had been a disaster for the Ottomans. By the end of the war, the Allied Powers were in possession of Istanbul and the Ottoman Government became a subservient for the Powers. British occupied many regions and their military power sufficient enough there to enforce the terms of agreement. The British were in secure possession of Mesopotamia including Mosul. On the other hand, the British position in Persia was strong both in militarily and politically. They were also in Trans-Caspia and this region became a naval base against the Bolshevist forces. The British army occupied the entire Caucasus from the Black Sea to the Caspian and provided the only guarantees for peace on the one hand between the rival peoples: Georgians, Armenians, Tartars, Daghanis, and Russians. The Ottoman Government, who wanted to get back those lost territories and to protect the territorial integrity of the empire, suffered a heavy defeat by the end of the war. In contrary to the British position, fighting for the sake of an independent state, Ottoman Empire become a much more dependent state than ever and considering the territories it was converted from an imperial state to a small one.

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