

THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS, WANGENHEIM, AND THE MAKING OF THE LIMAN VON SANDERS MISSION

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the formation process of the Liman von Sanders Mission, which triggered a major crisis in European diplomacy on the eve of the First World War. Following the devastating defeats of the First Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire faced a severe existential crisis and was compelled to confront the structural weaknesses of its military. Fears that even Istanbul and Western Anatolia could no longer be defended brought the need for a comprehensive military reorganization to the forefront. In this context, the Ottoman government decided in January 1913 to request a new military mission from Germany-one that would be granted exceptionally broad authority. The effort to save the state from collapse, combined with the Committee of Union and Progress leaders' motivation to remain in power, led to the initiation of formal contacts with Germany toward the end of the war. Germany, eager to protect its strategic interests in Ottoman territory, responded positively to this request, and extensive negotiations were held between the two sides. As a result of these negotiations, a German military delegation headed by General Liman von Sanders arrived in Istanbul in December 1913. The study focuses on the diplomatic contacts carried out during this period between the Unionist leadership and the German Ambassador to Istanbul, Hans von Wangenheim. It offers a comparative analysis of the motivations of both parties regarding the mission. In this framework, the Unionists' strategic security concerns and their efforts to preserve their political power are examined in detail, while Germany's strategic initiatives to increase its regional influence-and the impact of these initiatives on the Ottoman Empire's diplomatic and military transformation-are evaluated from a multidimensional perspective. The study argues that this process represented not merely a military initiative but also a political and strategic intervention, marking a significant rupture in the Unionists' traditional policy of balancing the Great Powers. It claims that the mission triggered a process that ultimately rendered it virtually impossible for the Ottoman Empire to develop an alternative to Germany in the context of World War I. In this respect, the study aims to contribute to one of the most debated areas in the historiography: the nature of the Ottoman-German alliance and the underlying causes of the Ottoman Empire's entry into the First World War.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, Germany, The Committee of Union and Progress, Wangenheim, Liman von Sanders*

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Öz

İttihat ve Terakki, Wangenheim ve Liman von Sanders Misyonu'nun Oluşumu

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Birinci Dünya Savaşı öncesinde Avrupa diplomasisinde önemli bir krize yol açmış olan Liman von Sanders Misyonu'nun oluşum sürecini incelemektir. Birinci Balkan Savaşı'nda alınan ağır yenilgilerin ardından ciddi bir var olma kriziyle karşı karşıya kalan Osmanlı Devleti, ordunun yapısal zaaflarıyla yüzleşmek zorunda kalmış; İstanbul ve Batı Anadolu'nun dahi savunulamayabileceği yönündeki endişeler, kapsamlı bir askerî yeniden yapılanma ihtiyacını gündeme getirmişti. Bu doğrultuda, 1913 yılı ocak ayında Almanya'dan yetkileri son derece geniş yeni bir askerî misyon talep edilmesine karar verilmişti. Devleti çöküşten kurtarma çabası, İttihat ve Terakki yöneticilerinin iktidarda kalma yönündeki motivasyonu ile birleşince, savaşın sonlarına doğru Almanya ile resmî temaslar başlatılmıştı. Osmanlı topraklarındaki stratejik çıkarlarını koruma arzusundaki Almanya ise bu çağrıya olumlu yaklaşmış; taraflar arasında kapsamlı müzakereler yürütülmüştü. Bu görüşmelerin neticesinde, General Liman von Sanders'in liderliğindeki Alman askerî heyeti Aralık 1913'te İstanbul'a gelmişti. Çalışma, bu oluşum sürecinde İttihat ve Terakki yönetimi ile Almanya'nın İstanbul Büyükelçisi Wangenheim arasında yürütülen diplomatik temaslara odaklanmakta; tarafların bu misyona dair motivasyonlarını karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısıyla analiz etmektedir. Bu çerçevede, İttihatçıların stratejik güvenlik hassasiyetleri ile iktidarlarını sürdürme yönündeki kaygıları ayrıntılı biçimde ele alınmakta; Almanya'nın bölgede nüfuzunu artırmaya yönelik stratejik girişimleri ve bu girişimlerin Osmanlı Devleti'nin diplomatik ve askerî dönüşüm süreci üzerindeki etkileri çok boyutlu bir perspektifle değerlendirilmektedir. Çalışma, bu sürecin yalnızca askerî değil, aynı zamanda siyasi ve stratejik boyutlar taşıyan bir müdahale olduğunu ortaya koymakta; misyonun, İttihatçı kadroların geleneksel "denge siyaseti" anlayışından kopmalarında bir kırılma noktası teşkil ettiğini ve uzun vadede Osmanlı Devleti'nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Almanya dışında bir alternatif geliştirmesini büyük ölçüde imkânsız hale getiren bir süreci tetiklediğini iddia etmektedir. Bu yönüyle çalışma, Osmanlı-Alman ittifakının temellerinin atıldığı tarihsel ve diplomatik zemine ve literatürdeki en önemli tartışma alanlarından biri olan Türk-Alman ittifakı ile Osmanlı Devleti'nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na giriş nedenlerine ilişkin değerlendirmelere tarihsel bir arka plan sunarak katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Osmanlı Devleti, Almanya, İttihat ve Terakki, Wangenheim, Liman von Sanders*

Introduction

The practice of employing foreign officers to restructure the army had, in the wake of the Empire's extensive territorial losses throughout the 19th century, evolved into a near tradition-and eventually, an unavoidable necessity-for a state increasingly identified with the label "the Sick Man of Europe". Especially following the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, the French model of military modernization had gradually been replaced by the Prussian one. Within this framework, German officers such as Moltke, Kaehler, and von der Goltz assumed important roles within the Ottoman military structure. Among them, Goltz Pasha stood out due to the length of his service and the institutional legacy he left behind. His contributions were regarded as a decisive factor in the military success achieved during the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897. Nevertheless, despite all these efforts, the process of political disintegration in the Balkans and, most significantly, the shock defeats suffered during the First Balkan War of 1912–

1913 had clearly exposed the limitations and inefficacy of these earlier missions. These developments paved the way for a growing consensus among the imperial leadership-particularly the Committee of Union and Progress-on the necessity of launching a more comprehensive, effective, and fully empowered modernization initiative. It was within this context that, in late 1913, the German Military Mission led by Liman von Sanders-described as the “last” and “most comprehensive” of its kind-marked a critical turning point in the history of Ottoman military modernization. Unlike its predecessors, the Sanders mission was not limited to advisory functions; he was also granted *de facto* command over an entire army corp. This reflected not only the depth of the reform process but also the extent of the Ottoman state's structural military weakness and its growing strategic dependence on Germany. With the establishment of the mission, the objective was to transform the Ottoman army not merely in technical terms, but also in its command structure, disciplinary system, and organizational functioning. As soon as it was announced the mission became one of the most contentious issues in European diplomacy in the period leading up to the First World War. Although initially presented as a military assistance initiative, the mission soon evolved into a severe political crisis that brought the Entente and Central Powers into direct confrontation, ultimately resulting-according to the Ottoman Ambassador in Berlin, Mahmut Muhtar Paşa-in an unprecedented international crisis.

Existing studies, particularly the Turkish historiography, on the subject have predominantly focus on the Committee of Union and Progress's (CUP) request for the mission, the ensuing diplomatic negotiations, the technical features of the mission, and the international crisis that unfolded after its arrival in Istanbul. However, these works have largely failed to evaluate the internal and external dynamics that motivated the CUP leadership to pursue such a bold initiative, or to analyze Germany's political and strategic rationale in accepting the Ottoman request within a comparative framework. The severe crisis that emerged within the Ottoman military structure during the First Balkan War not only exposed deep-seated institutional weaknesses in the army but also marked a critical turning point in terms of the Empire's diplomatic orientation, political stability, and relations with the Great Powers. The war had revealed just how dire the condition of the army truly was, prompting a consensus on the need for a comprehensive and radical reorganization. Given the lack of viable alternatives, the Ottoman leadership resolved to seek military assistance from Germany. In this context, a formal request was made in January 1913 for a military mission of exceptional authority, modeled on the French mission recently dispatched to Greece.

For the Committee of Union and Progress, which played a decisive role in institutionalizing the mission negotiations, the primary motivation was the need for military and psychological recovery. Following the devastating defeats in the Balkan Wars, the Unionists aimed to make the remaining territories-particularly Istanbul and Anatolia-defensible, and, if possible, to reclaim some of the lost lands. Germany's military support, especially through a modern and disciplined army model, was thus perceived as the key to a security-based reconstruction. The traumatic effects of the recent wars, the enduring sense of insecurity, and the rise of militarist tendencies all shaped the strategic rationale behind this orientation. Secondly, the study argues that the Liman von Sanders Mission played not only a central role in Ottoman foreign policy, but also in the CUP's strategy to consolidate its domestic political power. The idea of the mission had emerged just before the CUP seized power through the *Babiali Baskini* and was pursued with determination even after the assassination of Grand Vizier Mahmud Şevket Paşa and other political crises. In this regard, the mission functioned as a dual instrument-serving both the project of reorganizing the Ottoman military along German lines and the CUP's goal of reinforcing its institutional legitimacy. In doing so, this article aims to fill a significant gap in the literature by highlighting the internal political dimension of the mission, which is often overlooked in favor of external diplomatic analyses. Thirdly, the study contends that the Liman von Sanders Mission marked the first and most critical phase of a de facto alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Germany. It explores the diplomatic dynamics of Ottoman-German relations through the course of the negotiations, as well as the CUP's strategic priorities and the reflection of Great Power rivalries on the political stage in Istanbul. In this way, the study offers not only a contextualized background to the mission but also a fresh historical perspective for reassessing the direction of Ottoman foreign policy and its positioning within the shifting global balance of power. It critically engages with reductionist interpretations that claim the Ottoman Empire entered the war "unnecessarily," was "dragged in by Germany," or acted solely based on "Enver Paşa's personal inclinations." Instead, the article seeks to uncover the more complex structural, political, and strategic dynamics underlying the decision to go to war.

From Germany's perspective, the primary objective was to fully integrate the German military model into the Ottoman army, thereby reinforcing German influence over Ottoman military affairs and preparing the Empire to serve as a strong and reliable ally in the approaching global conflict. The article thus argues that the Liman von Sanders Mission constituted a crucial component of Germany's broader strategy to deepen its military and political influence over the Ottoman Empire. In retrospect, one can argue that this strategy was largely

successful. Despite ongoing debates throughout the summer of 1914 regarding whether the Ottomans would actually enter the war, the strategic orientation of the CUP had already been firmly established. The acceptance of the mission had deepened military integration with Germany to such an extent that alternative alliances had become virtually impossible-both technically and politically. After the Ottoman army's training, organization, and command structures were aligned with the German system, the prospect of military cooperation with any member of the Entente Powers was no longer a practical option.

Drawing on a broad range of primary sources-including diplomatic correspondence, archival materials, and contemporary memoirs-the study is structured into four main chapters. The first chapter, "From Defeat to Decision: The Origins of the Mission," examines why Germany was selected after the First Balkan War and how the idea of the mission evolved. The second chapter, "The Mahmud Şevket Paşa-Wangenheim Negotiations," focuses on the early diplomatic discussions and analyzes the strategic approaches taken by the CUP leadership. The third chapter, "Deadlock in the Negotiations," evaluates the disagreements that emerged between the parties and the temporary stagnation of the talks. The final chapter, "The Acceptance of the Mission and Arrival in Istanbul," examines the final diplomatic settlement, the delegation of authority, and the beginning of a new period following General Liman von Sanders's arrival in the Ottoman capital.

1. From Defeat to Decision: Goltz, Eydoux, and the Road to Sanders Mission

*"Events have been moving very rapidly, and the Turkish debacle seems complete. However much Turkey may be bolstered up by the Powers, her former position in Europe and elsewhere is apparently gone. A Moslem said to me the other day, 'If the Turks cannot maintain themselves in Europe by force of arms, they have no right to rule Islam'. I think we must expect trouble later in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, now that the central Government has received such a severe blow"*¹.

On November 3, 1912, this interesting "finding" transmitted by Lord Kitchener, the British Consul General in Cairo, to Grey presents an insightful glimpse into the profound crisis facing the Ottoman Empire and the harsh reality it had to confront. His report, though anecdotal in nature, reflected a broader

¹ British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914, Vol. IX, Part II: The Balkan Wars: The Crisis in the Balkans, 1913, (Hereafter (BD/9/2)), ed. G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), 1934., Lord Kitchener to Sir Edward Grey, No. 113, Cairo, November 3, 1912.

structural deterioration that had long been unfolding. Long beleaguered by political and economic instability, the Empire had compounded its difficulties with significant territorial losses in the Balkans². The early and unforeseen disaster in the Balkans explicitly demonstrated the weakness-and even the collapse-of both its army and navy. The military suffered heavy defeats in rapid succession, with Bulgarian forces advancing to the outskirts of Istanbul; the city was spared occupation only through a ceasefire request and the pressures exerted by the Great Powers on the Balkan states. Concurrently, Greece, leveraging its naval superiority, managed to invade the Northeastern Aegean Islands. Had it not been for the existing Italian occupation, it is highly likely that the Dodecanese (*Oniki Ada/Southeastern Aegean Islands*) would have also come under Greek sovereignty. Furthermore, the crisis, exacerbated by the catastrophic, uncontrolled migration from Rumelia to Anatolia³, plunged the Committee of Union and Progress into a state of profound panic, placing the state, perhaps for the first time in its history, in imminent danger of disintegration. This critical situation underscored the imperative for a radical modernization of the army (and the navy), both materially and spiritually, as failure to do so rendered collapse inevitable⁴.

² This study should be read in comparison with the following three works, which examine the same process from different perspectives and sources: Prigge 2017, p. 29-51; Bayur 1983, p.276-288; Kerner, 1927, p. 12-27; Turfan 1991, p. 163-194; Uyar 2019, p. 35-39. For further reading on the Sanders Mission see also: Aksakal 2018, p. 89-93; Fay 1930, p. 498-524. Dillon 1918, p. 369-381; Sazonov 1927, p. 117-126; Trumpener 1966, p. 179-192. This study distinguishes itself from other works in the literature through its approach to the Liman von Sanders Mission and the depth of the sources used. The comparative analysis of Ottoman documents alongside British, French, and German documents allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of the subject. Particularly within the context of the Edirne and Aegean Islands issues, the motivations of the Ottoman and German sides regarding the mission are compared within the framework of international dynamics. This approach contributes to a better understanding of the national and international dimensions of the Liman von Sanders Mission.

³ Cevad 2013, pp. 71-124; For further details on the reasons behind the defeat in the war, see also: Sabis 2014, pp.21-145.

⁴ Celal Bayar 1997, p. 181. For a significant analysis that seeks to explain the psychological and structural causes of the military collapse see: Hafız Hakkı Paşa 2020, p. 18-88. According to the account of the Austro-Hungarian military attaché Joseph Pomiankowski, while the idea of a comprehensive military reform in the Ottoman army was generally recognized by the ruling elite, it was Münir Paşa, the ambassador to Paris, who first put forward concrete proposals on this matter. Pomiankowski notes that this information was conveyed to him personally by Baron Wangenheim in February 1913. As Pomiankowski recounts, "*In February 1913, Baron Wangenheim informed me that Münir Paşa, then the ambassador to Paris, had proposed a tripartite reform plan: the state regime and the army should be reformed according to the German model, the administrative organization according to the Austro-Hungarian model, and the gendarmerie according to the Italian model.*" See: Pomiankowski 2014, p. 35.

In truth, the Ottoman army, as it stood, clearly unveiled a disorganized and ineffective appearance. Having become the attention of political disputes, the army was severely weakened by the power struggle between the Committee of Union and Progress and its opponents. The increasing entanglement of the military in political affairs—a trend that can be traced back to the reign of Abdülhamid II—intensified during this period, while the state simultaneously faced a deep economic crisis and struggled with issues such as a shortage of skilled personnel.⁵ The heavy defeat in the Balkans highlighted these underlying problems and led to a widespread agreement that the army needed to be depoliticized, reorganized, and made capable of defending the state. However, this decision faced a major structural limitation. The existing officer corps, trained under outdated methods and lacking modern strategic and tactical skills, was not in a position to carry out such a reform. At the same time, the economic situation of the state made it difficult to provide the necessary resources. As a result, it became clear that internal efforts alone would not be enough, and turning to foreign assistance became unavoidable. Among potential partners, Germany emerged as the most viable option. The Ottoman state already had established military ties with Germany and had gained practical experience through previous cooperation. While Ottoman engagement with the Prussian military model can be traced back to the 1830s—particularly with the advisory role of Helmuth von Moltke and other Prussian officers—the institutionalization of German military influence began in earnest with the arrival of General Colmar von der Goltz in the 1880s⁶. His mission significantly shaped the Ottoman army and elevated the prestige of the German model⁷. The German military system was renowned for its meticulous training, discipline, modern methods of warfare, and

⁵ In his memoirs, Sanders uses rather pessimistic language to describe the state of the Ottoman army when he first saw it: “*As the head of the Military Mission, I had the right to inspect all units and fortresses, so this was not particularly significant. Within a few weeks of taking command of the corps, I encountered a rather unpleasant situation in the troops. All the officers were in a state of depression.*”, Sanders 2020, p. 14.

⁶ For a comparative overview and detailed analysis of the roles, qualifications, and status of Prussian officers within the Ottoman military, as well as the structure, scope of activities, and institutional impact of the missions led by Moltke, Kaehler, von der Goltz, and Liman von Sanders, see: Wallach 1977, p. 11-146.

⁷ Goltz Paşa, despite the significant challenges he faced, played a crucial role in the recovery of the Ottoman army and the improvement of officer training during his initial 12-year period of service. His efforts were highly influential in shaping the future “pro-German sentiment and allegiance” within the Ottoman military. For detailed information on Colmar von der Goltz’s assessments and contributions regarding the Ottoman Empire, see Salih Kış, 2017; Günay 1991, p. 26-42; Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz, 2023; For a general overview of the German military missions in the Ottoman army from Colmar von der Goltz to Field Marshal Liman von Sanders, see: Mühlmann 2009, p.14-26; Özgüldür 1993, p. 297-307.

organizational capabilities. Although the responsibility for the defeat was also attributed to the German military mission in Istanbul, admiration, trust and respect for German discipline and military methodology remained widespread among Ottoman military and political circles. This made Germany an ideal partner in the process of restructuring the Ottoman army. It is important to note, however, that this preference was not solely based on the perceived merits of the German military model. During this period, the Ottoman state was experiencing a severe crisis of confidence with Britain, which had been entrusted with modernizing the navy, and with Italy and France, which had undertaken the modernization of the gendarmerie. The negative stance exhibited by these two states during the Italo-Turkish War (*Trablusgarp Savaşı*) and the First Balkan War had caused deep disappointment among the Committee of Union and Progress, leading to the perception that the Allied Powers had lost their previous sensitivity regarding the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.



Figure 1: “*Spekulatius der Große in Skutari*,” This satirical cartoon by Erich Wilke mocks the opportunistic and economic motivations behind the Great Powers’ involvement in the Balkan Wars, especially during the siege of Scutari. *Erich Wilke, “Spekulatius der Große in Skutari,” Jugend*, no. 22 (1913): 651.

As Germany emerged as the leading candidate for external assistance, Babiali promptly initiated diplomatic contact to secure concrete military support.⁸ The report sent by Germany's Ambassador in Istanbul, Wangenheim, to the German Foreign Ministry (*Auswärtiges Amt*) on 2 January 1913 sheds light on the beginning of this process. According to this report, the Ottoman Foreign Minister, serving under the government of Kamil Paşa, Gabriel Noradunkyan held a meeting with Wangenheim and, on the condition of absolute confidentiality, requested information regarding the circumstances under which General Eydoux had been assigned, the scope of his duties, and particularly the position he had taken against the Greek army⁹.

This direct reference to General Eydoux is indeed striking. As a head of the French Mission Eydoux arrived in Athens on January 21, 1911, at the head of a twenty-member delegation following the signing of a military cooperation agreement between France and Greece. This development must be viewed in the context of the 1909 military intervention in Greece, when the army effectively seized political control and forced the civilian government to carry out comprehensive constitutional and military reforms. The restructuring efforts initiated after the 1909 intervention gained institutional momentum with the rise of Eleftherios Venizelos to political leadership, and the military reforms were shaped around a model of military education and organization to be implemented through foreign experts. He was invited in this context. The example of Eydoux demonstrates not only that Babiali closely monitored military developments in Greece, but also that it was significantly influenced by the tangible successes of

⁸ This process is also well-detailed in Mesut Uyar's article titled "Sanders Military Assistance Mission, 1913-1918" under the subheading "The Birth of the Sanders Mission" (p.34-37), where it is analyzed through literature and records from the German Foreign Ministry. See and compare, Uyar 2019, p.29-84.

⁹ The original text: "Noradunghian bat streng vertraulich, ihm so schnell wie möglich Kenntnis von den Bedingungen zu verschaffen, unter denen der General Eydoux engagiert sei, und von der Stellung, welche der General dienstlich der griechischen Armee gegenüber einnehme. Anheimstelle, falls keine Bedenken, Graf von Quadt zu direkter Mitteilung gewünschter Information an mich zu veranlassen". (Noradunghian requested in strict confidence that he be informed as soon as possible of the conditions under which General Eydoux was engaged and of the General's official position vis-à-vis the Greek army. If there are no objections, I would ask Count von Quadt to communicate the desired information directly to me). Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914, Band 38/1, (Hereafter GPEK/38/1), Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Friedrich Thimme (eds.), Die Liquidierung der Balkankriege, 1913-1914 (Zweite Hälfte), Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, Berlin, 1926, Wangenheim an das Auswärtiges Amt (AA), Nr.15 435, Konstantinopel, den 2. Januar 1913. (This document is also examined within a different analytical framework in the works of Swanson, Bayur and Turfan. For comparison, see Swanson 1970, p.229; Bayur 1983, p. 276; Turfan 1991, p. 169.

the French military mission in a short span of time. The reforms implemented under Eydoux's leadership enabled the modernization of the Greek army and rendered it battle-capable. This success prompted Ottoman decision-makers to reassess their own military reform process and the effectiveness of the foreign military missions they had hosted until then. In this sense, Eydoux's case likely served not only as a technical reference for the Ottoman request for a new German military mission in 1913, but also played a role in prompting a more profound and outcome-oriented restructuring initiative. It appears that the Ottoman decision-makers viewed the success of Eydoux's mission in Greece as a model and, in light of this experience, decided to pursue a similar transformation with the support of a powerful ally-Germany.

According to the terms of the agreement and the royal decrees that put it into effect, members of the mission were granted extraordinary powers: each French officer was appointed at one rank above their French army grade and was considered senior to all Greek officers of the same rank. Although a general admiration for the Prussian military tradition persisted, General Eydoux made great efforts-especially in the lead-up to the Balkan Wars—to reorganize the Greek army and improve its maneuverability based on the French military model. The reforms did not remain theoretical but yielded effective and tangible results in a much shorter time than expected¹⁰. During the Balkan Wars, Eydoux's contributions were frequently acknowledged by Greek authorities. In particular, King Constantine, who had initially opposed the mission¹¹, later expressed his appreciation for General Eydoux's contributions to the reorganization of the army and openly declared that, thanks to Eydoux's reforms and his contribution to the war effort, Greece owed to France¹². According to generally accepted assessments, Eydoux achieved to turn the Greek army a real and effecting fighting force¹³ and played a significant role in some of the military victories achieved by the Balkan alliance against the Ottoman Empire. Casavetti reflects on his contribution to the Greek army in his study with the following remarks:

“It was not, of course, until the arrival of the French Military Mission, with General Eydoux at its head, in January, 1911, that the systematic reorganization of the Army was taken in hand. There was much to be done, but the ground on which they had to work was well prepared, and apart from this the Greek, when he applies his mind to a subject, is able to learn quicker than almost anyone else.

¹⁰ “The Greek Army Manoeuvres”, *The Times*, 5 June 1913.

¹¹ Llewellyn-Smith 2021, p. 303.

¹² “The Greeks And General Eydoux”, *The Times*, 13 October 1913; “Greek King in Paris”, *Daily Mail*, 22 September 1913.

¹³ “Finances of the Greece: Can Hellenic Kingdom withstand the Strain”, *The Financial Times*, 22 October 1913.

The result is that a great deal-far more than was thought possible by any authorities on military affairs-was accomplished in a very short time. Even this could not have been done if the French officers who formed the Mission had not put their heart into their work and laboured continuously and without sparing themselves”¹⁴

On the other hand, Eydoux’s appointment to the Greek army was, strikingly-or even ironically-inspired by the mission of Colmar von der Goltz, who had profoundly influenced the modernization of the Ottoman army. Invited to Istanbul after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 to restructure the Ottoman army along Prussian lines, Goltz served in the Empire for thirteen years. His sweeping reforms, the provision of modern German arms during the restructuring period, and his reorganization of mobilization, structure, and war planning played a significant role in the Ottoman military victory in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897¹⁵. The superior performance of the Ottoman army in that conflict had a deep impact on Greece, prompting its leadership to avoid a similar defeat in future wars by seeking to rebuild its army along comparable lines and to request the support of a foreign military mission. E. J. Dillon, a journalist known for his close ties to Venizelos, provides a revealing anecdote about Eydoux’s invitation to Greece in his article “*The Central Figure of the Peace Conference*”, published in the *Daily Telegraph*. According to Dillon, the following exchange took place between them: “*He was invited to Greece by M. Venizelos, who remarked to me: ‘What Von der Goltz Pasha is credited with having accomplished for Turkey, General Eydoux will achieve for Greece.’ ‘Are you quite sure?’ I queried. ‘Yes,’ was the answer, ‘because both sides are in earnest. The men are burning with zeal to learn, and the French instructors with zeal to teach and create an army.’*”¹⁶.

This dialogue not only reveals the high expectations placed on the Eydoux Mission, but also clearly illustrates how the Greek political and military elites-much like the Ottomans before them-carefully studied the Ottoman experience, were inspired by Goltz Pasha’s military reforms, and were determined to follow a similar path to modernization. In this regard, one may trace a historical continuum: Von der Goltz’s reforms in the Ottoman army served as a direct inspiration for the Eydoux Mission, and Eydoux’s efforts in Greece, in turn, became a model for the German mission later led by Sanders. In other words, the Goltz Mission gave rise to the Eydoux Mission; and the Eydoux Mission, in turn, inspired the Sanders Mission. Moreover, this process sheds light not only on the dynamics of Ottoman-Greek military rivalry and the background of conflicts

¹⁴ Cassavetti 1914, p. 64.

¹⁵ Chalil 2019, p.43-44; Atilgan 2019, p. 29-46.

¹⁶ “The Central Figure of the Peace Conference”, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 1913.

between the two states, but also on the broader strategic orientations of each country during World War I. Greece's alignment with the French military tradition drew it into the ranks of the Entente Powers, while the Ottoman Empire's increasingly close ties with the German military system laid the groundwork for its eventual entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers.

Returning to the formation of the mission, although there is no available evidence indicating whether Noradunkyan conducted the meeting based on a formal government decision or entirely on his own initiative, this can be regarded as the first step toward establishing a strategic relationship with Germany concerning military assistance¹⁷. As can be seen, when the Ottoman Empire brought up its request for military assistance-a step that would pave the way for the Liman von Sanders Mission-neither the coup had yet taken place, nor had the Unionists returned to power in a way that would prove lasting, nor had Mahmut Şevket Paşa been appointed as Grand Vizier. When evaluated in light of the currently available evidence, this document stands as a particularly strong and illuminating piece of proof that could put an end to debates over who first proposed the Liman von Sanders Mission. Notably, the emergence of the idea for the mission (reorganizing the army) and the initiation of diplomatic efforts appear to have occurred-contrary to widespread assumptions-before the involvement of Unionist actors. The literature presents differing views regarding who first introduced the idea. One prominent argument holds that the initiative came from Mahmut Şevket Paşa. Cemal Paşa, a leading figure in the Committee of Union and Progress, explicitly supports this view in his memoirs, emphasizing that

¹⁷ In his study, Naim Turfan-while also referring to the arguments put forward by Bayur-states that there is no official record in the Ottoman archives concerning this meeting, and suggests that Noradunkyan most likely initiated contact with Wangenheim on his own (Turfan 2020, p. 309, 386). Within this context, Turfan concludes that Noradunkyan was inclined to conceal the initiative specifically from Minister of War Nazım Paşa. Wangenheim, too, may have opted for discretion, given Nazım Paşa's nationalist orientation, his confidence in the capacity of the Turkish military, and his overall skepticism toward foreign advisors-all of which contributed to a broader effort to limit German influence within the army. That said, Noradunkyan was also one of the most visible political figures of the period. He frequently appeared in the international press, issuing public statements-particularly on matters related to the war-that broadly reflected the Ottoman government's policies. In this light, even if the meeting was not initiated entirely on his own accord, it is plausible to argue that Noradunkyan was articulating views consistent with those of the governing elite. Indeed, it seems unlikely that he would have made such a significant proposal independently, without some form of official or semi-official endorsement. For a more detailed account of Noradunkyan's public statements and his wartime diplomacy, see: Mutlu 2023, p.12-160. Nevertheless, in order to better understand and clarify this critical point, it is of utmost importance that the relevant documents not only in the Ottoman and German archives but also British and French archives be thoroughly examined.

Enver Paşa played no role in this process¹⁸. These statements clearly indicate that the issue had been raised prior to his appointment as Minister of War. Indeed, Ahmet İzzet Paşa, who held the position of Minister of War when Sanders arrived in Istanbul, also attributes the initiative to Mahmut Şevket Paşa¹⁹. Mühlmann identifies the meeting between Wangenheim and Mahmut Şevket Paşa on April 26 as the starting point of negotiations between the two sides²⁰. Contemporary literature likewise tends to highlight Mahmut Şevket Paşa as the key figure in initiating this process. For example, the *History of the Turkish Armed Forces* states: “*The initiative to bring General Liman von Sanders and his delegation to Turkey was prepared during Mahmut Şevket Paşa’s tenure as Minister of War...*”²¹.

One reason why this view has gained wide acceptance is the belief that the first concrete and official contacts regarding the mission were initiated between Mahmut Şevket Paşa and the German Ambassador in Istanbul, Wangenheim. However, it is important to distinguish between two separate phases: the initial proposal of the mission and the beginning of its diplomatic negotiations. In fact, Wangenheim’s report shows that the idea was first raised by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabriel Noradunkyan, and that he held preliminary talks on the subject. Mahmut Şevket Paşa’s prominent role in the process can be explained by his appointment as Minister of War following the *Babiali Baskını*, a violent intervention by the Unionists in 1913, on 23 January 1913. It is likely that the initiative originally led by Noradunkyan was then continued by Mahmut Şevket Paşa, who reopened discussions with Wangenheim. At first, the idea resembled a limited advisory mission, similar to the earlier French mission under General Eydoux. But during Mahmut Şevket Paşa’s tenure, this idea developed into a plan for a more powerful mission with broader authority. This marked the beginning of efforts to establish a German military mission that would include command responsibilities, not just advisory support. In this case, it seems very likely that Mahmut Şevket Paşa heard about the idea directly from Wangenheim, rather than through a third party. While this scenario can only be considered a hypothesis for now, what is certain is that Mahmut Şevket Paşa, who was always holding the view that the Ottoman army should be reformed along the lines of the German model, played a key role in giving shape to the mission and putting it into practice. Looking at the broader context, this decision appears to have been not solely the result of the Unionist leadership, but rather a product of a broader state

¹⁸ Cemal Paşa 2020, p. 83; Artuç 2023, p. 134.

¹⁹ Ahmet İzzet Paşa 2019, p. 182.

²⁰ Mühlmann 2009, p. 26-27.

²¹ Genelkurmay 1996, p. 52.

mechanism-one driven by the urgent need to restructure the army in order to save the state, primarily by depoliticizing the military and restoring it as a dynamic and functional institution. In his report on January 5, Wangenheim explained the rationale for this request as follows: “*Because he intends to request a German general as commander-in-chief in order to ensure that the army remains free from politics during peacetime*”²².

Within this framework, it is important to underline the following point: the intention to invite a German military mission emerged before the Committee of Union and Progress came to power. However, the Unionists adopted a resolute stance on rapprochement with Germany and the military mission, choosing to carry forward the initiative that had been launched prior to their rise to power. The appointment of Mahmut Şevket Paşa as Grand Vizier was a key component of this policy, and his selection was closely linked to the Sublime Porte’s prioritization of strengthening Ottoman-German relations. In this context, it appears that Germany’s satisfaction was successfully secured. Indeed, in a telegram sent from the Ottoman Embassy in Berlin to the Sublime Porte on 26 January 1913, it was reported that his presence at the head of the cabinet was regarded as a guarantee for the enhancement of Germany’s prestige in the Ottoman Empire. The same document also noted that the German press had generally responded positively to this development²³.

However, because of the ongoing First Balkan War and Germany’s reluctance to engage in formal negotiations while hostilities persisted, concrete discussions were postponed until the initiation of peace efforts in London. It was only after the start of the London Peace Conference that detailed negotiations could begin. This process coincided with Şevket Paşa’s tenure as Grand Vizier. Therefore, while the idea of the mission predates the Unionist government, the actual implementation of official contacts took place during a period in which he held considerable military and political influence²⁴.

²² Quoted from the Editor’s note added as a footnote to the same telegram. GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das Auswärtiges Amt (AA), Nr.15 435, Konstantinopel, den 2. Januar 1913.

²³ Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı, Osmanlı Arşivi (Hereafter BOA), HR.SYS, 2913-68, Galib Bey a Moukhtar Bey, Paris, 26 Janvier 1913.

²⁴ One important point to note here is that the restructuring process was not solely dependent on the expected German mission. In this regard, as noted in Turfan’s work, as part of the broader effort to reorganize the Ottoman army, the *Regulation for the General Military Organization (Teşkilat-ı Umumiye-i Askeriyye Nizamnamesi)* was distributed to the army on 14 February 1913, marked as “top secret,” and was put into effect. Jointly prepared by the Ministry of War and the General Staff, the regulation was approved by the Council of Ministers and ratified by the Sultan. However, its official proclamation only took place on 11 December 1913. For more details see: Turfan 2000 p. 311.



Figure 2: “Inspired by the Goltz Mission and an inspiration for the Sanders Mission”; The Eydoux Mission (1911–1914), “La mission de Grèce vient se battre en France,” *Le Miroir*, 23 août 1914, p.15.

*“Neither today nor in the future will anyone be able to lay a hand on Anatolia, where we have vital interests”*²⁵

Initially, German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II adopted a notably cautious stance toward the Ottoman Empire’s request for a military mission. This hesitation stemmed largely from the sensitive geopolitical environment at the time, as the First Balkan War was still ongoing. The conflict had already disrupted the balance of power in Southeastern Europe, and any overt move by Germany to expand its influence through a military presence in the Ottoman Empire risked provoking a reaction from the other Great Powers, particularly Russia, France, and Britain. Therefore, Berlin approached the request with strategic restraint, aiming to avoid further diplomatic tension while still preserving its long-term interests in the region. Wangenheim-whom General Pomiankowski described as “the most influential figure in the coordinated diplomatic circle in the Turkish capital prior to the war”²⁶-emerged as the individual who allayed Kaiser Wilhelm’s reservations and ensured that the matter was duly considered. According to Pomiankowski, many German officers in Istanbul believed that a

²⁵ The German motto? A quotation from Wangenheim’s address delivered on January 28, 1913. For more see: “Hands off Asia Minor”, *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1913.

²⁶ Pomiankowski 2014, p. 47. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Sazonov regarded Wangenheim as “the most successful of the German fighting diplomatists”), For more about his views see: Sazonov 1927, p. 228.

comprehensive reformation of the Turkish army was unrealistic and advocated for the dissolution of the existing military mission²⁷. Wangenheim, however, did not share this view and maintained that the Ottoman call for assistance must be given due consideration. In his reports, the German ambassador provided an in-depth analysis of the Ottoman state's economic, military, and political conditions, emphasizing that Germany's response to this call was critical in terms of long-term interests²⁸. For instance, in a report sent to Berlin on 21 January 1913-just a few days before the *Babıali Baskını*, he detailed the reasons behind the rising demand for external assistance within the Ottoman administrative cadre and the rationale for choosing Germany.

“Recently, a sentiment has emerged among Turks that Turkey cannot recover and be restructured solely by its own means. In all spheres, including administration, the army, and the navy, there is now a demand not merely for advisors, but for foreign experts endowed with extensive authority and placed directly at the helm of units. One of today’s most forward-thinking figures in Turkey, the current Şeyhülislam Cemaleddin Bey-once a staunch opponent of foreigners-recently informed his acquaintances that he would be prepared to accept the position of Grand Vizier provided that the administration and the army were placed under foreign control. Cemaleddin Bey asserted that, by wearing a turban, he symbolically conveyed to the Muslims the notion that Christians might intervene in the internal affairs of the Ottoman state. The same views were prevalent among the Committee of Union and Progress circles, who were poised to return to power in the near future. It is possible that the need for foreign assistance, which the Ottoman state felt in order to regain its footing, could be met by the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy). Today, the general inclination of Ottoman public opinion is toward the Triple Alliance; however, Kamil Paşa, who was about to step down, was still attempting to forge closer ties with Britain. Both France and Russia have lost the trust of the Turks. Today, Germany undoubtedly occupies the foremost position in terms of Turkish sympathy, as it was the only country that, in its arrangements with the Balkan states, undertook initiatives supporting the Turkish perspective. For this reason, Turkey expects Germany to stand by its side in the most crucial area of its reform efforts, particularly in reorganizing the army. Moreover, there is hope that the emperor will be prepared to provide Turkey with an especially capable general. This general, assuming the role of commander-in-chief without any

²⁷ Pomiankowski 2014, p. 35-36.

²⁸ These comprehensive reports would not only play a critical role in convincing the Kaiser to approve military cooperation with the Ottomans and ultimately endorse the mission, but Wangenheim's diplomatic efforts would also go down in history as a pivotal process that laid the foundation for the Ottoman-German alliance.

*accountability to the ministry, would completely reorganize the army with the assistance of German officers and, in particular, purge the officer corps of political influences.”*²⁹

The idea of restructuring the army continued to remain on the agenda despite internal turmoil and heavy defeats in the war. The fact that the current cabinet was preparing to relinquish Edirne (*Adrianople*), and the Aegean Islands under pressure from the Great Powers rapidly deepened the internal unrest. The Committee of Union and Progress, which seized power through the *Babıali Baskını* (Coup d'état/Raid on the Sublime Porte), on one hand, grappled with issues of distrust and legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the Great Powers and decided to continue the war, while on the other hand, it initiated a new process for the reorganization of the army. According to Kazım Karabekir, the Mahmut Şevket Paşa and the Chief of the General Staff Ahmed İzzet Paşa launched a major mobilization for the reorganization and reform of the army³⁰. The definitive loss in the Balkan Wars and the vision of reclaiming Edirne and the Aegean Islands, which were seen as vital for the security of Istanbul and the survival of the state, made a radical transformation in the army imperative. As noted in Cemal Paşa's memoirs, Mahmut Şevket Paşa attached particular importance to this issue, providing detailed explanations and seeking his opinions on the matters he contemplated and attempted. According to him, all previous attempts to reform the Ottoman army had either remained incomplete or were fundamentally flawed. Whether during the reign of Abdulhamid II or after the Constitutional era, the reformers called upon had been selected arbitrarily and without any guiding principles. There had been no consideration of inviting a comprehensive, interconnected, and effective reform commission within the framework of a broad program. He emphasized that the existing demands of the British naval mission for the navy must be fully met, while for the army, it was essential to seek assistance from Germany. He suggested that a military mission similar to the one France had sent to Greece could also be requested from Germany. A large-scale German military mission should be invited for the comprehensive reorganization of the army. If necessary, even the command of an Ottoman corps (later decided to be the First Corps in Istanbul) should be entrusted to a German general³¹.

²⁹ Telegram dated January 21, 1913. Quoted from the Editor's note added as a footnote to the same telegram. GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim to the Foreign Office (AA), No. 15 435, Constantinople, January 2, 1913.

³⁰ Karabekir 2001, p. 408. Another significant step in the restructuring of the army was “rejuvenation,” and the most decisive and radical measures in this regard were taken starting from early 1914, when Enver Paşa assumed the Ministry of War.

³¹ Cemal Paşa 2020, p.81-83. The experience of Field Marshal von der Goltz was a significant influence on Mahmut Şevket Paşa's conclusion. It had become clear through the Goltz mission

Based on these statements, it is possible to argue that Mahmut Şevket Paşa had a highly realistic, comprehensive, and determined perspective on modernizing the Ottoman army. He believed that, with the current state of the army, it no longer seemed possible for the Ottoman Empire to defend either its capital or the Anatolian heartland. He also believed that the reforms should not be limited to technical corrections but should aim to rebuild the fundamental elements of the army, such as leadership, organization, and ideological cohesion. He conveyed the framework and necessity of this demand to Cemal Paşa as follows: *“As for our army: We can no longer free ourselves from German military methods. For over thirty years, German instructors have been present in our army; our officer corps has been thoroughly trained in German military methods; in short, our army has been shaped by the spirit of German military training and discipline. It is now impossible to change this. Therefore, I am considering bringing in a large-scale German military mission and, if necessary, entrusting the command of an Ottoman corps to a German general, appointing German officers as commanders to all its units. In this way, by creating a model corps, we could send all Ottoman officers to this corps as trainees for a certain period to enhance their knowledge.”*³² This passage illustrates his pragmatic and forward-thinking approach. He recognized the deep-rooted influence of German military methods on the Ottoman army and sought to institutionalize this relationship further. His vision extended beyond superficial reforms, aiming to create a model corps that would serve as a training ground for Ottoman officers, thereby ensuring the long-term modernization and professionalization of the army. This approach underscores his commitment to addressing the structural and systemic deficiencies of the Ottoman military through decisive and well-planned measures.

that one of the obstacles to the success of the mission was “full authority.” According to Turkish Historian İlber Ortaylı, Goltz Paşa was the only person who managed to understand the Ottoman army best and influence Ottoman commanders, becoming a legend like Moltke during his time in Istanbul (Ortaylı 2001, p. 115-116). However, he never had the authority granted to Liman von Sanders. According to Pomiankowski, Goltz stated that during his 12 years in Turkey as a training officer, the Sultan did not permit him to observe maneuvers. Goltz argued that the selection of capable officers who would serve in the General Staff and be appointed to high command positions could only be possible through maneuvers, but the Sultan was opposed to such practices. The Sultan insisted on providing the necessary knowledge to identify and select high-ranking commanders based on their qualities to ensure the presence of competent Paşa’s. Pomiankowski 2014, p.32. Karabekir confirms these statements. According to his account Goltz not only lacked full authority in matters of reform, but some of the powers granted to him were even restricted. Karabekir 2001, p. 206-208.

³² Cemal Paşa 2020, p.82-83.



Figure 3-1: Eydoux, “The re-organizer of the Greek army” (Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014697709/>)

Figure 3-2: Von der Goltz, “The re-organizer of the Ottoman army” (Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014709451/>)

2-The Mahmut Şevket Paşa–Wangenheim Talks

The official request for the military mission was first brought forward in early April 1913, during the peace negotiations in London concerning the First Balkan War. Although initial efforts had begun in early 1913, official negotiations could not be initiated due to the Balkan War. Unlike the previous government, the Committee of Union and Progress did not prioritize a long-term, institutional reform aimed at depoliticizing the army. Rather, their primary objective was to address the immediate and concrete threats posed by the ongoing crisis. In this context, their most pressing motivations were twofold: first, to rescue the state from a potential military and political collapse through a rapid and effective restructuring of the army; and second, to consolidate their own hold on power. Having come to power through the *Babiali Baskını*, the Unionists had not yet fully secured their authority and were still haunted by the threat of a counter-revolution³³. Moreover, they now faced the painful contradiction of having to accept the very peace terms they had previously rejected—terms that had, in fact, triggered their seizure of power. The peace talks had reached a deadlock,

³³ Ahmad 1971, p. 183-196.

and the loss of Edirne appeared all but inevitable. Being forced to accept the very conditions they had once categorically opposed-and for which they had resorted to military intervention-posed a serious risk to both their domestic and international legitimacy. Under these extraordinary circumstances, strengthening the army was seen not only as a military necessity but also as a political imperative. On April 2, 1913, Mahmut Şevket Paşa, through the military attaché von Stempel in Istanbul, submitted an official request to the Kaiser, asking for the appointment of a suitable Prussian officer to the Ottoman service for “the fortification of Constantinople and the reorganization of the army”³⁴. Surprisingly-and even ironically-the formal realization of the mission, which had originally been proposed with the motivation of separating the military from politics, fell to the Unionists, who had themselves come to power through a military coup³⁵.

The response to this request was not delayed. On April 5, 1913, the reply from Germany stated that sending an officer was, in principle, possible³⁶. Following this positive response, secret negotiations began in Istanbul between Mahmut Şevket Paşa and Wangenheim regarding the content of the mission. These negotiations shaped the basic outline of the reform program. For example, during the meeting on April 26, 1913, he pointed out that the Ottoman administration lacked a well-trained and cohesive corps of officials and emphasized the need to procure foreign reformers to address this issue. He also expressed his trust in Germany for the reorganization of the army, stating that this was the most critical element of the reform program. He highlighted the necessity

³⁴ GPEK/38/1, von Treutier an das AA, Nr.15 436, Homburg, den 2. April 1913.

³⁵ In their study *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk* Mesut Uyar and Edward J. Erickson present a striking claim regarding civil-military relations and the request for a German military mission. According to them, Mahmud Şevket Paşa believed that the most effective way to swiftly and decisively distance the army from politics and to put an end to partisan strife was to invite a new German military assistance mission to the Ottoman Empire. In this context, it was argued that the incoming mission should be broader in scope and that German officers should not remain in mere advisory roles but be placed directly in command positions. In this way, it would be possible to depoliticize the army through German commanders who were not involved in Ottoman domestic politics. It was thought that this project needed to be implemented without delay-before the group of young staff officers led by Enver Bey consolidated their power (Uyar & Erickson 2017, p. 471-472). However, the meaning attributed to the mission in this context would soon give way to disappointment. Following the assassination of Mahmud Şevket Paşa, the Committee of Union and Progress moved rapidly toward full control of the government, and with Enver Paşa’s appointment as Minister of War, the concerns that had initially motivated the mission began to materialize as part of a fundamental transformation. Indeed, the mission came to be viewed by the Unionists not merely as a means to “save the state,” but also as a strategic tool to consolidate their own political power.

³⁶ GPEK/38/1, Jagow an den von Treutier, Nr.15 438, Berlin, den 5. April 1913.

of a fundamental restructuring of the army, the elimination of political tendencies among officers, and the inadequacy of the current activities of German training advisors³⁷. These statements align with Şevket Paşa's remarks to Cemal Paşa: that the reorganization of the Ottoman army required a fully authorized (*tam yetkili*) German officer. This process marked the beginning of a significant phase in Ottoman-German military cooperation, laying the groundwork for the extensive German military mission that would later play a crucial role in the modernization efforts of the Ottoman army.

While the Unionists, in requesting the mission, were possibly driven by urgent and existential concerns-above all, the immediate need to restore the army and stabilize their political authority-Germany interpreted the situation through a broader strategic lens, viewing the mission as an opportunity to deepen its influence within the Ottoman Empire and to reshape the regional balance of power. As previously noted, the shock of the Balkan Wars had brought the fear of disintegration to the surface, reinforcing a sense of urgency among the Ottoman leadership to reestablish internal order and military capability. For the Unionists, the primary concern was not the formation of a grand alliance, but rather the survival of the state in the face of existential threats. In contrast, Germany's engagement with the Ottoman Empire was not confined to the provision of military expertise; it also reflected a calculated ambition to expand German influence in the Near East. Within this framework, it can be argued that four main considerations shaped Germany's decision to accept the Ottoman request for military assistance.

The first reason was the concern to "compensate" for Germany's responsibility in the heavy defeat suffered by the Ottoman army during the First Balkan War. The efforts of General von der Goltz Paşa and his assistants, in contrast to the war of 1897, had clearly failed to improve the tactical organization, management, or morale of the Ottoman army. During the Balkan War, the army had almost completely collapsed. As the German military historian and the author of *The "German Spirit" in the Ottoman and Turkish Army, 1908-1938: A History of Military Knowledge Transfer*, Gerhard Grünebacher has pointed out, the Balkan Wars had become a testing ground for the "German Spirit." During the First Balkan War, while Germany supported the Ottoman army, the French military mission backed the Greek armed forces³⁸. Therefore, the loser of the First Balkan War was not only the Ottoman state but also the German military system itself. Indeed, that was how it was perceived in Ottoman political and military circles. This failure was also seen as a failure of Germany-more specifically, of the German military system and its weaponry-unjustly, in Mühlmann's view³⁹. In

³⁷ GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an den Hollweg, Nr.15 439, Pera, den 26. April 1913.

³⁸ Grünebacher 2022, p. 74.

³⁹ Mühlmann 2009, p. 82-83.

fact, in the complaints that were indirectly conveyed to the German Foreign Ministry, it was explicitly emphasized that part of the defeat was attributable to Germany, and this issue was even being debated in Germany itself⁴⁰. The acceptance of the military mission can therefore be seen as Germany's effort to compensate for this loss of prestige⁴¹.

The second reason was the effort to prevent the Ottoman Empire from aligning with the Triple Entente (*Üçlü İtilaf*: Britain, France, and Russia). While it seemed unlikely that Russia would cooperate with the Ottomans due to its political ambitions over Istanbul and the Straits (Bosphorus and the Dardanelles), the stance of Britain and France-both of which had economic and strategic interests in Ottoman territories-remained uncertain. Despite the disappointments experienced in the Italo-Turkish War and the First Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire continued to maintain cooperation with both countries. These contacts

⁴⁰ In the lead-up to Sanders' arrival in Istanbul, during a period when disagreements between Germany and Russia became increasingly apparent, the conservative Russian newspaper *Novoie Vremia* made the following remarks: "The Turks have been extraordinarily defeated. This defeat was entirely due to the weakness of their organization. And it was precisely the organization for which German instructors were responsible. The Turks achieved success only when they set aside Goltz Paşa's detailed plans and launched a reckless operation towards Edirne under the leadership of a 'half-crazy' commander like Enver Bey. In this context, the failure of the German instructors is undeniable" (BOA, HR.SYS/1879-5, Turhan Paşa a Said Halim Paşa, St. Petersburg, November 27, 1913). As can be seen, *Novoie Vremia* attributed the Ottoman Empire's failures in the Balkan Wars to the German instructors, while crediting the victory at Edirne to the Ottoman army's own leadership and boldness. The newspaper criticized the Ottoman dependence on German military strategy, on one hand, and accused the Unionists of lacking confidence by entrusting the army to a "proven failed" system, on the other.

⁴¹ GPEK/38/1, Zimmermann an den Lucius, Nr.15 446, Berlin, den 8. November 1913. In his article "The Turkish-German Military Alliance: Brotherhood in Arms or Partnership of Interests?", Turkish historian Gültekin Yıldız offers a striking assessment of the German officers invited to modernize the Ottoman army and the overall failure of these missions. According to Yıldız, although the task of reorganizing and modernizing the Ottoman army was ostensibly entrusted to German military missions from 1883 onwards, the cooperation failed to yield the expected results due to the Ottoman authorities' deep mistrust of foreigners. Over time, German advisors came to realize that they would not be able to implement a meaningful transformation of the Ottoman military system. Under these conditions, they began to act more like local representatives of arms manufacturers from their home countries. As a result, these officers gradually drifted away from their original duties and effectively turned into "arms dealers," facilitating large-scale weapons sales to the Ottoman army. While the question of which side bore responsibility for this "distortion or corruption" remains debatable, Yıldız's observation is important in showing that military advisory efforts were not limited to technical modernization but were also intertwined with economic and commercial interests. In this regard, his analysis offers a critical perspective on the role of German military missions-particularly valuable for understanding the background of more extensive interventions such as the Liman von Sanders Mission. See: Yıldız 2014, p. 113. For details on the development of arms trade with Germany and Goltz Paşa's initiatives in this regard, see also Ortaylı 1981, p.65-66, 68-89; "Goltz Paşa, in particular, proved himself an able lobbyist and marketing agent for the German arms makers", see: Yorulmaz 2014, p.8.

indicated that the Ottomans were attempting to balance their relations with Britain, France, and Russia, which posed a potential threat from Germany's perspective. France had long established financial dominance over the Ottoman Empire and, through the loans it provided, had strengthened this influence to an unprecedented degree in historical terms. To preserve this privileged position, France could offer a military mission to the Ottomans, similar to the one it had provided to Greece, if requested. Discussions within the German Foreign Ministry in November 1913 clearly revealed how serious this concern was for Germany. During a meeting with the Russian Prime Minister in Berlin on November 18, Bethmann Hollweg stated that if Germany withdrew its support, the Ottoman Empire appeared determined to turn to another power, and France was quite eager in this regard. Hollweg also emphasized that French chauvinism had celebrated the Turkish defeat (referring to the First Balkan War) almost as if it were a German defeat. Abandoning the Ottoman Empire, which had long been supported, could be perceived as a significant defeat by nations hostile to Germany⁴².

Britain, on the other hand, was already present in Istanbul through its naval mission, and there was a strong clique among Ottoman officials advocating for maintaining good relations with this country. One of the most prominent proponents of this view was Mahmut Şevket Paşa. According to the memoirs of Ahmet İzzet Paşa, Mahmut Şevket Paşa had taken into account the views and warnings of Küçük Said Paşa in foreign policy, adopting a stance that favored Britain and France while also managing relations with Germany⁴³. Mahmut Şevket Paşa believed that Britain's support was absolutely necessary, particularly for the recovery of the Aegean Islands, and he was open to granting certain privileges in the implementation of reforms in the Baghdad Railway region to secure this support⁴⁴. His attitude, and later that of the Said Halim Paşa cabinet, caused significant discomfort in Germany, as the pursuit of Ottoman-British

⁴² GPEK/38/1, "Aufzeichnung des Reichskanzlers von Bethmann Hollweg" Nr. 15 450, Berlin, 18 November 1913.

⁴³ Ahmet İzzet Paşa, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁴⁴ Both Mahmut Şevket Paşa and the Said Halim Paşa cabinet consistently kept Britain informed about administrative reforms. For example, at the beginning of July, Said Halim Paşa presented a memorandum to Ambassador Marling during their meeting on this matter: "*An inspectorate committee headed by Baumann Paşa has been sent to each province to examine on-site the number of gendarmes required to ensure order and peace in every province. In addition, gendarmes from Rumelia have been dispatched to several regions, and more gendarmes will soon be sent to complete the ranks. To ensure the full implementation of the laws and regulations, the Empire has been divided into six general inspection regions. Key regions, particularly those encompassing the Eastern Provinces, will be headed by foreign general inspectors. These inspectors will lead a team of foreign and Ottoman experts in gendarmerie, justice, public works, and agriculture. Foreign advisors and inspectors will be appointed to ministries, and officials will be assigned to specific departments. The Mahmut Şevket Paşa Cabinet conducted negotiations for the recruitment of all these foreign officials, and the current cabinet has adopted the same principles to continue this process.*" "Text of Circular Telegram sent to Ottoman Ambassadors", BD/10/1, Marling to Grey, No. 538, Constantinople, July 3, 1913.

cooperation in the East was perceived as a threat by Germany. This issue had frequently been a topic of debate in Ottoman-German relations. Wangenheim, openly expressed this discomfort during his meetings with Mahmut Şevket Paşa. For example, in a meeting on May 17, he used the following words: “*The invitation of the British to the Baghdad Railway region will create an extremely negative impression on Germany and will be interpreted as a victory for Britain over Germany.*”⁴⁵



Figure 4: “England und die Bagdadbahn”. Published in May 1913 in the German satirical and art magazine *Jugend*, the cartoon titled “*England und die Bagdadbahn*” (*England and the Baghdad Railway*) satirizes the Anglo-German rivalry surrounding the Baghdad Railway project. At the same time, it implicitly criticizes Berlin for failing to act with sufficient determination and effectiveness in its strategic moves across Ottoman territories.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr.15 303, Konstantinopel, den 17. Mai 1913. In his study, Mühlmann—who served as one of Liman von Sanders’s closest associates during the mission’s initial and most critical phase between 1913 and 1915—emphasizes the strategic importance of the railway, stating: “Similarly, in the context of German economic history, the Baghdad Railway had acquired such political and economic significance that any possibility of turning back had effectively disappeared.” Indeed, in the pre-war period, similar situations arose in other parts of the Near East, often not as a result of German initiative, but through the actions of rival foreign powers. Even when these developments led to the loss of previously secured and highly valuable positions, a reversal of policy in these regions was no longer a viable option for Germany. See: Mühlman 2009, p.13-14; For a general overview of the Anglo-German rivalry over Ottoman territories, see Soy, 2005.

⁴⁶ Erich Wilke, “*Spekulatius der Große in Skutari*,” *Jugend*, no. 22 (1913): 651. <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.4209#0670> The cartoon is also featured in the following study: Heimsoth 2022.

The fear of “losing” the Ottoman Empire to Britain persisted even after Liman von Sanders arrived in Istanbul. In a report sent to Berlin on January 22, 1914, the German *chargé d'affaires* in Istanbul, Von Mutius, mentioned that Britain could mediate an agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Greece over the issue of the Aegean Islands, and if this were to happen, Britain could gain significant influence over the Unionists⁴⁷. This concern was further validated by the statements of Halil Menteşe, a prominent figure within the Unionist leadership who played important roles in diplomatic relations. He stated: “*We emerged from the Balkan Wars weakened. This situation had shattered our hope of relying solely on ourselves. The disastrous results of the war had shown us the catastrophic consequences of isolation. Therefore, it was necessary to seek external guarantees and, at the very least, buy time to strengthen the state's structure. We did not have much hope in Germany. We saw their interest in our country as purely economic and did not believe they would use their armies to protect us from a Russian invasion. Although an alliance with Britain and France seemed unlikely, we hoped they could moderate Russia's aggression and buy us time. We decided to pursue a policy of rapprochement with them.*”⁴⁸

As a third reason, one may point to Germany's desire-perhaps driven by a form of wishful thinking-to bring the Ottoman army under its control. It was assumed that dominance over the military would also grant decisive leverage over the functioning of the state itself. This logic was explicitly articulated by Ambassador Wangenheim in his report of April 26, 1913, following his meeting with Mahmut Şevket Paşa. He summarized the overall significance of the mission as follows: “*The power in control of the army will always be the strongest in Turkey. It will not be possible for a government hostile to Germany to remain in power as long as we maintain control over the army. This thought may have also been in the mind of Mahmut Şevket Paşa. He seemed to trust that the army under German influence would be a strength of the Young Turk government. The German assignment to reform the educational system offers as yet unforeseen opportunities to mold the Turkish people in the German spirit and to restructure the Turkish state machinery*”⁴⁹. These statements make clear that Germany did

⁴⁷ Crampton 1974, p. 406.

⁴⁸ *Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi Halil Menteşe'nin Anıları* 1986, p. 182.

⁴⁹ In this report, Wangenheim also drew attention to the enthusiasm of the Unionists regarding the mission. He described the Grand Vizier as “Turkey's first true statesman in the European sense” and emphasized that he pursued his goals with determined energy and courage. The report also included statements about the need to remove the political spirit from the officer corps and to thoroughly reform the Ottoman army as part of its restructuring, noting that only Germany was trusted in this process. GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an den Hollweg, Nr.15 439, Pera, den 26. April 1913.

not regard this as a merely technical or narrowly defined military mission. Rather, it aimed at a broader transfer of influence, encompassing cultural penetration, educational reform, and the construction of Turkish-German institutional frameworks that would shape the emerging state in alignment with German strategic interests.

The last and most important reason behind Germany's acceptance of the mission request was directly linked to its short- and long-term economic, cultural, and, most importantly, strategic interests-a rationale that was also closely connected to the third motivation outlined above regarding control over the Ottoman army as a means to exert broader influence over the state. Although Germany's interest in the Ottoman Empire and its influence-oriented policies in the region constitute a broad and multi-dimensional field, it is not possible to cover all aspects of this process here. Nevertheless, from a general perspective, it becomes clear that Germany's interests in three key areas were perceived to be under threat: German capital investments in Ottoman lands, particularly The Baghdad Railway Project, which gradually became an indispensable strategic element in German economic history⁵⁰; cultural influence strategies conducted through German schools and experts; and long-term strategic expectations based on the geopolitical integrity of the Ottoman Empire. This approach should be evaluated within the framework of Germany's *Weltpolitik* ("dünya siyaseti") strategy, particularly in the context of its "Drive to the East" (*Drang nach Osten/Doğu'ya Doğru*) orientation, which began to take shape in the late 19th century and gradually became more systematic over time. In this context, Anatolia was not merely a part of the Ottoman Empire from Berlin's perspective; it was also considered a region of vital importance for the future of German interests⁵¹. The heavy defeat suffered by the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan War and the ensuing political instability led Germany to perceive a direct threat to its interests in Anatolia. As a result, Berlin became increasingly inclined to support the Ottoman state and to consolidate its influence in the region. Germany's favorable stance was therefore not merely an act of alliance, but rather a strategic necessity. In this respect, Germany-much like the Committee of Union and Progress-clearly recognized that the Ottoman army was too weak to defend the country, particularly Istanbul and Anatolia. From the German perspective, a possible attack on Istanbul or a Greek occupation of İzmir could have led to the

⁵⁰ For a detailed analysis on this subject, Albayrak 1995, p. 1-38.

⁵¹ For the foundations of Germany's cultural expansion efforts, see Ortaylı 2001, p. 91-102. After 1908, Germany increasingly adopted a policy of strengthening German cultural and linguistic influence. It sought to achieve this through policies promoting language courses and the development of German schools. For further details on Germany's transfer of German culture through German-Turkish joint institutions, see also Gencer 2003, p.145-268.

Ottoman Empire's disappearance from the stage of history-an outcome that would have jeopardized all of Germany's regional interests. At this critical juncture, Germany faced a decisive crossroads: Should the Ottoman Empire be left to its fate, or should it be supported politically and militarily to ensure its survival? Wangenheim clearly supported the latter. In his report dated 21 May, he stated the following:

*“With the Balkan Wars, the Eastern Question (Şark Meselesi) has been divided into two parts: a European part and an Asian part. For the former European Turkey, the issue can now be formulated as follows: ‘How will the relationships among the Balkan states, which have replaced Turkey, take shape, and how will these relationships affect the interactions between the Balkan peoples and the great powers, as well as among the great powers themselves?’ The Eastern Question concerning Asian Turkey can be summarized with this question: ‘Is the remaining part of Turkey still capable of survival, or is it doomed to collapse?’ The world had grown accustomed to viewing Asian Turkey as an extension of European Turkey. Those who considered the existence of European Turkey sufficiently secure due to the rivalry between Austria and Russia also believed that Asian Turkey was more or less inviolable. However, these theories have been completely overturned by the events of the war. European Turkey has effectively disappeared, and no power is likely to revive the fragmented Treaty of Berlin from its dusty corner to maintain the status quo in Asian Turkey. Therefore, the Anatolian issue (Anadolu/Küçük Asya Meselesi) must be addressed as an entirely new problem, independent of the traditional dogmas and habits of the great powers’ Eastern policies... Asian Turkey can no longer stand on its own. A centuries-long decline, as was the case in European Turkey, cannot be expected here, because the Balkan states have already violated the sacred dogma of the Ottoman Empire’s integrity. If no external assistance comes, events in Anatolia will unfold much more rapidly.”*⁵²

⁵² GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das Hollweg, Nr.15 312, Pera, 21 Mai 1913. These views were not new for Wangenheim. Since January 1913, particularly during the most intense phases of the Balkan War, he had been openly expressing such opinions. In both his public statements and his meetings with Ottoman officials, he consistently emphasized Germany's firm stance that the Ottoman Empire should not be abandoned in times of crisis. A striking example of this approach was his speech at the Teutonia Club at the end of January, delivered on the occasion of Kaiser Wilhelm II's birthday. In this speech, Wangenheim stated that the future of Turkey lay in Anatolia ("Asia Minor") and stressed that German interests in the region were aligned with those of the Ottoman Empire. He also declared that Germany was ready to offer strong support to help the Ottomans achieve their goals during the peace negotiations and maintain control over Anatolia. Within this framework, his statement that Germany would apply the principle of *noli me tangere* ("touch me not") against any external intervention in Ottoman sovereignty over Anatolia clearly reflected Berlin's determination on the matter. "Hands off Asia Minor", *Daily Mail*, 30 January

What Wangenheim meant by the quick development of events was the acceleration of the disintegration process of the Ottoman Empire. In a sense, it indirectly posed the following question to Berlin: “Could Germany afford the complete collapse of the Ottoman Empire, particularly through the loss of its Asian territories?” More than mere rhetoric, this appeal emphasized the urgent need for Germany to take a decision on the fate of the Ottoman Empire. “If outside help does not arrive, the events in Anatolia will accelerate” clearly indicated the seriousness of the situation and the need for intervention.⁵³ Wangenheim, who was of the opinion that the Ottoman Empire needed to be brought to its feet, explained the qualities that the mission leader should possess in his report the next day as follows:

“The general would need to be at the head of all other German reformers and would be responsible for the consistent and appropriate implementation of reforms in the Turkish army. His proposals would have to form the basis for mobilization efforts and operations in a future war⁵⁴. For such a position, only a top-tier military figure would naturally be considered, particularly one with extensive experience in the general staff of troops. Given that the general staff and command notably failed in the last war, his primary task would be to address these deficiencies through thorough and practical training of the general staff. A

1913. In the same speech, Wangenheim explicitly declared Germany’s opposition to the transfer of the strategically vital Aegean Islands to Greece. Given the circumstances of the time, such declarations constituted significant diplomatic and psychological support for the Ottomans. The Ottoman navy lacked the capacity to retake the islands, whereas Germany’s powerful fleet had the potential both to assist the Ottomans directly and to exert pressure on The Triple Entente. As such, these explicit statements of support likely contributed meaningfully to strengthening the Ottoman leadership’s confidence in Berlin.

⁵³ In his diaries, Mahmut Şevket Paşa makes an important and accurate observation about Germany’s dilemma. He noted his skepticism about Germany’s attitude towards the Armenians as follows: “This situation implied that even Germany harbored some ambitions in Anatolia. However, since Wangenheim explained to the Russian Ambassador that Germany had nothing but the survival of the Ottomans in Anatolia in mind and that it was impossible for them to pursue any other policy, I believed this to be true. But of course, the formation of a strong government in Anatolia by the Ottoman Government depended on the end of the existing uncertainties. If the anarchy continues, it is obvious that even Germany will try to take a piece of Anatolia because of the situations that will arise in the future and thus compromise with other states.” For the original text, see *Mahmut Şevket Paşa’nın Sadaret Günlüğü* 2014, p. 219. By 1912, the issue of reforms in the Armenian provinces had become a significant matter that fueled conflicts of interest among the Great Powers in the lead-up to the First World War (Avagyan 2005, p. 124-125). While it appeared that Germany, as the patron of the Young Turks, had taken on the role of the “savior” of the Ottoman Empire from the perspective of The Triple Entente, Wangenheim’s statements clearly reveal that this perception was not entirely accurate.

⁵⁴ This statement can also be cited as an example of Germany evaluating the mission issue within the context of war.

key requirement would be that the general in question had independently and successfully led staff exercises as the chief of staff of an army corp. Furthermore, he must possess a strong character capable of asserting himself. Knowledge of the language and the region is not strictly necessary, as Major von Stempel, who is fully experienced in local conditions, could be appointed as an assistant to support him. In my opinion, the appointment of a German general would silence all voices holding German reformers responsible for Turkish defeats. Moreover, it would serve as the best counterbalance to the advancing English influence resulting from the appointment of English administrative reformers. In the event of rejection, there is a risk that the Porte, which is determined to break with the current inadequate military reform system, might turn to other powers. Strictly confidentially, I hear that the Austrian military attaché is making propaganda for the appointment of Austrian reformers. Confidentiality is urgently requested for the time being”⁵⁵.

As can be seen, Wangenheim was describing the profile of a “super-authorized” commander equipped with extraordinary powers based on Mahmut Şevket Paşa’s demands. His proposal was based on the premise that the general to be sent to Istanbul should not be merely a guide or advisor, but an authority in complete control of the army and with direct executive authority. This description clearly indicated that the general would oversee all reforms in the Ottoman army and be the ultimate decision-maker in all areas, from war preparations to operations. In a sense, the proposal suggested granting dictatorial powers to a German general in Istanbul⁵⁶. This proposal, however, stood in stark contrast to the foundational policies of the Committee of Union and Progress following the Balkan Wars. Their approach was based on establishing a new foundation for governing the country, modernizing the independence of the homeland while avoiding any intervention that could undermine this independence, and transforming Anatolia into “a developed, prosperous, and stable geography of

⁵⁵ GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr.15 440, Konstantinopel, den 22. Mai 1913.

⁵⁶ When examining the discussions between Wangenheim and Mahmut Şevket Paşa, it becomes clear that the Ottoman side was open to granting such extensive authority to a German commander. For example, during a meeting between the two on May 17, Mahmut Şevket Paşa stated that plans were in place to seek assistance from the British for reforms in Western and Southern Anatolia. However, after Wangenheim expressed that Germany would not be pleased with the presence of British officials in these regions, Mahmut Şevket Paşa responded with the following words: “*The reform of the army was entrusted to us [the Germans] under the leadership of a German general with almost dictatorial powers. Similarly, the complete reorganization of the entire education system was also planned. In this way, the influence granted to us [the Germans] was far greater than any potential British influence.*” GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr.15 303, Konstantinopel, den 17. Mai 1913.

Young Turkey”.⁵⁷ Yet, the prevailing conditions seem to have forced the Unionists to make this difficult decision.

Within the context of Germany’s long-standing strategy, its priority was to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia. Therefore, Kaiser, in line with this strategy, quickly intervened in the situation and decided to prepare and send a military mission to Istanbul. However, before this decision could be implemented, there was a critical issue to be resolved: obtaining the “approval” of Britain and Russia. This approach highlights Germany’s careful balancing act between asserting its influence in the Ottoman Empire and avoiding unnecessary tensions with other major powers. At a critical juncture, immediately after the Balkan Wars and in an environment where the possibility of a new Balkan War was being discussed, sending a military mission with extraordinary powers to Istanbul could disrupt the balance of power among the Great Powers and lead to a crisis of trust. Kaiser’s plan was to conceal the true purpose and scope of the mission’s authority, creating the impression of a routine assignment. To this end, he aimed to simply state that the mission resembled the Goltz Paşa mission, thereby minimizing potential reactions. His daughter’s wedding provided the perfect opportunity to bring up this important issue as if it were a simple matter. This strategy underscores the complexity of international relations at the time, where even seemingly straightforward decisions required careful maneuvering to avoid upsetting the delicate balance of power.

In the spring of 1913 (on May 24, 1913), the wedding of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s only daughter, Victoria Louise, took place in Berlin, to which Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and King George V of Britain were also invited⁵⁸. According to E.J. Dillon’s work *The Eclipse of Russia*, the Kaiser seized this opportunity to bring up the issue of the military mission. Dillon notes that the Kaiser informed Tsar Nicholas II that the Ottoman Empire had requested the dispatch of a military instructor and, if there were no objections, proposed sending General Liman von Sanders. Tsar Nicholas II responded that he took pride in contributing to the resolution of such matters and expressed no objections. Following this, the Kaiser, considering past experiences, insisted that this approval be formally recorded in writing, and the relevant document was officially signed⁵⁹. According to Mehmet Perinçek, who references Russian documents, the Kaiser aimed to prove the “innocence” of the mission during this process. He explained that a new German military mission would be sent to Istanbul at the request of the Ottoman

⁵⁷ Kocaoğlu 2013, p. 259.

⁵⁸ “The Prussian Wedding”, *The Times*, 17 May 1913; “Wedding of the Kaiser’s Daughter”, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1913.

⁵⁹ Dillon 1918, p.369.

Empire and that this mission would be a continuation of the previous Goltz mission⁶⁰. The Kaiser did not mention to either the British King or the Russian Tsar the extensive powers of the mission, the fact that its leading officer would command an army corps, or, as expressed by Mahmut Şevket Paşa, that the mission and its leader would be endowed with dictatorial authority⁶¹. In this way, he successfully secured the approval of both Britain and Russia, who found the situation reasonable. This approach, in which the Kaiser revealed only part of the truth and skillfully concealed his true intentions, was indeed a cunning (sinsice/sournoisement) strategy. This covert strategy or hidden agenda would later lead to a major crisis between Germany and Russia⁶².

Following the signing of the Treaty of London (May 30, 1913), which ended the First Balkan War, the process of selecting a suitable commander to lead

⁶⁰ Perinçek 2011, p.35.

⁶¹ The assurances given by the Kaiser to Russia were neither sincere nor realistic. The meaning attributed to the Liman von Sanders Mission carried a scope and significance that was fundamentally different from all previous military missions, both from the Ottoman and the German perspective. As previously emphasized, this mission was part of Germany's broader strategy to expand its political and military influence over the Ottoman Empire. In particular, efforts to integrate the German military model into the Ottoman army were by no means a new development. On the political level, Major General Walter von Stempel served as military attaché in Istanbul during one of the Ottoman Empire's most critical transitional periods, between 1908 and 1913. During his tenure, he closely observed the transformations within the Ottoman army and developed personal relationships with officers from the General Staff, through which he actively promoted the German military system. On the military front, particularly after 1908, Colmar von der Goltz emerged as a legendary figure, managing to leave a lasting impression despite the anti-German sentiment that persisted within parts of the Ottoman officer corps. He exerted considerable influence during both of his terms of service (Grünebacher 2022, p. 41-59). However, with the arrival of Liman von Sanders-an event whose consequences would soon become evident-a new phase clearly began. The Ottoman Empire had entered a struggle for survival, while Germany found itself at a historical crossroads: would it stand by the Ottomans or leave them to their fate? The acceptance of the mission was perhaps the first concrete indication that Berlin would not abandon the Ottoman Empire, marking a potential turning point in their bilateral relations.

⁶² The Tsar likely did not consider the matter important enough to inform his government and ministers about it. Sazonov's statement in his memoirs that he only became aware of the issue at the end of October can be cited as evidence of this. According to Dillon, the astonishment of Russian officials, particularly Sazonov, when the matter became public was due to the Tsar's failure to inform them about it. This situation caused confusion in Russian diplomatic circles and led to an escalation of reactions regarding the mission (Dillon 2018, p. 369-370). In his memoirs, Sazonov also sharply criticizes the Kaiser. Sazonov had visited Berlin in October and met with the Kaiser, but the Kaiser made no mention of the Sanders Mission. According to Sazonov, this was an extremely cunning move (Sazonov 1927, p.118-125). This "insulting approach" likely contributed to Sazonov's framing of the mission's arrival in Istanbul as a matter of "life and death." GPEK/38/1, "Aufzeichnung des Reichskanzlers von Bethmann Hollweg" Nr. 15 450, Berlin, 18 November 1913.

the military mission began. This process was directly supervised by General Freiherr von Lyncker, Chief of the Military Cabinet of Kaiser. After careful consideration, Liman von Sanders, one of the experienced division commanders of the German army and the commander of the 22nd Division in Kassel, Hesse, was deemed suitable for this role. According to Liman von Sanders' memoirs, on June 15, 1913, he received a letter from the Military Cabinet offering him the position as head of the German Military Mission in Istanbul⁶³. After Sanders accepted the offer, Lyncker submitted a report to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg on June 30, 1913. The report included the following statements: *"Although finding a suitable general for this task has not been easy, a general who has declared his readiness to undertake this mission has been identified. This individual is Lieutenant General Liman von Sanders, Commander of the 22nd Division in Kassel. He is an outstanding divisional commander who is extremely well-suited for this position in every respect. Lieutenant General Liman von Sanders possesses an elegant military demeanor, is well-educated, and is a highly versatile officer. He has served for many years in the General Staff and has achieved remarkable success in various positions within the army"*⁶⁴.

3-The Stalling of Mission Negotiations

In June, although preparations for the mission in Germany had made significant progress, the negotiations did not conclude at the expected pace, and the process of the mission's arrival in Istanbul was delayed. This delay had several key reasons. First, the assassination of Mahmut Şevket Paşa created not only a vacuum in political and military leadership but also temporarily halted the reform processes in the military and the negotiations with Ambassador Wangenheim⁶⁵. Mahmut Şevket Paşa's reformist vision and determination were crucial, especially for military projects, and his absence led to uncertainty and a loss of momentum in reform efforts⁶⁶. Second, on the eve of the new Balkan War, Ottoman diplomacy was focused on negotiations with Greece. During this period, there was significant diplomatic activity between the Ottoman Empire and Greece, as both sought to protect their interests against Bulgaria. Greece aimed to prevent Ottoman support for Bulgaria, while the Ottomans looked for opportunities to resolve the Aegean Islands issue in their favor. In this context,

⁶³ Sanders 2020, p. 7-8.

⁶⁴ GPEK/38/1, Lyncker an den Hollweg, Nr.15 441, Berlin, den 30 Juni 1913.

⁶⁵ According to Mühlmann, the internal political developments in Turkey following the assassination could not be ignored. Mühlman 2009, p. 27.

⁶⁶ With the assassination of Mahmut Şevket Paşa, the Committee began to get a little closer to seizing complete control of the government. According to some authors, in order to achieve this, they adopted conspiratorial and deceitful tactics. See: Kuran 2000, p. 401-403.

German Ambassador Wangenheim actively worked to mediate an agreement between the two sides. He attempted to balance the interests of both parties while seeking to increase German influence by discussing the terms of a potential Turkish Greek alliance⁶⁷. However, due to deep disagreements and mutual distrust between the parties, the negotiations did not yield any results.

Third and most importantly, the outbreak of a new Balkan war, which involved the Ottoman Empire, caused a shift in the empire's domestic and foreign policy priorities, necessitating the redirection of military and diplomatic resources to different areas. The primary cause of the Second Balkan War was the unresolved territorial disputes among the Balkan states, despite the 1913 Treaty of London. Macedonia, in particular, was at the center of these conflicts. While Bulgaria made extensive territorial claims in this region, Serbia and Greece firmly rejected Bulgaria's demands. Competing claims over Thessaloniki further intensified tensions between Greece and Bulgaria, and the war finally broke out on June 29, 1913, when Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece. The war quickly expanded, becoming a multilateral conflict as Serbia, Greece, Romania, and the Ottoman Empire all took up arms against Bulgaria⁶⁸. Bulgaria's need to fight on four fronts created an opportunity for the Ottoman Empire. Despite the Britain, France, and Russia' firm opposition, the Ottomans "defied Europe"⁶⁹ and successfully reclaimed Edirne and Kırklareli, which were of vital importance for the security of Istanbul. These gains partially compensated for the Ottoman losses in the Balkan Wars and provided a significant moral and strategic advantage. The war ended with Bulgaria's heavy defeat, and the Treaty of Bucharest, signed on August 10, 1913, reallocated the Balkan territories. This treaty increased Bulgaria's territorial losses while strengthening the positions of Serbia and Greece in the region. The Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, achieved both symbolic and strategic success by regaining lost territories. The intensity of the Second Balkan War and the need to prioritize resources for the conflict temporarily pushed the planned military reforms and cooperation with Germany to the background. However, the success in the war not only solidified the power of the CUP but also greatly boosted the morale of the army. This situation created a foundation for the renewed importance of German influence in military reforms, setting the stage for the eventual deployment of the German military mission led by Liman von Sanders. The war's aftermath highlighted the Ottoman Empire's

⁶⁷ *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı Mahmut Şevket Paşa'nın Günlüğü* 1988, p.198-204; *Mahmut Şevket Paşa'nın Sadaret Günlüğü* 2014, p.310-314.

⁶⁸ Helmreich 1938, p.363-364.

⁶⁹ Kurat 1990, p.187.

determination to strengthen its military capabilities, paving the way for deeper collaboration with Germany in the years to come.

Since the mission was planned for the postwar period, following the Treaty of Bucharest, the Unionist leadership urged that the negotiations be accelerated. This urgency stemmed from ongoing security concerns that persisted despite the formal end of the wars, reinforcing the Empire's increasing dependence on Germany. Although the Balkan Wars had ended, the Ottoman Empire remained gripped by insecurity. The recapture of Edirne during the Second Balkan War did not eliminate the perceived Bulgarian threat to the city, nor did it resolve the growing concern over Greek ambitions in Western Anatolia via the Aegean Islands. The defense of both regions required a fundamental restructuring and strengthening of the army—something that made the immediate arrival of the long-awaited German military mission imperative. Meanwhile, Russia appeared to be mobilizing in the East under the pretext of addressing the Armenian Question⁷⁰, further contributing to the sense of encirclement. From the Ottoman perspective, the Empire now seemed besieged on both its western and eastern flanks. The Great Powers, moreover, no longer appeared to show any meaningful respect for the Empire's territorial integrity. A more immediate concern Edirne had fallen under Bulgarian control on March 26, 1913, during the First Balkan War, but the Ottoman Empire managed to retake the city on July 21, 1913, during the Second Balkan War. However, despite the Treaty of Bucharest, Bulgaria was unwilling to relinquish its claims on Edirne (as well as Manastır and Selanik). Just one day after the signing of the treaty, King Ferdinand issued a semi-official *communiqué* to the Bulgarian public, stating that the struggle against Turkey had ended in a great victory, that no Bulgarian patriot could accept the loss of Monastir, Serres, and Thessaloniki, and that Bulgaria had been betrayed by its allies⁷¹. The French Ambassador in Sofia, in his reports to Paris, was emphasizing that the political and social climate in Bulgaria was highly reactive, even revanchist. In his report dated August 11, he included the following statements:

“The prevailing sentiment at the moment is a mix of relief at the end of the war and bitter sorrow over the collapse of all national aspirations. The peace imposed on Bulgaria is seen as unjust and predatory, and it is believed that it cannot bring lasting stability to the Balkans... If public hopes for the revision of the treaty and the evacuation of Edirne and Thrace are dashed, it is certain that Bulgaria's sole focus will be on seeking revenge and directing all its efforts toward rebuilding its strength. While individual actions against sovereign or political figures are always possible, the real danger, in my view, lies within the

⁷⁰ Yalman 2019, p.68-69; Schöllgen 2021, p.504-512.

⁷¹ “Destiny of Bulgaria”, *The Times*, 12 August 1913.

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army due to its lack of discipline. Dissatisfaction and a desire for revenge have already affected several divisions. Although measures for demobilization have been cautiously and swiftly implemented, the accumulation of a large number of soldiers in major garrison centers, especially in the capital Sofia, is a situation that could lead to serious and justified concerns.”⁷²



Figure 5: “Asia Minor: Settled”, *Punch*, 2 April, 1913⁷³

⁷² Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1871-1914, Série 3, (1911-1914), Tome IIIX, 11 Août -31 Décembre 1913, (hereafter DDF/3/8), Panafieu a Pichon, No.4, Sofia, 11 aout 1913.

⁷³ <https://magazine.punch.co.uk/image/I0000wln1a3TwRjQ> (Accessed June 24, 2025.). This 1913 *Punch* cartoon satirizes not only the international isolation imposed on the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars and the European powers’ attempts to restrict its geopolitical role, but, more importantly, the patronizing and dismissive attitude that accompanied these efforts. In the cartoon, Europe is personified as “Dame Europa,” who depicts the Ottoman Empire as the most troublesome boy in the school, instructing him to go and “consolidate himself” in a corner labeled “Asia Minor.” The scene serves as a direct allusion to a statement made by British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, who had expressed the hope that the Ottoman Empire would henceforth confine itself to Anatolia and focus its energies there. Yet, the recapture of Edirne by the Ottoman army did not merely represent a tangible military success, but also amounted to an open challenge to the restrictive vision articulated by Britain-then the most influential power in European diplomacy.

The retention of Edirne under Turkish control contradicted the “Turks to Asia” mentality that had resurfaced before the First Balkan War, and the indirect support of the Britain, France, and Russia for this approach further heightened the Ottoman Empire’s concerns regarding Edirne. During the process of the Unionists “defying Europe and reclaiming Edirne,” Russia had created a major crisis⁷⁴. According to a telegram sent by France’s Ambassador to London, Paul Cambon, to Foreign Minister Pichon on August 12, 1913, Russia planned to regain control of Edirne by imposing sanctions on the Ottoman Empire or deploying troops to the region. However, the discord among the Great Powers cast doubt on the feasibility of these plans. Germany had prohibited an attack on the region inhabited by Armenians and assessed that a naval demonstration along the European shores of the Black Sea would be ineffective. It was estimated that the reoccupation of Edirne would require an army of at least 200,000 men. This was not only unfeasible under the current conditions but also carried the potential to trigger a new Balkan War. This situation contradicted both countries’ stance on entering an “urgent period of calm” (*urgent d’une période calme*) following two critical wars⁷⁵. Therefore, while Britain and France preferred diplomacy and encouraged negotiations between the two countries⁷⁶, the Unionists’ concerns were not fully alleviated. In an environment of mutual threats, the prevailing view among the Unionists was that the security of Istanbul could not be guaranteed without firmly securing control over Edirne⁷⁷.

This sentiment was further reinforced by the revanchist atmosphere in Bulgaria, as highlighted in the French Ambassador’s report. The deep sense of injustice and the desire for revenge among the Bulgarian public and military posed a significant risk to regional stability. For the Ottoman Empire, this reinforced the need to strengthen its military capabilities and secure its borders, particularly in Edirne, against potential Bulgarian aggression. The urgency to finalize the German military mission and implement reforms became even more critical in this context, as the Ottoman leadership sought to counterbalance the revanchist ambitions of its neighbors and ensure its territorial integrity. The

⁷⁴ Kurat 1990, pp.186-187. In his work titled *İmparatorluğun Çöküşü*, Karabekir makes an important observation regarding Russia’s general policy: “The Tsarist Russian State, blinded by the dream of Slavic unity, could no longer contain itself. In my opinion, if we had won the Balkan War, the Russians would have attacked the Straits at that time and triggered a World War.” Karabekir 2020, p. 16. According to Turhan Paşa, the Ottoman ambassador in St. Petersburg, one of the most important reasons for Russia’s insistence on Edirne was public pressure. BOA, HR.SYS, 2913-122, Turkhan Paşa a Said Paşa, Petersburg, 17 Fevrior 1913.

⁷⁵ BOA, HR.SYS, 2917-78, Rifat Paşa a Said Halim Paşa, Paris, 28 Aout 1913.

⁷⁶ DDF/3/8, Delcasse a Pichon, No.34, Saint-Pétersbourg, 15 aout 1913; DDF/3/8, Cambon a Pichon, No.19, Albert Gate House, 12 aout 1913.

⁷⁷ “Turkish Aspirations”, *The Times*, 14 August 1913.

Unionists' perception of the threat posed by Greece was far more serious. While they held a psychological advantage regarding the Bulgarian threat, this was not the case with the Greek threat. Moreover, while the final status of Edirne was crucial for both the security of Istanbul and the Unionists' ability to remain in power, the issue of the Aegean Islands posed a direct threat to the disintegration and fragmentation of the state. The recapture of Edirne had ensured the Unionists' hold on to power, which they had assumed amid a major crisis. However, for this power to be consolidated and made permanent, securing Western Anatolia was of critical importance. This issue was particularly sensitive because it directly threatened the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The loss of these islands to Greece would not only weaken the empire's strategic position in the Aegean but also embolden separatist movements within Anatolia. The Unionists were acutely aware that the security of Western Anatolia was inextricably linked to the broader stability of the empire. Without safeguarding this region, the gains made in Edirne and the Unionists' political survival would remain precarious⁷⁸.

The apparent reason for the disagreement between the parties was centered on the Northeastern Aegean Islands (particularly Chios and Mytilene), which Greece had occupied during the First Balkan War. While the Ottoman Empire demanded the return of these islands, Greece rejected this demand. Despite the Treaties of London and Bucharest, the disagreement remained unresolved, prompting the Great Powers to decide to negotiate and resolve the issue among themselves, imposing their decision on both countries. The Ottoman Empire was concerned that Britain, France, and Russia might offer a solution favoring Greece. The root cause of the dispute, however, was İzmir (Smyrna). The primary reason behind the Unionist government's determination to reclaim Chios and Mytilene was to ensure the security of İzmir. The fear that Greece could use these islands as a springboard to occupy İzmir in the future further reinforced this resolve. The Unionists, who had taken on the mission of reclaiming lost territories and saving the state, viewed these islands as "outposts of Anatolia"⁷⁹ (*Anadolu'nun*

⁷⁸ In his reports, Wangenheim frequently emphasized that both issues were of vital importance to the Unionists. For example, in his report dated April 5, he suggested that whether the Unionists could remain in power depended more on their ability to consolidate in Anatolia than on internal matters. In his report dated August 8, he included the following statements: "*If Edirne remains in Turkey's hands, the Unionists will maintain control over the situation in Turkey for a long time. They are the only group from which hope for Turkey's salvation can be expected.*" (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, No. 15 439, Pera, April 26, 1913; GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim to the AA, No. 15 376, Constantinople, August 8, 1913). Edirne also played a crucial role in the process leading to the Unionists' definitive rise to power, serving as a source of motivation and legitimacy. According to Sina Akşin, on the day of the Raid on the Sublime Porte, the Unionists marched to the Porte delivering speeches primarily focused on Edirne. Akşin 2001, p. 399.

⁷⁹ Yellice 2022, p. 73-74.

karakolları) and believed that their loss would trigger the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The issue had become so critical that the Unionists began to see the Aegean Islands as a matter of survival and were willing to risk war with Greece to reclaim them. The Ottoman Empire made this determination clear in its diplomatic engagements with the Great Powers. According to a telegram sent by Britain's Ambassador to Vienna, Cartwright, to Foreign Secretary Grey on September 30, Said Halim Paşa expressed this resolve in clear terms during his meeting with Wangenheim: "*If the Great Powers give all the islands to Greece, it means war.*"⁸⁰. This statement underscored the Ottoman Empire's unwavering stance on the issue and its readiness to confront Greece militarily if necessary. The Unionists' perception of the Aegean Islands as vital to the empire's survival and their determination to prevent Greece from using them as a strategic base against İzmir reflected the broader geopolitical anxieties of the time. The unresolved dispute over the islands not only heightened tensions between the Ottoman Empire and Greece but also complicated the diplomatic efforts of the Great Powers, who sought to maintain stability in the region while balancing the interests of both parties.

This dual irredentist threat-Bulgaria's claim to Macedonia and Greece's aspiration for the Megali Idea- posed a serious challenge to regional stability - highlighted the urgent need for military reforms and external support for the Unionist government, which had yet to recover from the upheaval caused by the Balkan Wars. Faced with these threats, the rapid reorganization of the army and navy became imperative, making it inevitable to seek closer ties with Germany and to expedite the implementation of the German military mission led by Liman von Sanders. The Unionists aimed to consolidate their power and protect the territorial integrity of the empire through the modernization of the army and the enhancement of its defensive capabilities. The success of the mission would not only strengthen the Ottoman military but also reinforce the political legitimacy of the Unionists, ensuring their continued dominance in the post-Balkan Wars era⁸¹.

⁸⁰ According to Cartwright, Enver Paşa, "the national hero" (*milli kahraman*) who reclaimed Edirne, was determined to take back these islands as well, and the success at Edirne served as the greatest source of courage for the Unionists in this endeavor. BD/10/1, Cartwright to Grey, No. 28, Vienna, 30 September 1913.

⁸¹ During this period, steps were also taken to strengthen the navy. Ships were ordered from Britain. At the beginning of 1913, when the Ottoman Empire decided for the first time to turn to Germany for the restructuring of its army, the idea of entrusting the navy to Germany was also considered. However, this plan was abandoned to avoid direct conflict with Britain. GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim and as AA, Nr.15 435, Konstantinopel, den 2. Januar 1913.

During this period, the increasingly anti-Ottoman stance of the Britain, France, and Russia, particularly regarding the issue of the Aegean Islands, became one of the significant factors driving the Unionists closer to Germany. Until the Treaty of Bucharest, the Ottoman Empire had attempted to maintain a balance between Britain, France, and Germany. However, after the Balkan Wars, their support for Bulgaria and Greece caused great disappointment in the Ottoman Empire⁸². On the other hand, Germany emerged as a more reliable ally by supporting the Ottomans on issues such as the retention of Edirne under Ottoman sovereignty and the Aegean Islands dispute. Although Germany had no direct influence on the recapture of Edirne, this perceived support increased Ottoman affinity toward Germany. According to Ahmet İzzet Paşa's statements, these developments led the Committee of Union and Progress to move away from its independent and bold policies, steering the empire toward a quasi-protectorate relationship. This situation created a favorable ground for Germany to expand its political influence over a wider area⁸³. By the end of this process, the Unionists had come to believe that Germany had adopted a policy in favor of the consolidation of İstanbul and Asia Minor.

Paradoxically, while Germany quickly became the only viable option for the Unionists, Germany tended to prepare for every possible scenario regarding the Ottoman Empire. On one hand, Germany sought to exert influence in İstanbul through the Sanders Mission, while on the other hand, it aimed to safeguard its interests in the event of a potential disintegration. Wangenheim's report dated August 8, 1913, clearly illustrates this dual strategy:

"I believe it is absolutely necessary to maintain our current pro-Turkey stance unless it becomes certain that the partition of Turkey is inevitable, that other powers will allow us to establish ourselves in Anatolia, and that we can enter our designated region as welcomed successors following the Ottomans... I clearly see the objectives of our policy: we must strive to preserve Turkey for as long as possible, and by participating in Turkey's reform efforts, we should not only provide honest assistance but also seek to increase our influence throughout Turkey. At the same time, we must be prepared for the worst-case scenario-partition. This requires activities such as establishing schools, hospitals, and sending doctors in our working area to win over the population, while also making it clear that we have no intention of ceding our designated regions to another power. I firmly believe that we should not hide our plans from other

⁸² According to Cemal Paşa's memoirs, during the recapture of Edirne, Edward Grey stated in a speech at the House of Commons: *"If the Turks retake Edirne, they will not only lose all their possessions in Europe but perhaps even İstanbul."* See: Cemal Paşa 2020, p. 60.

⁸³ Ahmet İzzet Paşa 2019, p.183.

*powers; in fact, we should openly declare which regions we will claim in the event of partition. If another power occupies Turkish territories, especially Anatolia, even temporarily, we must assume that the process of partition has begun.”*⁸⁴

The statements regarding the Armenian Question (*Ermeni Meselesi*) in Bompard's report dated September 10, 1913, align with and support Wangenheim's remarks. According to Bompard, while Russia's pressure on Armenian reforms caused significant unease, Germany would also seek to protect its strategic interests and maintain its influence in the region if a greater Armenia were to be established under Russian influence. During discussions between the parties, Wangenheim had expressed the following on the matter: *“If a Greater Armenia is established as a Russian sphere of influence in this manner, it will be necessary to create a German sphere of influence in Lesser Armenia. Undoubtedly, other major powers, including France, will respond by laying claim to other parts of the Ottoman Empire in Asia. In such a scenario, the entire Ottoman Empire would be partitioned, and this would inevitably trigger a European war in a short time.”*⁸⁵ These statements underscore how the *Armenian Question* was not merely a regional issue but a potential catalyst for broader geopolitical conflict, as the competing interests of major powers over the Ottoman Empire's territories could lead to its partition and escalate into a European-wide war. From this, we can see how fragile and precarious the Ottoman Empire's position was. The convergence of these two perspectives highlights that the empire's increasing dependence on Germany was driven not only by the need for military and political support but also by the looming threat of partition and the complex interplay of great power rivalries. Germany's dual strategy of supporting the Ottomans while preparing for potential scenarios of collapse further solidified this dependency, making Germany the empire's primary ally in a volatile international landscape.

The warnings of the German ambassador to be prepared for all eventualities and his discussions with the ambassadors of other Great Powers in Istanbul regarding the fate of the Ottoman Empire align with the assessments in American historian Harry N. Howard's work, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History, 1913-1923*. According to Howard, Germany, along with its allies Italy and Austria-Hungary, was developing plans for the partition of the Ottoman Empire, particularly focusing on the division of Anatolian territories. These negotiations intensified after the Balkan Wars. Italy's occupation of Tripoli and the Dodecanese Islands, Austria-Hungary's expansionist policies in the Balkans, and Germany's efforts to peacefully penetrate the Ottoman Empire,

⁸⁴ GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr.15 376, Konstantinopel, den 8. August 1913.

⁸⁵ DDF/3/8, Bompard a Pichon, No.135, Thérapia, 10 septembre 1913.

especially through the Baghdad Railway to establish influence in Anatolia, were all shaped within this framework of partition politics. Through the Liman von Sanders Mission, Germany aimed to bring Anatolia under its security umbrella as part of its *Drang nach Osten* policy, transforming it into a region closed off to intervention by other great powers⁸⁶. However, it also sought to prepare for the possibility of an early partition. Despite all the discussions about potential scenarios, Germany's priority was to preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The division and fragmentation of this state beyond Germany's control could pose a significant threat to its plans in the region. Under these conditions, the first preference was to strengthen the Ottoman Empire's defenses. For this reason, Germany responded positively to the request to accelerate the mission negotiations.

However, Germany had one important demand from the Ottomans: the termination of the state of war with Greece and Bulgaria. The normalization of Ottoman-Bulgarian relations was seen by Germany not only as a diplomatic necessity but also as an indispensable precondition for the implementation of military strategies. This strategy was critical both for strengthening the Ottoman Empire and maintaining the balance of power in the Balkans. The dispatch of the mission following the normalization of Turkish-Bulgarian relations was not only about the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria but also about German-Bulgarian relations and the broader balance of power among the Great Powers. Germany aimed not only to strengthen the Ottoman Empire during this process but also to draw Bulgaria to its side. The Kaiser's primary concern was that strengthening the Ottoman Empire without resolving the border issues between the two countries risked pushing Bulgaria away from Germany. Therefore, Germany was extremely cautious not to provoke Bulgaria⁸⁷. In line with its interests in the Balkans, Germany had established close relations with Bulgaria and played a significant role in modernizing the Bulgarian army⁸⁸, aiming to position this state on its side in an impending war. For this reason, the complete normalization of Ottoman-Bulgarian relations was seen by Germany not only as a diplomatic necessity but also as a prerequisite for sending the

⁸⁶ Howard 1931, p. 52-55.

⁸⁷ For example, after the mission arrived in Istanbul, during the negotiations between Germany and Russia following Russia's objections, Russia demanded that the mission be relocated to Edirne. In response, Germany pointed out that this could provoke a strong reaction in Bulgaria and further alienate the country. As stated, "*When State Secretary Kokovtsov suggested that the German military mission might be stationed in Edirne, I pointed out that this could provoke a strong reaction in Bulgaria and further alienate that country from us. Therefore, any other city in Anatolia, such as Izmir or one located at a certain distance from the Armenian border, would be a more suitable location for the German officers.*" Schreiner 1921, p. 676.

⁸⁸ Hall 2000, p.16.

military mission to Istanbul⁸⁹. Germany likely believed that the return of Edirne to Ottoman sovereignty and Bulgaria's loss of offensive capability increased the possibility of reconciliation and normalization between the parties. In this context, Germany anticipated that a solution allowing Edirne to remain under Ottoman control could be acceptable to Bulgaria.

Despite all the critical and seemingly irreconcilable border issues, the normalization of bilateral relations was of great importance for the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. The Balkan Wars had resulted in a great "victimization" for both states. While the Ottoman Empire aimed to cooperate with Bulgaria to isolate Greece to achieve the desired result on the Aegean Islands⁹⁰, Bulgaria needed Ottoman support to achieve its territorial ambitions over Macedonia. This interdependence was the most important factor that forced the two countries to sit at the negotiating table. Moreover, Bulgaria's rapidly diminishing hopes of regaining Edirne accelerated the rapprochement between the two countries. The negotiations between the two countries started on September 6⁹¹, progressed quite rapidly and the Treaty of Constantinople was signed on September 29, 1913⁹². With this agreement, Bulgaria officially accepted that Edirne and Kırklareli belonged to the Ottoman Empire and the border issues between the parties were resolved and the state of war was ended.

⁸⁹ GPEK/38/1, Jagow an den Wangenheim, Nr.15 443, Berlin, den 24. August 1913.

⁹⁰ The perception of a Greek threat pushed the Unionists, in the words of Ahmet İzzet Paşa, to pursue an alliance with Bulgaria, which just a few months earlier had been considered the most stubborn and cruel of enemies. Ahmet İzzet Paşa, *op. cit.*, p. 181. One of the most significant indicators of this approach was the Ottoman Empire's effort to use the prospect of an alliance with Bulgaria as a bargaining chip in its diplomatic engagements with the Great Powers. For example, during a meeting with his French counterpart Bunsen in Vienna on December 27, 1913, the Austrian Ambassador Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa made the following remarks: "*The Ottoman Empire will do everything in its power to reclaim these islands, which it deems essential for the security of the Straits and Anatolia, as well as the well-being of the Ottoman people in Asia. If war with Greece is necessary to achieve this, then war will be waged. This situation could lead to a new Balkan War, and the loser of this new conflict would not only be Greece but also Europe. Greece would suffer the most from an Ottoman-Bulgarian alliance. Renewed tensions in Ottoman-Greek relations would excite Bulgaria and endanger Greece's territories in Macedonia. War would serve as an encouraging factor for Bulgaria to take action.*" BOA, HR. SFR.04/279/87. What emboldened the Unionists in this threatening approach was the general state of anxiety among the Balkan states following the Treaty of Istanbul. For instance, in a report sent to Foreign Secretary Grey, Crackanthorpe conveyed the prevailing sentiment in Serbia as follows: "*Rightly or wrongly, the Serbian government believes that a secret agreement has been made between Turkey and Bulgaria against Greece, and is convinced that both Turkey and Bulgaria are working together to incite the Albanian uprising, with Austria secretly encouraging this group of conspirators.*"

⁹¹ Helmreich 1938, p. 410.

⁹² "Turco-Bulgarian Agreement", *The Times*, 29 September 1913.

While Turkish-Bulgarian relations were moving toward normalization, tensions and border disputes in Turkish-Greek relations remained unresolved despite all efforts. In line with its strategic objectives in the region, Germany expected the Ottoman Empire to definitively resolve its border issues and normalize bilateral relations not only with Bulgaria but also with Greece. However, while Bulgaria was forced to abandon its claims over Edirne, Greece adamantly refused to return the islands of Chios and Lesbos. Although the Ottoman Empire presented the return of these islands as an indispensable condition for peace, it failed to persuade Greece. Similarly, the Ottoman Empire's attempts to convince the Great Powers also proved fruitless. Embassy reports often indicated that the justification for leaving Chios and Lesbos under Greek control was based on the "predominantly Greek population density" of the islands⁹³.

For example, in a report sent to Said Halim Paşa on October 16, Ambassador Nabi Bey in Rome noted that all the Great Powers-except Austria and Italy-supported transferring Chios and Lesbos to Greece⁹⁴. During this process, the Ottoman Empire, particularly through its military alliance efforts facilitated by the Liman von Sanders Mission, expected support from Germany regarding the Aegean Islands. However, due to the delicate balance of power among the Great Powers, Germany limited itself to advising the Ottomans to adopt a more "conciliatory" stance and to abandon their claims over Chios and Lesbos. Throughout October, Mahmut Muhtar Paşa's diplomatic efforts in Berlin yielded no concrete results. For instance, during his meeting with Jagow on October 4, Mahmut Muhtar Paşa warned that if the Great Powers continued to support Greece's possession of Chios and Lesbos (Sakız ve Midilli), Balkan peace would be illusory, and a third Balkan War would become inevitable. According to Muhtar Paşa's account, Jagow was quite surprised by these words and responded with the following remark: "*If Turkey declares war on Greece, it might achieve success; however, these victories will be short-lived, as it will lose Europe's sympathy.*"⁹⁵

The issue of ceding the Aegean Islands to Greece-an integral component of broader plans to partition Anatolia-was largely in line with the views of Wangenheim and the assessments of Howard. Having failed to receive the expected support from Britain, to which it had entrusted its navy, the Ottoman Empire also found no backing from Germany on this critical matter, despite its high expectations during the alliance negotiations. This situation clearly exposed

⁹³ HR.SFR.4, 908-47, Hilmi Paşa a Said Halim Paşa, 11 Octobre 1913.

⁹⁴ HR.SFR.4, 908-47, Nabi Bey a Said Halim Paşa, Rome, 16 Octobre 1913.

⁹⁵ HR.SFR.4, 908-40, Mahmut Muhtar Paşa a Said Halim Paşa, 4 Octobre 1913.

the Committee of Union and Progress's isolation and helplessness in the face of the prevailing international balance of power. The Committee's lack of experience in foreign policy further deepened this isolation; yet the core problem lay in the fact that its room for maneuver in the international arena was already severely limited.

4-The Approval of the Mission and Its Arrival in Istanbul

Although the crisis with Greece continued, the Treaty of Istanbul signed between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria on 29 September 1913 eliminated one of the major obstacles to the implementation of the Liman von Sanders Mission. With this development, the Ottoman Empire secured a crucial diplomatic and strategic advantage against Greece in the Balkans, while Germany succeeded in strengthening regional stability in line with its strategic interests. The treaty solidified both the balance of power in the region and the foundations of Ottoman-German cooperation. During this period of normalization in Ottoman-Bulgarian relations, the details of the contract concerning the Liman von Sanders Mission, which was to be dispatched to Istanbul, also began to crystallize. The first draft of the contract was presented by Jagow to Kaiser Wilhelm II on September 20, 1913, shortly before the signing of the Treaty of Istanbul. Prepared by Wangenheim, this contract outlined General Liman von Sanders' authority and covered a comprehensive framework, including training within the Ottoman army, promotion procedures, supervision, disciplinary measures, and operational responsibilities. The main points of the contract can be summarized as follows:

1- To ensure the unity of the German reorganization effort, which had thus far failed, General Liman was appointed as the direct superior of all German officers serving in the Ottoman military. He was granted the authority to conduct inspections anywhere in Turkey. No foreign officer could be recruited for the Ottoman army without his permission.

2- General Liman was directly entrusted with overseeing the entire military training and education system-which included the shooting school, training camps, and instructional units-an assignment deemed highly significant for Turkey's future as well as for the spread of German methods and language.

3- General Liman would serve as a member of the Supreme War Council. His influence over the promotion of Turkish officers, particularly generals, was clearly established. Furthermore, he was granted disciplinary authority equivalent to that of a commanding general.

4- Unlike the British naval missions, these arrangements were to be valid for five years instead of two. Within six months following any changes in the cabinet or the Ministry of War, transfers and retirement decisions concerning

senior Turkish officers could only be executed with the approval of the German general. These regulations ensured the necessary continuity in military affairs and demonstrated unwavering trust in His Majesty the Kaiser and German military principles. As known, the lack of continuity had been the cause of disasters at the beginning of previous wars.

5- General Liman was allocated an annual budget of approximately one million Marks for discretionary use, covering the training of generals, the theoretical development of general staff officers, general staff tours, and similar needs. In contrast, the total budget allocated to all German officers thus far had been below 30,000 Marks.⁹⁶

As can be seen, the contract clearly demonstrated the increasing subordination of the Ottoman Empire's military and political autonomy to German influence. General Liman von Sanders' direct control over the training and administration of the Ottoman army reflected Germany's ambition to become a decisive force not only in military matters but also in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. The mandatory German oversight in critical decisions, from high-ranking officer appointments to the army's restructuring, weakened the Ottomans' claims to independence and revealed Germany's efforts to shape the Ottoman Empire as a strategic ally for the upcoming war. Moreover, the specific emphasis in the contract on placing "the entire military training and education system under General Liman's authority, which was considered vital for Turkey's future and the spread of German methods and language," indicates that this relationship extended beyond mere military cooperation. It had evolved into a cultural influence project. Through these arrangements, Germany aimed to impose its military and cultural model within the Ottoman Empire and, in doing so, shape Turkey's future in line with its own strategic interests.

At the beginning of October, the draft text of the contract was approved by the Kaiser. Following this approval, on October 2, in line with the Kaiser's instructions, Major General Liman von Sanders, commander of the 22nd Division, visited the Ottoman embassy in Berlin. In a report sent to Said Halim Paşa on October 3, Mahmut Muhtar Paşa stated that Sanders had declared he had been "appointed to lead the military mission that was requested and seriously desired by the Ottoman Empire."⁹⁷ The following day, on October 4, a telegram sent by Said Halim Paşa to Muhtar Paşa confirmed that the agreement had been ratified by an imperial decree of the Sultan⁹⁸. On October 27, 1913, the mission

⁹⁶ GPEK/38/1, Jagow an den Rominten, Nr.15 444, Berlin, den 20. September 1913. This draft text appears to have been accepted as the final agreement without any significant changes.

⁹⁷ BOA, HR.SYS/1879-5.

⁹⁸ BOA, HR.SYS/1879-5.

was officially approved by the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*), and a five-year contract was signed between the two sides⁹⁹. According to the contract, finalized within the framework presented to the Kaiser on September 20, it was agreed that under the leadership of von Sanders, 42 German officers of various ranks (mostly majors and captains) would be sent to Istanbul to reorganize and modernize the Ottoman army¹⁰⁰.

The agreement granted exceptionally broad powers to the head of the military mission, General Liman von Sanders. Under this framework, Sanders, who held the rank of Major General, would be promoted to Lieutenant General in the Ottoman Army and would hold the authority of a corps commander during his tenure in Turkey. He would also become a member of the highest military authority, the Military Council (*Askeri Şura*), and would be kept informed of all developments concerning the defense of the country. According to the terms of the agreement, all military training activities and related institutions would be placed directly under his command. According to Mühlmann, the inclusion of this provision aimed fundamentally to ensure that the Ottoman military education system would be implemented in a unified manner along German principles. The management of military education-previously under the authority of the General Staff but in a particularly poor state-was to be transferred entirely to Sanders. In addition, full authority over the appointment of foreign officers was also to be granted to him. General von Sanders would be given unlimited inspection authority throughout all regions of the empire, and command of the First Army, stationed in Istanbul, would be entrusted directly to him. Thus, Sanders would have direct authority not only over the First Army, but also over all military schools, model regiments, training camps, and all foreign officers serving in the Ottoman military. According to Mühlmann, these arrangements were intended both to reinforce Sanders's military authority and to ensure the practical implementation of the German training model within the Ottoman army. In the initial phase, a group of 40 German officers would be assigned not only to the General Staff and central command structures, but also to various command levels in both the capital and the provinces. Although the mission members were officially discharged from the German army, it was guaranteed that their service in Turkey would count toward their seniority in the German military, and that they would be able to return to the German army if needed. In mid-December, General Liman von Sanders arrived in Istanbul accompanied by eight German

⁹⁹ Wallach 1977, p.121.

¹⁰⁰ BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No. 376, Constantinople, 30 October 1913. For the disagreements during the process leading to the agreement and the details regarding the appointment, see: Fischer 1984, pp. 135-136.

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officers, and immediately assumed his duties¹⁰¹. In his memoirs, Sanders recounts that at the end of November, he was summoned to the Kaiser's presence, who reportedly told him: *"It should not concern you whether the Young Turks or the Old Turks are in power. Your sole responsibility is to focus on the army. Keep Turkish officers away from politics. Engaging in politics is their greatest mistake."*¹⁰²



Figure 6: "German Military Mission to Istanbul", 18 December 1913¹⁰³

Although General Sanders was not formally granted political authority, the contract endowed him with extraordinary powers that far exceeded those of a conventional military advisor. He held direct command over the First Army, full control of military education, and exclusive authority in appointing foreign officers-effectively establishing him as a figure of real military power within the Ottoman military structure. As Mühlmann emphasized, the primary aim of these arrangements was to ensure the comprehensive and systematic implementation

¹⁰¹ Mühlmann 2009, p. 29-30; Genelkurmay 1996, p.108.

¹⁰² Sanders 2020, p. 9.

¹⁰³ The officer mission is depicted (from left to right): Major Perrinet von Thauvenay, Major von Feldmann, Captain von König, Colonel Bronsart von Schellendorf, Lieutenant General Liman von Sanders, Colonel Weber, Military Supply Director Bucharth, Major Nicolai, Chief Medical Officer Prof. Dr. Mayer, First Lieutenant Mühlmann.

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Deutsche_Milit%C3%A4rmission_T%C3%BCrkei_1913.pdf

of the German military model. Given the military's central role in politics following the Babiali Baskını, Sanders's position inevitably intersected with political realities. In practice, his responsibilities extended into the political domain, blurring the lines between military leadership and state governance. His role thus positioned him not only at the heart of the Ottoman military's restructuring, but also within the broader strategic reorientation of the state. In this regard, Germany's military presence in the Ottoman Empire was not merely technical; it evolved into an institutional and political influence under the guise of military reform.

The primary motivation of the CUP was to initiate a profound, sincere, and realistic modernization process within the army by fully adapting the collapsed "Turkish military system" of the First Balkan War to the German model through the creation of a model army. In essence, their goal was to address the root of the problem and implement a radical transformation. However, it seemed unlikely that the army could recover swiftly and reach a level capable of securing the empire's borders in a short period. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire faced significant deficiencies in military equipment and lacked the necessary economic resources to address these shortcomings. Under these conditions, another crucial objective of the CUP was to place Istanbul and Anatolia under a protective shield provided by Germany's military presence and support. Although the Unionists were not initially inclined toward complete dependency on Germany, this motivation significantly increased German influence and severely limited the military autonomy of the Ottoman army. The empire's growing international isolation, coupled with the increasingly apparent Armenian threat in the East and the Greek threat in the West, became the underlying reasons for this "undesired" or perhaps unintended dependency. The CUP's systematically rising power following the *Babiali Baskını* was further consolidated with the recapture of Edirne, marking a critical step toward full control of the government (*tam iktidar*)¹⁰⁴. This, in turn, allowed them greater maneuverability in implementing their policies and expanded their political influence within the empire.

On the other hand, this approach provided Germany with a broad opportunity to pursue its strategic objectives in the region. The extensive powers granted to Liman von Sanders not only facilitated German influence in military modernization but also laid the groundwork for a deeper political influence over the Ottoman Empire. One of the most significant outcomes of this process was the initiation of the controversial debate over whether the Ottoman Empire should enter World War I—a discussion that effectively began after Liman von Sanders'

¹⁰⁴ "Full authority" (Akşin 2001, p. 377) would actually be achieved with Enver Paşa's appointment to the Ministry of War.

arrival in Istanbul¹⁰⁵. Germany was indeed elevating its influence over the Ottoman Empire to an unprecedented level. Regardless of the terms of the agreement reached with the CUP, it seemed unlikely that Germany could convincingly argue on the international stage that the mission was purely military and devoid of political intent.

The decision to appoint a fully authorized military delegation-and, in particular, to place the First Army Corps under the command of a German officer-instead of merely dispatching military instructors, and to place an entire corps under direct German command, had sparked significant controversy as soon as it became known¹⁰⁶. The debates intensified even further once the arrival of the mission was confirmed¹⁰⁷. The military and political rapprochement between the two countries had already been viewed with suspicion by the other European powers. This appointment further deepened the prevailing concerns among the Great Powers of the time. General Liman von Sanders was perceived as a “personal representative”¹⁰⁸ sent directly by the Kaiser; his appointment was thus

¹⁰⁵ Enver Paşa is also accused of not being sufficiently alert to the approaching world war for the same reason. For example, Kazım Karabekir, in his work seeking answers to the question of why we entered the World War, criticizes as follows: “Just as the movements of celestial bodies are constantly observed by experts through telescopes and the characteristics of microbes are examined through microscopes, intelligence officers also have the duty to listen and watch the countries they are concerned with, using the microphone and microscope of intelligence, down to the smallest movements. I, too, was curiously observing Russia, which was not moving much, in this manner. There was also the influence of these observations when I informed Enver Paşa on March 28, 1914, that we were facing a world war. Enver Paşa, busy making plans to reclaim the islands that had fallen into Greek hands, did not pay attention to me at that time.” Karabekir 2020, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ Following the public disclosure of the news, Wangenheim repeatedly stated during his meetings with the ambassadors in Istanbul that the primary objective of the mission was the reorganization of military schools. BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No. 376, Constantinople, 30 October 1913; German Military Mission to Turkey, *The Times*, 31 October 1913.

¹⁰⁷ The Liman von Sanders incident also caused significant discontent within the army, with some officers viewing Sanders as “the executor of a mission to tie the Ottomans to Germany.” Ali İhsan Sabis, who made harsh criticisms of Sanders in his memoirs, stated that Sanders naturally wanted to tightly bind the Ottomans to Germany, while Wangenheim was thinking of Turkish-German friendship and even an alliance. Sabis 1990, p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ Although an official framework was presented at the time, according to U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, General Liman von Sanders personally revealed the true nature of his mission through an “unexpected behavior.” Morgenthau based this assessment on Sanders’ reaction to his placement in the protocol at a dinner event. According to his memoirs, following the meal, the German *chargé d’affaires*, Von Mutius, hurriedly approached him and, once composed, said: “You have made a great mistake, Mr. Ambassador.” When Morgenthau asked, “What mistake?”, Von Mutius explained: Sanders had taken great offense because he was seated behind the foreign ministers. However, as the personal representative of the Kaiser, Sanders was considered equal in protocol to ambassadors and, therefore, should have been seated ahead of the ministers.

seen as a clear attempt by Germany to expand its influence over the Ottoman Empire. According to Mahmud Muhtar Paşa, this development led to the perception that the Ottoman Empire had become dependent on Germany¹⁰⁹. The principal concern of the Entente Powers was the potential transfer of actual control over Istanbul and the Straits to Germany. As British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey stated, “Germany was deliberately aiming at world predominance,” and for this reason, the initiative could not be interpreted as a mere case of military cooperation. On the contrary, such steps were perceived as concrete manifestations of Germany’s global strategy to reshape the balance of power in its favor¹¹⁰. Germany had long been engaged in the construction of a powerful navy as part of its ambition to become a world power and had already made significant progress in this area. Consequently, the permanent presence of German naval power in the Istanbul and Straits region was viewed by the Entente Powers as a serious strategic threat. Moreover, this development was seen as a clear indication that the Ottoman Empire-expected to remain neutral and adhere to its traditional balance-of-power policy-had now chosen a side, and had done so in a way that clearly conflicted with the interests of the other major powers. In the eyes of these states, the mission was not merely a matter of bilateral military cooperation, but rather an initiative that directly violated the balance of power among the Great Powers and undermined the prevailing principle of political equality regarding the Ottoman Empire¹¹¹. Indeed, following the formal

According to Morgenthau, in this minor protocol crisis, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Pallavicini, seeking to express his discontent with Sanders’ attitude, asked the German Ambassador Wangenheim: “*If Liman von Sanders represents the Kaiser, then whom do you represent?*” He followed up with the statement: “*An ambassador is always regarded as the alter ego of his sovereign. It is against protocol for a sovereign to have two representatives at the same court.*” (Morgenthau 1919, p. 43-46.) This anecdote can be seen as a striking example showing that General von Sanders viewed his mission-likely beyond the limits of his official mandate- not merely as a military advisory role, but as a political mission representing Germany’s influence over the Ottoman Empire. Although this issue lies somewhat outside the central focus of the present study, it is worth emphasizing that similar debates frequently resurfaced during the war. War Minister Enver Paşa occasionally expressed clear frustration over General von Sanders’ unilateral decisions made without consultation with the German Embassy. According to Mustafa Aksakal, he once voiced his reaction in the following terms: “*In this agreement, everything must be in its proper place. The representative of the German Empire here is not Liman, but the German ambassador*”. This incident directly parallels Sanders’ conduct at the aforementioned dinner. (Aksakal 2008, p. 20.)

¹⁰⁹ Mahmud Muhtar Paşa 1924, p. 275.

¹¹⁰ Grey 1925, p.29.

¹¹¹ “German Officers for the Turkish Army”, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 November 1913. However, these criticisms involved a clear double standard that could not easily be ignored. During the Balkan Wars, the principle of “balance” had not been consistently observed, and both the Entente and the Central Powers had experienced serious disagreements throughout the conflict. In particular,

confirmation of the mission's arrival in Istanbul, reports in the European press increasingly emphasized that the supreme command of the Ottoman army had, in effect, been transferred to (*Tevdi-i keyfiyetine*) a German officer¹¹². The Unionists' assertions that the German military mission was "equivalent" to other foreign missions already present in Istanbul were not regarded as sincere or convincing by the Entente powers. According to a report published in the 12 December 1913 issue of *Tanin*, quoting the French newspaper *Le Matin*, the first concrete reaction of Britain and France to the Liman von Sanders Mission was to reinforce their own military missions. In this context, Britain decided to strengthen its existing naval mission by sending 28 additional officers, while France opted to reinforce its gendarmerie mission with an additional team of 42 personnel¹¹³. Greek politician and writer Leon Maccas offers a far-reaching interpretation of the mission's purpose from a Greek-centered perspective. According to Maccas, the German military delegation led by Sanders was tasked not only with reorganizing the Ottoman army, but more importantly, with planning and organizing Germany's preparations for war in the East¹¹⁴.

the Entente powers had taken the side of the Balkan states rather than that of the Ottoman Empire, playing a key role in pushing the Ottomans out of Europe. Even the question of Edirne- whose recovery was crucial for the security of Istanbul-had led to considerable diplomatic tension among the powers. What truly concerned the Entente bloc was Germany's growing attempt to take the lead in shaping the future of the Ottoman Empire. The Liman von Sanders Mission was not regarded as a mere technical military arrangement, but rather as a unilateral move by Germany to strengthen its influence in the region and to protect its own strategic interests. The competition over political control in the Ottoman capital clearly showed that the struggle for the division of influence had, in fact, already begun before the outbreak of the war.

¹¹² "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: İtilaf-ı müsellehin bir teşebbüsü" *Tanin*, 12 Kanun-i Evvel 1913.

¹¹³ "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: Bahriye'de İngiliz Heyeti" *Tanin*, 12 Kanun-i Evvel 1913.

¹¹⁴ Maccas 1919, p. 128. As frequently emphasized throughout this study, one of the principal-if not the most decisive-motives behind the establishment of the Sanders Mission, from the perspectives of both the Ottoman Empire and Germany, was the concern over the security of Istanbul and the Straits. The formation of the mission and Sanders's arrival in Istanbul immediately provoked a wave of international reaction, centered on the issue of controlling the Straits and the Ottoman capital. This issue constituted one of the most sensitive subjects of the geopolitical rivalry among the Great Powers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While the struggle for control over the Straits is commonly viewed as a contest between two opposing blocs-namely the Entente Powers led by Britain and France, and the Central Powers centered around Germany and Austria-Hungary-it also held significant implications for intra-bloc conflicts of interest. In the context of securing naval dominance in the Mediterranean, the status of the Straits carried differing strategic meanings for both traditional maritime empires such as Britain and France, and for emerging competitors like Germany, Russia, and Italy. Consequently, the future of the Straits became a central concern not only in terms of the Ottoman Empire's sovereignty but also with respect to the broader European balance of power. (For a general evaluation-the period covers what is often referred to as the longest century of the Empire-on this issue, and particularly for an analysis of the Straits question from the perspective of British and



Figure 7: General Liman von Sanders (Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ggbain.20470/>)

Among the Entente powers, Russia voiced the strongest objection. It regarded the mission as a de facto transfer of control over the Ottoman capital and the Straits to Germany, and demanded its immediate cancellation. On 11 November, Sazonov explicitly stated during a meeting with the German ambassador that the issue was not political, but fundamentally military. In his view, it was utterly unacceptable for the army of a state that had for centuries

Russian strategic interests, see Yıldız 2019, p. 40-59". Indeed, the Gallipoli Campaign-one of the most critical theaters of the First World War-clearly demonstrated the geostrategic significance of the Straits. For the Entente Powers, control of the Straits was vital for establishing a secure supply and communication route with Russia, as well as for eliminating the Ottoman Empire from the war. Similarly, for Germany, the continued control over Ottoman territory-especially Istanbul and the Straits-functioned both as a strategic base for eastward military and political expansion and as a defensive barrier against Entente advances. Even Greece, which had achieved substantial territorial gains against the Ottoman Empire during the First Balkan War and had formulated long-term ambitions regarding Western Anatolia, aimed to participate in the Gallipoli Campaign in order to secure influence over the Straits and Istanbul. (Yellice 2016, pp. 205-242; Başak 2015, pp. 1-10; Theodoulou 2011, pp. 157-191). This was not only a result of the strategic pressure exerted by the Entente Powers but also closely related to the Ottoman perception of an expansionist Greek threat. This development largely explains the Ottoman Empire's hasty and comprehensive attempt at military reorganization during the First Balkan War.

been in conflict with Russia to be reorganized by Germany. Sazonov argued that this mission was not, as claimed, a routine and harmless military advisory effort; rather, it contained elements that were highly exceptional and dangerous, and clearly distinguished it from previous military missions. According to him, the Unionist leaders in Istanbul were capable of carrying out an unpredictable *coup de tête* at any moment, and under such circumstances, appointing Sanders to such a critical position would only serve to further feed the already pronounced “megalomaniacal tendencies” of this faction¹¹⁵.

The crisis became so serious that, on December 1, 1913, the Russian government went so far as to tell Germany that the future of Russo-German relations should not depend on the appointment of a single German general¹¹⁶. In fact, as Anderson notes, Russia even considered declaring war if the mission was not canceled. But it gave up this plan after realizing that Britain would not support such a move¹¹⁷. According to information revealed by Mehmet Perinçek from Russian archives, the mission’s objectives were “uncovered” by the Russians. A report submitted to the Russian General Staff outlined these tasks as follows: directing and directly controlling the organizational activities of the Ottoman Ministry of War to Germanize the Ottoman army; closely monitoring and tightly controlling the policies of other major powers in Turkey; and strengthening and developing Turkish military power in Asia Minor to counterbalance Russia’s aggressive tendencies¹¹⁸. Russia’s intense diplomatic reaction and the resulting tension with Germany clearly demonstrate or gives us clue that the Liman von Sanders Mission was far more than a mere technical military arrangement, a routine advisory mission, or a standard military assistance effort; rather, it carried significant strategic value for Germany and embodied broader geopolitical ambitions. The mission, in fact, gradually came to symbolize a broader struggle for influence being waged over the Ottoman Empire.

In response to the systematic criticisms directed at the German military mission by Russian officials-particularly the Russian press-the *Tanin* newspaper, which functioned as the semi-official organ of the CUP, launched a series of articles entitled “The German Military Mission.” (“Alman Askerî Heyeti”). The aim was to shape public opinion, legitimize the mission, and, crucially, to persuade the Entente powers of the mission’s “innocuous” character. For instance, just one day before the mission’s arrival in Istanbul, Tanin published an article on 13 December 1913 titled “The German Military Mission: The Mission and

¹¹⁵ GPEK/38/1, Lucius an das AA, Nr. 15448, Petersburg, 11 November 1913.

¹¹⁶ BD/10/1, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 385, St. Petersburg, 1 December 1913.

¹¹⁷ Anderson 1965, p. 303.

¹¹⁸ Perinçek 2011, p. 35-36.

Europe.” (“Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: Heyet ve Avrupa”) The article emphasized that, despite Russia’s sharp reaction, optimism regarding the mission remained strong both within the public sphere and among the circles of the Sublime Porte. In fact, these hopes were said to have grown even stronger, as the mission was expected to bring the Ottoman army to a “state of perfection.” In the same article, *Tanin* directly responded to the criticisms voiced in the Russian press, asserting that the arrival of the German delegation had been met with widespread satisfaction. According to the newspaper, no Ottoman officer held the German military experts or their reform agenda responsible for the recent military defeats. Framing the issue in this manner, *Tanin* continued to defend and praise the mission. The recent Balkan Wars, the paper argued, had served as a wake-up call, clarifying the root causes of the army’s shortcomings. This time, the paper asserted with confidence, past mistakes would not be repeated, and a successful resolution was now within reach¹¹⁹. Beyond addressing the domestic audience, *Tanin* also sought to reassure the Great Powers, offering implicit diplomatic guarantees through its rhetoric. It aimed to dispel growing international anxieties that the Straits might fall under German control. In this context, the newspaper’s article titled “The Triple Entente States” (“İtilaf-ı Müselles Devletleri”) reported that the First Army Corps and the Straits Command would be structured as two entirely separate military commands—an arrangement that had, according to the paper, been officially announced by the Sublime Porte and reportedly welcomed in London¹²⁰.

In parallel with the Istanbul press, *Ahenk*, a newspaper published in Izmir, adopted a similar editorial stance, defending the legitimacy of the German mission. In its article dated 19 December 1913, titled “Britain and Germany Alike,” (“İngiltere ve Almanya Müşterek”) the paper cited various European newspapers to support the view that the German military mission was equivalent in function and scope to the British naval mission. Referring to an article by Professor Schilmann published in *Gazette de la Croix*, *Ahenk* argued that Admiral Limpus was tasked solely with the reorganization of the Ottoman navy, just as General Liman von Sanders had been appointed exclusively to reform the Ottoman army. Within this framework, *Ahenk* also sought to allay public concerns over the alleged German domination of the Bosphorus and Istanbul. The newspaper presented commentary dismissing such fears as exaggerated, insisting that just as Britain had been entrusted with naval reform, Germany was undertaking an equivalent role in the army. Thus, according to *Ahenk*, there was no need for alarm or sensationalist speculation about German control of the capital¹²¹.

¹¹⁹ “Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: Heyet ve Avrupa”, *Tanin*, 13 Kanun-i Evvel 1913.

¹²⁰ “Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: İtilaf-ı müselles devletleri” *Tanin*, 13 Kanun-i Evvel 1913.

¹²¹ “İngiltere ve Almanya Müşterek”, *Ahenk*, 19 Kanun-i Evvel 1913.

Although the crisis appeared to be partially “resolved” through subsequent diplomatic engagements, the strategic significance of the mission was not forgotten; this episode would leave a lasting rupture in both Russo-German and Ottoman-Russian relations¹²². The magnitude of the crisis and the severity of Russia’s reaction are largely explained by the alliance later established between the Ottoman Empire and Germany, and by the prominent role Liman von Sanders would go on to play during the First World War, which broke out only eight months later. As the mission also turned into an escalating diplomatic crisis between The Triple Entente and The Triple Alliance, Sanders and his team arrived in Istanbul on December 13 and officially began their duties on December 20, 1913¹²³.

Conclusion

The Liman von Sanders Mission represented a period in which Germany’s influence over the Ottoman Empire had reached its peak; the special relationship established between the two countries had left lasting effects on the strategic balance of the war. The decision was both bold and risky, as it marked a departure for both the Ottoman Empire and Germany from their traditional balance-of-power strategies toward a more radical and risk-laden foreign policy. As the process makes clear, both countries appeared to have no other viable option. The mission constituted one of the most concrete steps in this strategic transformation and played a decisive role in the formation of the Ottoman-German alliance signed shortly after the outbreak of war. From a long-term perspective, this process can be considered one of the most critical turning points on the Ottoman Empire’s path toward entering the First World War. The idea of requesting a “fully authorized” military mission, which was first raised during the First Balkan War, in early 1913, from Germany stemmed from the decision to initiate a profound, sincere, and realistic modernization process by entirely adapting the collapsed “Turkish military system” of the First Balkan War to the German model. The Unionists increasingly felt that entering another war with the existing military structure could lead to disastrous consequences-possibly even the disintegration of the state. Despite the treaties signed after the wars, lasting order had not been achieved in the Balkans. In this climate of uncertainty, persistent security concerns regarding Istanbul and Anatolia, coupled with deep distrust toward

¹²² For a more detailed account of the reactions to the mission, the responses of the Ottoman Empire and Germany, and the subsequent modifications made to the Liman von Sanders Mission, reference can be made to the following two complementary articles by the same author. Yellice 2025, p. 1-56; Yellice 2024, p.247-260.

¹²³ “L’arrivée de la mission militaire allemande,” *Stamboul*, 15 décembre 1913; DDF/3/8, Bompard a Doumergue, No. 647, Pera, 18 Décembre 1913.

Britain, France, and Russia, had pushed Ottoman decision-makers toward closer military cooperation with Germany-a direction that gradually became definitive. For the Committee of Union and Progress which had seized power in a coup and was facing serious crises of legitimacy both at home and abroad, the mission also served as a crucial tool for consolidating its authority. The military and political needs of the Unionists aligned with Germany's perception of threat regarding the future of the Ottoman Empire-and thus its own strategic and economic interests in the Near East. This convergence led to the start of diplomatic negotiations. The agreement reached-especially the extraordinary powers granted to Liman von Sanders and his appointment as commander of the First Army Corps-implicitly demonstrated the Ottoman Empire's acknowledgment that it could no longer defend its capital and Anatolia on its own. From the Unionist perspective, this also reflected a pragmatic and realist orientation adopted for the sake of preserving the state's survival.

This difficult and risky process ultimately led to the Ottoman Empire's rapid drift away from the Entente Powers, while also marking the beginning of a period in which the empire's decision-making mechanisms were radically reshaped in line with German interests. Although the Unionists continued to pursue alliances with France and Britain and tried to establish a diplomatic understanding with Russia in the lead-up to the war, they eventually made an active decision to move toward strategic alignment with Germany. With this choice, German influence became the dominant force shaping the Ottoman Empire's future. The abandonment of the traditional balance-of-power policy among the Great Powers constituted not only a turning point in the empire's wartime alignment, but also a structural rupture that defined its prewar military and diplomatic transformation. The decisions taken during this period fundamentally altered the Ottoman Empire's position in the international balance of power and ultimately triggered the dynamics that led to its collapse.

As evident in Wangenheim's correspondence with Berlin during the mission's formation, the Liman von Sanders Mission was not merely a military reform initiative, but a component of Germany's broader strategic plan to consolidate its influence over the Ottoman army and enhance its geopolitical position in the Near East. For Germany, the mission had multiple objectives: to establish control over the Ottoman military, to deepen cultural interaction, to expand its presence in Anatolia, and to secure the Baghdad Railway project. During this period, German influence over the Ottoman Empire reached its zenith, and a privileged bilateral relationship was established. While caution is warranted in drawing a direct causal link between the Liman von Sanders Mission and the Ottoman-German alliance of 2 August 1914-given Germany's reluctance or at least hesitation about forming an alliance with the Ottoman Empire during

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the summer of 1914-it can nevertheless be argued that the mission laid the groundwork for that alliance and represented a turning point in Ottoman-German relations.

In this respect, the Mission must be considered one of the most critical thresholds on the Ottoman Empire's path to World War I. For any scholar seeking to reevaluate the Ottoman Empire's decision to enter the war and its alliance choices, the process of the mission's formation-shaped between January and December 1913-should be studied in depth. Such an investigation would not only provide a more coherent analytical framework but also contribute to a multidimensional understanding of the empire's foreign policy orientation prior to the war.

In conclusion, the mission was not merely a mission-it was surely something far more than that. In the period that followed, neither the Ottoman Empire's relations with Germany and the Entente Powers, nor Germany's relations with the Entente, would ever be the same again. For the mission, through its short- and medium-term impact, not only disrupted the existing order but also paved the way for a paradigmatic rupture. Both for the Unionists and Germany.

The impact of the mission-through the subsequent Ottoman-German alliance-on the First World War and even Turkish War of Independence still appears to be in need of further scholarly investigation.

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