

**THE LIMAN VON SANDERS MISSION CRISIS:  
REACTIONS TO THE MISSION, THE STANCE OF  
THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND GERMANY  
(NOVEMBER 1913–JANUARY 1914)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the Ottoman Empire and Germany's responses to the international reactions triggered by the arrival of the German Military Reform Mission, led by Liman von Sanders, in Istanbul. The research highlights the mission's significance in reshaping pre-World War I power dynamics between rival blocs-with some diplomats even regarding it as a catalyst for the seeds of war- particularly focusing on its potential to provoke a conflict between Russia and Germany. It examines the factors that compelled Germany to modify the mission, the Ottoman Empire's resistance to these changes, and ultimately questions whether these adjustments were imposed by Germany on the Ottomans or whether they constituted a strategic maneuver by the Committee of Union and Progress leadership to create political leverage amid diplomatic pressures.

The mission emerged following the Ottoman Empire's request for a fully authorized German military delegation to reorganize its army, which had suffered a decisive collapse in the Balkan Wars. The primary point of contention revolved around Liman von Sanders' appointment as the commander of the First Army Corps, which lay at the heart of Russia's objections. This development, perceived as an expansion

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of Germany's political and military influence over the Ottomans, provoked strong diplomatic protests from Russia and quickly escalated into an international crisis. Initially, Germany resisted these pressures alongside the Ottoman Empire, but mounting diplomatic tensions eventually forced Berlin to retreat. The Ottomans, too, opposed Germany's demands for a period before ultimately conceding to the modifications.

The study argues that the mission marked a critical turning point not only in the modernization of the Ottoman military but also in the restructuring of Ottoman foreign policy and decision-making mechanisms in alignment with German interests. It demonstrates how power dynamics, diplomatic pressures, and military reform policies became deeply intertwined in Ottoman-German relations. As Germany expanded its military and political influence over the Ottomans during this process, this shift became a key factor influencing the Ottoman Empire's decision to ally with Germany in World War I. In this regard, the study also seeks to provide a scholarly foundation for debates surrounding Liman von Sanders' role in the Battle of Gallipoli.

**Keywords:** Enver Paşa, Germany, Liman von Sanders, Ottoman Empire, Russia.

**LIMAN VON SANDERS MİSYONU MESELESİ:  
MİSYONA YÖNELİK ULUSLARARASI TEPKİLER,  
OSMANLI DEVLETİ VE ALMANYA’NIN TUTUMU  
(KASIM 1913-OCAK 1914)**

**ÖZ**

Bu çalışma, Liman von Sanders liderliğindeki Alman Askerî Islah Heyeti’nin İstanbul’a gelişinin ardından ortaya çıkan uluslararası tepkiler karşısında Osmanlı Devleti ve Almanya’nın tutumlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, Birinci Dünya Savaşı öncesinde bloklar arası güç dengelerini derinden etkileyen ve bazı diplomatlara göre savaşın tohumlarının atılmasına yol açan bu misyonun, özellikle Rusya ile Almanya arasında bir çatışmayı tetikleme potansiyeline dikkat çekmekte, Almanya’yı misyonda değişikliğe sevk eden ve Osmanlı Devleti’nin bu değişikliğe direnmesinin nedenlerine odaklanmakta ve temelde değişikliğin Almanya tarafından Osmanlı’ya bir dayatma mı olduğu, yoksa İttihat ve Terakki liderliğinin diplomatik baskılar karşısında manevra alanı yaratmak üzere geliştirdiği bir strateji mi olduğu sorusunu merkeze almaktadır. Misyon, Osmanlı Balkan Savaşı’nda çöküşü kesinleşen orduyu yeniden yapılandırmak amacıyla Almanya’dan tam yetkili bir askerî heyet talebi neticesinde ortaya çıkmıştı. Gündeme gelmesinin ardından misyonun asıl tartışma noktası, Rusya’nın tepkisinin de merkezinde yer alan Liman von Sanders’in Birinci Kolordu Komutanlığı’na atanması olmuştu. Bu durum, Almanya’nın Osmanlı üzerindeki siyasi ve askerî nüfuzunu artırdığı gerekçeyle özellikle Rusya’nın sert diplomatik itirazlarına yol açmış ve kısa sürede uluslararası bir krize dönüşmüştü. Almanya başlangıçta Osmanlı Devleti ile birlikte bu baskılara karşı direnç göstermiş, ancak artan diplomatik gerilim sonucunda geri adım atmak zorunda kalmıştı. Osmanlı Devleti ise Almanya’nın dayatmalarına karşı bir süre direniş göstermiş, ancak sonuçta yapılan değişiklikleri kabul etmek durumunda kalmıştı. Çalışma, misyonun yalnızca Osmanlı ordusunun modernizasyon sürecinde değil, aynı zamanda Osmanlı dış politikasının ve karar alma mekanizmalarının Almanya’nın çıkarları doğrultusunda yeniden şekillenmesinde kritik bir dönüm noktası olduğunu öne sürmekte, Osman-

lı-Alman ilişkilerinde güç dengesi, diplomatik baskılar ve askerî reform politikalarının nasıl iç içe geçtiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Almanya, bu süreçte Osmanlı üzerindeki askerî ve siyasi nüfuzunu artırırken, bu durum, Osmanlı Devleti'nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Almanya'nın yanında yer alma kararını etkileyen önemli faktörlerden biri olmuştur. Bu yönüyle ayrıca, Liman von Sanders'in Çanakkale Savaşı'ndaki rolüne ilişkin tartışmalara bilimsel bir arka plan sunma iddiasını taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Almanya, Enver Paşa, Liman von Sanders, Osmanlı Devleti, Rusya.

## INTRODUCTION

The devastating defeat in the First Balkan War revealed the urgent need for a comprehensive reform in the military and political structure of the Ottoman Empire. This defeat not only exposed the shortcomings of the Ottoman army but also clearly demonstrated the failure of previous German military assistance missions. In response, the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki/CUP) leadership decided that the army had to be urgently restructured to strengthen the defense of Istanbul, the Straits, and Anatolia, thus preventing the collapse of the state. Accordingly, a fully authorized military mission from Germany was requested, marking a crucial step in the process. The Liman von Sanders Mission emerged as the most tangible outcome of this initiative<sup>1</sup>. Under Sanders' leadership, the mission aimed to transform the assigned Ottoman corps into a model army and then strengthen the entire Ottoman military based on this model.

The primary reason for choosing Germany was the growing distrust towards the Entente Powers. The Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912) and the Balkan Wars

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1 The dispatch of a German military mission to the Ottoman Empire and the appointment of German General Liman von Sanders to a critical military post in Istanbul (the Liman von Sanders Mission Issue) is regarded as one of the “final” and perhaps the most significant diplomatic crises that deeply affected European and global politics in the lead-up to the First World War, particularly in the period preceding the July Crisis triggered by the assassination in Sarajevo. This crisis heightened tensions in international relations and further intensified the rivalry among the great powers. The multifaceted nature of the Sanders Mission and the involvement of numerous actors made it challenging to comprehensively address the issue within a single study. Therefore, a new study has been written as a continuation of a previously published article on the subject. This article evaluates the mission from the perspective of Ottoman-German relations, focusing primarily on Russia's reactions to the mission and the debates it sparked among the Entente Powers. Complementing the earlier work by the same author, titled “Britain, Russia and the German Military Mission to Istanbul, 1913-1914” (See, Gürhan Yellice, “Britain, Russia and the German Military Mission to Istanbul, 1913-1914,” **CUJOSS**, Vol 48, No 2, 2024, p. 247-260). This study necessitates a comparative analysis of both articles to achieve a better understanding of the mission. Additionally, another study detailing the formation process of the mission has been prepared within this framework and awaits publication (“The Committee of Union and Progress, Wangenheim, and the Making of the Liman von Sanders Mission, January-December 1913”). These complementary studies hold significant importance for understanding both the internal dynamics of the Ottoman Empire in its final years and the broader implications of the mission on international relations. The role of the mission in Ottoman-German relations and the tensions it provoked among the Entente Powers can be considered a critical turning point in the lead-up to the outbreak of the First World War. Therefore, a holistic examination of the studies on this subject contributes substantially to understanding the complex political and diplomatic landscape of the period.

(1912-1913) made it clear that the Entente Powers no longer upheld their traditional policy of preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. During the First Balkan War, the lack of support from the Entente for the Ottoman efforts to reclaim the Aegean Islands and Edirne further isolated the empire within European politics. The Ottoman Empire was not only entangled in disputes with Greece over the status of the Aegean Islands but also became a battleground for competing geopolitical interests between Germany and Russia, as well as between the Entente and the Triple Alliance. The Armenian Question, which was increasingly aggravated by Russian influence in the East, further pushed the Ottomans toward closer ties with Germany. Thus, the Ottoman need for military reform aligned with Germany's ambitions to expand its political and military influence over the empire. While the CUP's primary motivation was to prevent the collapse of the state and modernize the army, Germany's willingness to accept this request stemmed from its broader strategic objective of strengthening its hold over the Ottoman military and political sphere.

6 Negotiations, which began in June 1913, culminated in a contract signed on October 27, 1913. Under this agreement, General Liman von Sanders was appointed as the commander of the Ottoman First Army Corps in Istanbul for five years with the rank of Lieutenant General and was also designated as the Head of the Reform Commission. A total of 42 German officers were assigned to oversee the reorganization and modernization of the Ottoman army. The mission aimed to establish a model army by handing over the command of a corps to a German general and then rebuild the Ottoman military based on this prototype (*Numune kolordusu*). The most critical command and administrative positions within the First Army Corps were to be held by German officers from the mission. Liman von Sanders and his officers would also be responsible for reforming military schools and directly supervising the modernization process of the Ottoman army.

While this mission deepened German influence in the Ottoman military reform process, it also triggered international diplomatic tensions. The Entente Powers, particularly Russia, perceived Sanders' position within the Ottoman army as a strategic maneuver by Germany to strengthen its dominance over the empire. As a result, Russia strongly opposed and criticized the mission, considering it a direct threat to its own interests in the region. Thus, this

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military reorganization was not merely an internal Ottoman reform effort; rather, it became an integral part of the broader geopolitical rivalry among the great powers in the lead-up to World War I.

## I. The Entente Powers' Reaction to the Liman von Sanders Mission

Until the signing of the agreement on October 27, 1913, the Ottoman Empire and Germany had conducted the Liman von Sanders Mission process with great secrecy<sup>2</sup>. The primary reason for this confidentiality was the concern over the mission's function and its potential impact on international power dynamics. However, despite all these efforts, their fears materialized: once news of the mission spread, it triggered a serious and rapidly growing reaction, particularly in Europe. Previously, the presence of German, British, and French military reform missions in the Ottoman Empire had not provoked significant international reactions. However, the news of Liman von Sanders' arrival caused an entirely different effect. The Entente Powers perceived this mission as fundamentally different from previous ones, believing that it involved broader strategic objectives. Although little was known about its exact scope and purpose, the mission was not merely seen as an effort to modernize the Ottoman army. Instead, in the eyes of the Entente Powers, it was a calculated move by Germany to expand its influence over the Ottoman Empire and alter regional power balances in its favor.

The first news about the mission was spread through embassies and quickly circulated. Embassies in Berlin reported the authority granted to Liman von Sanders and shared speculative information about the mission with their

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2 From the perspective of Ottoman-German diplomacy, this was indeed a remarkable success. For nearly six months in Istanbul, secret negotiations took place between Wangenheim and the Unionists, without any other ambassadors becoming aware of the process. In May, Kaiser Wilhelm II informed the British King and the Russian Tsar about the issue, yet during his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov in October, he did not bring up the matter nor share any details regarding the mission. So much so that Sazonov later wrote in his memoirs that no government had been aware of the matter until that date (Serge Dmitrievich Sazonov, **Fateful Years 1909-1916: Reminiscences of Serge Sazanov**, Butler&Tanner, London 1927, p. 118). The issue was first raised on November 18, 1913, during a meeting in Berlin between the Russian Prime Minister and German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg (**Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914**, Band 38/1 (hereafter **GPEK/38/1**), "Aufzeichnung des Reichskanzlers von Bethmann Hollweg" Nr. 15 450, Berlin, 18 November 1913).

respective governments. For instance, on October 30, the French Ambassador to Berlin, Manneville, referenced the *Le Lokal Anzeiger* newspaper in his report to French Foreign Minister Pichon. The newspaper, citing its correspondent in Istanbul<sup>3</sup>, provided details on how the military mission was being restructured<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, on October 31, 1913, Alick Russel, the British military attaché in Berlin, sent a report to the War Office, describing 58-year-old Liman von Sanders as an energetic, talented, and strong-willed character, while emphasizing that he would have broad and unrestricted powers in his position in Istanbul<sup>5</sup>. The news of this appointment quickly resonated not only in diplomatic circles but also across European public opinion, sparking intense debates. Throughout November, the British press published numerous analyses on the mission, arguing that it was a strategic move by Germany to expand its influence over the Ottoman Empire. The discussions primarily focused on the extent to which Germany would strengthen its control over the Ottoman Empire through this appointment and the nature of the agreement between the two sides. The consensus was that Germany sought to increase its influence over Ottoman territories through this mission, which could potentially lead to a major crisis between the Entente and Central Powers<sup>6</sup>.

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Indeed, events unfolded exactly as the British press had predicted. The mission quickly escalated tensions between the Entente and Central Powers, transforming it into a major crisis that even brought the possibility of war

3 This text uses the term “Istanbul” for clarity and to reflect modern usage. It should be noted, however, that in contemporary Ottoman documents the city was typically referred to as “Konstantiniyye”, while Western sources used “Constantinople”. In current Western historiography, the term ‘Constantinople’ still appears occasionally

4 **Documents Diplomatiques Français**, 1871-1914, Série 3, (1911-1914), Tome IIIX, 11 Août -31 Décembre 1913, (hereafter **DDF/3/8**), Manneville a Pichon, No.411, Berlin, 30 Octobre 1913.

5 **British Documents on the Origins of the War (1898-1914)**, Vol. X Part I (hereafter **BD/10/1**), Russell to Goschen, No. 377, Berlin, 31 October 1913.

6 “German Military Mission to Turkey”, **The Times**, 28 Nov. 1913; German Military Mission to Turkey, **The Times**, 31 Oct. 1913; “German Military Mission to Turkey”, **The Times**, 29 Nov. 1913; “Turkish Command for A German General”, **The Times**, 1 December 1913; “German Influence at Constantinople”, **The Times**, 2 December 1913; “The Constantinople Command”, **The Times**, 10 December 1913; “Powers of Liman Paşa”, **The Times**, 16 December 1913. According to Kazım Karabekir, the mission issue also caused serious concerns among the Balkan states. These states feared that the rapid modernization of the Turkish army would inevitably lead to the first blow being directed at them, prompting a wave of alarmist reports in their newspapers (Kazım Karabekir, **Türkiye’de ve Türk Ordusunda Almanlar**, Ed. Orhan Hülagü-Ömer Hakan Özalp, Emre Publishing, İstanbul 2001, p. 313).



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to the table. The Entente Powers viewed the mission as a disruption of the Ottoman Empire's integration and as Germany abandoning the existing balance of power in the region. According to these states, Istanbul was politically unstable, and due to the uncertainty of the future, there was a high likelihood that the Ottoman Empire would fall entirely under German influence through the mission. The crisis surrounding the mission was largely driven by Russia's rigid stance. Although the development also caused unease in Britain and France, both countries believed that the issue could be resolved through diplomatic means. However, Russia took a different approach, perceiving the mission as a threat serious enough to lead to war between the rival blocs and arguing that the matter had to be handled with great urgency. According to E.J. Dillon, a correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* who closely followed the Ottoman Empire and Russia, Russia interpreted Germany's move as preparation for war and, for this reason, adopted a harsher stance, demanding deterrent measures<sup>7</sup>.

Why, then, did Russia assign such profound significance to what Germany considered merely a military mission?

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The primary reason for this was that Russia perceived the mission as a direct threat to itself. For Russia, the Straits were the only gateway to the Mediterranean, and strengthening their defense under German control was absolutely unacceptable. This concern was validated by Pomiankowski's memoirs, in which he stated: "The appointment of Liman von Sanders as the commander of the corps in Istanbul was nothing less than the disguised annexation of the Straits."<sup>8</sup> According to Russia, Germany, through the

7 According to E.J. Dillon, Russia perceived Germany's move as a *casus belli* (E.J. Dillon, **The Eclipse of Russia**, George H. Doran Company, New York 1918, p. 369). Other scholars have also argued that Russia saw the German maneuver as a direct provocation leading to war. For instance, Albertini, in his work **The Origins of the First World War**, suggests that Russia seriously considered the possibility of war and even began to desire it, aiming to neutralize the German threat and pursue its ambitions over the Straits. In this context, Albertini recalls a famous quote by the renowned Savoyard diplomat, writer, and political philosopher Joseph de Maistre, known for his views on Slavic peoples, nationalism, and state authority: "Bury a Slav desire beneath a fortress and it will blow it sky high". (Luigi Albertini, **The Origins of the War, 1914**, Vol. II, (Translated and Edited by Isabella M. Massey), Oxford University Press, London 1953, p. 181-182).

8 Joseph Pomiankowski, **Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü**, Trans. Kemal Turan, Kayihan Publishing, Istanbul 2014, p. 36.

mission, would elevate its military and political influence over the Ottoman Empire to an unprecedented level. By placing Liman von Sanders at the head of the Ottoman army, Germany would establish dominance over Istanbul and the Straits, thereby posing a serious threat to Russian interests in the region. For Sazonov<sup>9</sup>, it was completely unacceptable for a state that had been struggling against Russia for centuries to fall under German influence and transform its army into a direct threat against Russia<sup>10</sup>. In his memoirs, he wrote the following on the matter:

“The Young Turk Government, which aimed at liberating Turkey from foreign influence, yet pursued, at the same time, a course which could end only in political and military bondage to Germany. We watched with anxiety the gradual suppression of Turkish independence by Germany, foreseeing the consequences that were bound to follow. We did our utmost to prevent it, and to open the eyes of the Turks to the inevitable outcome -the complete subordination of the Turkish nation to the aims of German policy, and the loss of all independence. But the efforts of the Russian Government were fruitless. It was not in our power to force

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- 9 For the sake of consistency, the name “Sasonoff” as it appears in some archival documents and other sources as been standardized to “Sazonov” throughout this study. This adjustment has been made to reflect the commonly accepted transliteration of the Russian foreign minister’s name in modern scholarly literature.
- 10 Russia was not entirely unjustified in its concerns regarding the appointment of Liman von Sanders to the head of the Ottoman army. It is evident that Kaiser Wilhelm II did not view Sanders’s role merely within the framework of military advisory duties, but rather as part of a broader and long-term strategy to advance German imperial interests. One of the clearest expressions of this intent can be found in a critical remark made by the Kaiser on July 29, 1914, just days before the outbreak of the First World War. Fritz Fischer, in his seminal work **Germany’s Aims in the First World War**, highlights this moment with the following account: “*At the decisive moment, on July 29, 1914 (before, that is, the outbreak of war), when a new crisis was blowing up - one which this time really did end in war-the Emperor at once reverted to this idea. A telegram had arrived from Constantinople expressing the unanimous wish of the German military mission and of General Liman von Sanders to return to Germany in the event of war; the emperor wrote in the margin: ‘Must stay there and also foment war and revolt against Britain. Doesn’t he yet know of the intended alliance, under which he is to be Commander in Chief?’*.” (See, Fischer **op. cit.**, p. 121.) These words clearly reveal the Kaiser’s actual intentions and offer insight into why Russian suspicions were, in many ways, well-founded. The German military mission was not envisioned as a neutral technical endeavor, but rather as an instrument of geopolitical ambition. From the Russian perspective, Sanders’s presence in Constantinople represented not merely an expansion of German influence over the Ottoman army, but a deliberate attempt to transform the Ottoman Empire into an operational base for German strategic objectives-particularly against Britain. As such, Russia’s objections were not rooted in paranoia, but in a perceptive recognition of the deeper political and military implications of the mission. In hindsight, their alarm was both rational and historically justified.

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the Turks to throw off the millstone which the Germans had hung round their necks. The interests of the Young Turk Government had become so closely interwoven with those of Germany that it was impossible to separate them. The fate of Pan-Germanism and of Young Turkey was destined to be sealed on the same day”<sup>11</sup>.

Due to these concerns, Russia openly objected to the Sanders Mission<sup>12</sup> during diplomatic talks with Germany in early November, demanding its cancellation, but this request was firmly rejected. Germany’s primary motivation was to ensure the defense of the Ottoman Empire’s remaining territories after the Balkan Wars, which was vital for its economic and strategic interests in the region. To convince Russia of the mission’s “innocence”, Germany argued that the mission had been established at the Ottoman Empire’s request and was not intended as a threat to Russia. Furthermore, the mission aimed to strengthen the defense of Istanbul and the Straits, a region of critical importance even for Russia, which had long supported maintaining the regional *status quo*<sup>13</sup>. Germany also claimed that this mission was no different from previous German military missions (such as the Goltz Paşa Mission) or the British (Limpus Mission) and French (Moujen Mission) military missions in Istanbul. Moreover, Berlin warned that if Germany refused the Ottoman request, the empire might seek assistance from another power, potentially endangering German interests<sup>14</sup>.

The mission issue was thoroughly discussed at the summit held in Berlin between November 17-20, 1913. During the summit, Russian Prime Minister

11 Sazonov, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

12 In the literature, the terms German Military Mission or German Military Reform Commission are commonly used. However, in this study, the expression *Sanders Mission* is preferred, as the focus is specifically centered on Liman von Sanders and his role within the broader context of German involvement in the Ottoman military.

13 **GPEK/38/1**, Lucius an das (to) AA, Nr. 15445, Petersburg, 7 November 1913; **GPEK/38/1**, Lucius an das AA, Nr. 15448, Petersburg, 11 November 1913; **GPEK/38/1**, Zimmermann an das Lucius, Nr. 14446, Berlin, 8 November 1913; **GPEK/38/1**, “Aufzeichnung des Militärattaches in Konstantinopel Majors von Strempele”, Nr. 15449, Berlin, 18. November 1913. **DDF/3/8**, Bompard a (to) Pichon, No.436, Péra, 3 Novembre 1913. Admiral Limpus was the head of the third and final British mission sent to Istanbul for the modernization of the Ottoman navy between the Second Constitutional Era and World War I. Serving from 1912 to 1914, he played a key role in naval reforms. Additionally, at the time, French General Muijen was also present in Istanbul, overseeing the reorganization of the gendarmerie (**Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi**, Vol/ III, Part 6, Genelkurmay Publishing, Ankara 1996, p. 107).

14 **GPEK/38/1**, Zimmermann an das Lucius, Nr. 14446, Berlin, 8 November 1913.

Vladimir Nikolayevich Kokovtsov escalated his concerns, stating that Russia's primary fear was Liman von Sanders assuming command of the Ottoman army. Kokovtsov believed that Sanders' leadership position in the Ottoman military would increase Germany's influence in the region and directly threaten Russia's strategic interests. In response, Bethmann Hollweg countered with several arguments. According to him, the mission was merely a continuation of a long-standing tradition, as German officers had been training the Ottoman army for decades. Rejecting this request would mean Germany abandoning this policy altogether, which was impossible given Germany's significant economic interests and strategic investments in Anatolia. Furthermore, ensuring the preservation of the Ottoman Empire's remaining territories after the war was vital for Germany. Bethmann Hollweg also dismissed Russia's concerns by emphasizing that the Ottoman army's sole objective was modernization, and it had no intention of engaging in offensive military actions. The Balkan Wars had already demonstrated that the Ottoman army lacked such capabilities, making any notion of an anti-Russian operation completely illogical. The selection of Istanbul as the mission's center was also a natural choice, as the Ottoman military administration, training institutions, and other key structures were all based in the capital. Moreover, Field Marshal von der Goltz had previously spent twelve years in Istanbul overseeing the reorganization of the Ottoman army, setting a strong precedent for the mission's location. Ultimately, the mission was purely educational and posed no threat to Russia<sup>15</sup>.

Unconvinced by these arguments and continuing to view the mission as a direct threat, Russia sought to develop a strategy through its allies. The goal was to ensure that the Entente Powers adopted a unified stance against the Liman von Sanders Mission and, if necessary, to pressure Germany into withdrawing through coercive measures. To achieve this, Russia proposed that the Entente first establish a common position and demand the cancellation of the mission. If this demand was rejected, economic sanctions should be imposed on the Ottoman Empire, along with the threat of severing diplomatic ties. If these pressures also failed, military intervention should be considered as a last resort, with the possible deployment of forces to a specific region in Anatolia<sup>16</sup>.

15 GPEK/38/1, "Aufzeichnung des Reichskanzlers von Bethmann Hollweg" Nr. 15450, Berlin, 18 November 1913.

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

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However, Russia's approach was not accepted by its allies. While Britain and France shared concerns about the mission, they believed that occupying any part of Anatolia carried the risk of triggering a broader European war. At such an early stage of the crisis, both countries were reluctant to take a more aggressive stance than Russia itself<sup>17</sup> ("Ruslardan daha Rus"), preferring instead to pursue diplomatic efforts to persuade Germany and the Ottoman Empire<sup>18</sup>.

France, in its negotiations with The Sublime Porte (*Babıali*) emphasized that the proposed mission could disrupt the balance of power among the Great Powers and constitute a step against the independence of the Ottoman Empire. French Foreign Minister Pichon, in his meetings with Rıfat Paşa, expressed

17 The exact phrase used here is: "More Russian than the Russians". This statement was used in the telegram sent by Grey to the British ambassador in St. Petersburg following the "warning telegram" that Britain had sent to the *Babıali* under Russian pressure. "*Russia must not forget that, although the presence of German command in Istanbul is unsettling for all powers, it holds a particularly deeper significance for Russia. Therefore, it is impossible for us to be 'more Russian than the Russians' on this issue. The German government is likely to be influenced less by British reactions and more by concerns over how strongly Russia will object*". Grey's assessment revealed Britain's reluctance to engage in direct confrontation with Germany and its lack of complete alignment with Russia's concerns. In general, Grey believed that Russia was overreacting to the mission. See, **BD/10/1**, Grey to O'Beirne, No. 388, **FO**, December 2, 1913.

18 **BD/10/1**, Grey to O'Beirne, No. 386, **FO**, December 1, 1913. Through the Sanders Mission, Germany's policy of increasing its influence in Anatolia and Istanbul fundamentally clashed with Britain's long-term imperial plans. In his later article titled "Türkiye's War of Liberation" (*Türkiye'nin Hürriyet Harbi*), which examines developments from the end of the First World War to the conclusion of the Turkish War of Independence, Sanders offers significant insights into Germany's concerns on this matter. According to Sanders, one of Britain's primary objectives after the First World War was to acquire new territories in the Near East, transform Istanbul into a key stronghold of British power, and establish dominance over Anatolia. (The other two critical strongholds in the Middle East were Iraq and Palestine.) Sanders also contextualizes the post-war situation, including the Istanbul government's fall under British influence, Greece's occupation of Izmir and the eastern Aegean, as well as Thrace, Italy's control over the Gulf of Antalya, and France's establishment of dominance in Syria. He further analyzes how a diminished Anatolian Turkey was envisioned as a buffer zone against the Bolshevik "threat." Sanders' analysis is essential for understanding Britain's imperial ambitions in the region and the shifting power dynamics that emerged following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. His perspective underscores how Germany's efforts to maintain influence over Anatolia and Istanbul directly conflicted with Britain's regional strategies. This tension provides a critical lens for understanding the intricate political and military developments after the First World War and the intense competition among international powers over Ottoman territories. For the translation and analysis of the text, see Tahir Kodal, "Otto Liman von Sanders'in Kaleminden 'Türkiye'nin Hürriyet Harbi'", **Belgi**, Vol 5, No 1, 2013, p. 595-642.

deep concern, particularly regarding the transfer of the First Army Corps to the German mission. He stated that this would be perceived as placing the capital under German control, a development that posed a significant threat and would be categorically rejected by Russia. According to Pichon, placing Istanbul under the command of a foreign officer would not only damage the honor of the Ottoman Empire but also cause serious diplomatic complications<sup>19</sup>. The Ottoman Empire was entrusting its capital to a group of officers who were agents of a foreign power, and the possibility that this group could later use its authority for its own interests was both uncertain and alarming. The French minister, referring to the French military mission in Greece, stressed that the French mission was solely responsible for reorganizing the Greek army and had no command authority. In contrast, the CUP was preparing to hand over its army to a German general. The core issue was that Sanders was assuming not just an advisory role but direct command authority<sup>20</sup>.

Similar warnings were also issued by Britain. On December 2, 1913, in a telegram sent to the *Babiali* through Mallet, Grey highlighted that placing the effective command of the Ottoman Army's corps in Istanbul under a German general and numerous German officers created a completely different situation from previous missions. He noted that this would mean diplomatic circles in Istanbul would fall under German control and that Germany would effectively hold the key to the Straits. According to Grey, granting such authority to a German general could lead to military measures that might undermine the Sultan's sovereignty and disrupt the balance of power that ensured the Ottoman Empire's survival. He also warned that Germany's dominant position in Istanbul could encourage other Great Powers to make similar demands on Ottoman territories, leaving the empire with no ability to resist such requests<sup>21</sup>.

Dissatisfied with its allies' diplomatic efforts, Russia adopted a much harsher stance in its negotiations with the *Babiali*. Rıfat Paşa, the Ottoman Empire's ambassador in Paris, highlighted the threatening approach of his Russian counterpart in his reports to the *Babiali*. According to Rıfat Paşa's report dated November 27, 1913, the Russian

19 **BD/10/1**, Lord Granville to Sir Edward Grey, No. 384, Paris, November 29, 1913.

20 **BOA**, HR.SYS/1879-5, Rıfat Paşa a Said Halim, Paris, 24 November 1913; **BOA**, HR.SYS/1879-5, Rıfat Paşa a Said Halim, Paris, 29 November 1913.

21 **BD/10/1**, Grey to Mallet, No. 387, **FO**, December 2, 1913.

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ambassador firmly stated that Russia categorically rejected the presence of German officers in the Ottoman army, emphasizing that this issue was of great importance to Russia. The Russian ambassador viewed the mission as the domination of a foreign power over the fate of the Ottoman Empire and expressed this view with openly threatening remarks during their meeting:

“We have good relations with Germany, and this situation will not affect them. However, when it comes to Turkey, we will take the necessary measures to protect our interests in this matter. Additionally, steps may be taken regarding any compensations that Russia may demand”<sup>22</sup>.

From a neutral perspective, it must be acknowledged that the concerns raised by the British and French Foreign Ministers were noteworthy. Regardless of the justification, the Ottoman Empire’s decision to place an entire army corps under direct German command not only reinforced the perception of a threat to its independence but also had the potential to destabilize the delicate balance of power among the Great Powers. However, there was a striking irony in this situation. Britain and France, while issuing friendly warnings to the Ottomans, were simultaneously pursuing a strategy aimed at weakening the empire and supporting the fragmentation of Anatolia -an objective directly opposed to the vision upheld by İttihatçılar. Their insistence on ceding Edirne to Bulgaria and their unwavering support for Greece in the unresolved Aegean Islands dispute were clear indications of this broader strategy. At the same time, Russia was exerting pressure on the empire through the Armenian Question in the East. In contrast, at least on the surface, Germany advocated for the territorial integrity of Anatolia. The inconsistent policies of these powers, warning the Ottomans on one hand while pursuing conflicting agendas on the other, may have fostered deep distrust in Ottoman diplomatic relations. Tragically, these so-called warnings issued under the pretext of safeguarding Ottoman interests were, in reality, far from serving the empire’s well-being. Under these circumstances, *Babıali* had many reasons to dismiss such warnings. The post-Balkan Wars period had already proven to be a major disappointment for İttihatçılar, and the attitude of the Entente Powers revealed a contradictory and inconsistent approach toward the Ottoman Empire.

Likely motivated by these considerations, İttihatçılar refused to back down despite the pressure from the Entente Powers. The contract signed on October

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22 BOA, HR.SYS/1879-5, Rıfat Paşa a Said Halim, Paris, 27 November 1913.



27, 1913, was officially ratified by the Sultan's decree on December 4, 1913, extending its scope to include the First Army Corps<sup>23</sup>. On the same day, Wangenheim reported to the German Foreign Ministry that the necessary decree for Liman von Sanders' appointment had been issued, with an additional note specifying that his headquarters would be located in Istanbul and that his forces would be garrisoned in and around the city. Meanwhile, Grand Vizier Said Halim, seeking to avoid further controversy, requested that the mission arrive in Istanbul as soon as possible<sup>24</sup>. According to British military attaché in Istanbul, Lieutenant Colonel G.E. Tyrell, Sanders was expected to arrive in the city within a week<sup>25</sup>.

While the Ottoman Empire remained steadfast, Russia's systematic pressure and propaganda portraying the mission as Germany's attempt to take control of the empire escalated the issue into a full-blown crisis<sup>26</sup>. In response, Berlin sought to de-escalate tensions by engaging in direct dialogue with St. Petersburg, arguing that the mission had been "misunderstood"<sup>27</sup> and attempting to establish common ground for a settlement. During secret negotiations between Russia and Germany, the idea of relocating the mission to a different region, such as Edirne, was discussed as a potential solution to the crisis<sup>28</sup>. This proposal was first introduced by France in late November, when French Foreign Minister Pichon suggested that relocating the mission to another region could be an ideal compromise for both sides. According to Pichon, if the Ottoman Empire was determined to place an army corps under German command, Edirne could serve as a suitable alternative<sup>29</sup>. Although Russia was receptive to the idea of relocating the mission to Edirne<sup>30</sup>, both Germany and the Ottoman Empire rejected the proposal. The mission's primary objective was not only military modernization but also the

23 **DDF/3/8**, Bompard a Pichon, No. 583, Pera, 4 Décembre 1913.

24 **GPEK/38/1**, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 464, Konstantinopel, den 4 Dezember 1913.

25 **BD/10/1**, Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrrell to Mallet, No.391, Constantinople, 2 December 1913.

26 Another objective of this initiative may have been to calm the debates and divisions within German public opinion. According to Mahmut Muhtar Paşa's report sent to the *Babiali* on November 28, 1913, the mission issue had caused significant discord within German public discourse (**BOA**, HR.SYS/1879-5, Mahmut Muhtar Paşa a Said Halim, Berlin, 27 November 1913).

27 **DDF/3/8**, Bompard a Pichon, No. 584, Pera, 4 Décembre 1913.

28 **DDF/3/8**, Bompard a Pichon, No. 584, Pera, 4 Décembre 1913.

29 **BOA**, HR.SYS/1879-5, Rifat Paşa a Said Halim, Paris, 26 Sep 1913.

30 **BOA**, HR.SYS/1879-5, Rifat Paşa a Said Halim, Paris, 26 September 1913.



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strengthening of Istanbul's defense. As such, moving the mission to Edirne was incompatible with these goals and was ultimately deemed unacceptable<sup>31</sup>. At this stage, the revival of this proposal demonstrated that Germany had recognized the severity of the crisis. The suggestion reflected an attempt to find a compromise that acknowledged Russia's sensitivity regarding Istanbul while allowing Germany to maintain its influence over the Ottoman army.

However, the hope for a settlement was short-lived.

According to Delcassé, the French ambassador in St. Petersburg, Germany informed Sazonov that the headquarters could be established either in Istanbul or elsewhere, but the final decision would be left to General Sanders<sup>32</sup>. This approach was seen by Russia as an insincere tactic, and the idea that the Kaiser would leave such an important matter to Sanders' discretion was considered "ridiculous." During negotiations in Berlin, Russian representative Sverbéieff clearly stated that the issue could not be treated solely as a military matter but was also a political one. He emphasized that the decision could not be left to Sanders' initiative and had to be made directly by the Kaiser<sup>33</sup>. The announcement of the imperial decree in Istanbul, which reached St. Petersburg on December 7, further diminished hopes for a resolution<sup>34</sup>. Critical details emerged during this period, including the fact that the army under Sanders' command would be structured as a "model army" and that he would hold a seat on the Supreme Military Council<sup>35</sup>. These revelations heightened Russian concerns, reinforcing its perception that the Ottoman army was falling under German control. These developments not only affected Ottoman-German relations but also had direct implications for the broader diplomatic balance among the Great Powers. Whether intentionally or not, Germany was driving a wedge between Britain and Russia, exacerbating Russian anxieties while prompting Britain to adopt a more cautious stance on the matter.

31 **BD/10/1**, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 383, St. Petersburg, 29 November 1913; **BD/10/1**, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 386, Foreign Office, 1 December 1913; **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No.402, Constantinople, 4 December 1913; **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No.402, Constantinople, 5 December 1913.; **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No.405, Constantinople, 5 December 1913.

32 **DDF/3/8**, Delcasse a Pichon, No. 585, St. Petersburg, 4 Décembre 1913.

33 **DDF/3/8**, Cambon a Pichon, No. 589, Berlin, 5 Décembre 1913.

34 **BD/10/1**, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 406, St. Petersburg, 7 December 1913.

35 **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No. 396, Constantinople, 3 December 1913.

Indeed, the lack of coordination and unity within the Entente bloc had become increasingly apparent. With the emergence of the mission crisis, the Entente Powers struggled to formulate a unified policy, as Britain and France did not fully align with Russia's strong reaction. Unwilling to accept this, Sazonov, in a message to Grey through O'Beirne, insisted that the Entente Powers should not be doomed to defeat in this matter and called for a more proactive stance to prevent Sanders from arriving in Istanbul. He proposed at least considering financial sanctions or the threat of severing diplomatic relations<sup>36</sup>. However, Russia once again failed to secure the support it had hoped for from its allies<sup>37</sup>. In the note sent to the *Babiali* on December 8, the following statement was included:

"The fact that the command of the army corps in Istanbul is to be entrusted to a German general grants him a position that no foreign officer-whether German or of any other nationality-has ever held in Istanbul. This situation will bring all diplomatic missions under German influence. Furthermore, the German general will possess the authority to implement military measures that could undermine the Sultan's

36 **BD/10/1**, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 406, St. Petersburg, 7 December 1913.

37 Russia's failure to secure the support it had expected from Britain on this critical issue, which had the potential to shape the future of Istanbul and the Straits, was also a reflection of the deep divisions among the Entente Powers regarding the fate of the region. This disagreement was so profound that, in the pre-war period, the idea of a possible Russian-German rapprochement was even discussed in Russia. In this context, on May 23, 1914, Second Markov addressed the Duma, stating: "*All history shows that it is Britain which has been keeping us out of the Straits, and now it is not Germany alone, not General Liman von Sanders alone, who has been keeping us out, but our own, friendly Britain. Such is my own conviction, and I think that very many of you here share that conviction. But it may be that we can come to terms with Germany, so as to have the Straits opened for Russia, even against the wishes of Britain. For Britain does not wish to tie her hands with Russia. She reserves for herself her freedom of action. She offers us only her friendship. Well, then, let us give our friendship to her, but, at the same time, let us give our friendship to Germany, in return for the Straits, sacrificing, it is true, something which does not belong to us, and to which we are vainly turning our eyes, for it will never be ours, anyway*". These statements are highly significant as they reveal the strategic uncertainties in Britain's relationship with Russia and demonstrate that Russia was even considering the possibility of reaching an agreement with Germany on the Straits issue. For the full text of the speech, see Frank Alfred Golder, **Documents of Russian History 1914-1917**, The Century Co, Stanford University, 1927, p. 24-28. The material for this book is taken from various places, but largely from two newspapers, the **Riech** (organ of the Constitutional Democrats) and the **Izvestiia** (represented the advanced socialistic thought until the Bolsheviks came on the scene). These two papers contain most of the official documents of the period and give opposing points of view.

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sovereignty. In such a case, the balance of power, which serves as the fundamental guarantee of the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity, will be disrupted. If Germany secures such a dominant position in Istanbul, other powers will inevitably feel compelled to protect their own interests in Turkey"<sup>38</sup>.

As can be seen, the note contained no serious sanctions and was essentially a harmless document. It included no proposal for punitive measures, no demand for compensation, and no language that could justify war. Similar to Britain's previous warnings, this note posed no actual obstacle to the arrival of the mission in Istanbul. Evaluating the process from the perspective of the Entente Powers, it is evident that the alliance's weaknesses in coordination and decisiveness became increasingly clear. While this approach strengthened Germany's position in the struggle for influence over the Ottoman Empire, it further heightened Russia's concerns. Moreover, Sazonov's pressure on Britain to relocate the Limpus Mission to İzmit while transferring the Sanders Mission to Edirne<sup>39</sup>, along with his proposal for the occupation of İzmir, Beirut, or Trabzon by the Entente Powers<sup>40</sup>, yielded no results.

Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire continued its preparations for Sanders' arrival, while also making significant efforts to reassure the Entente ambassadors in Istanbul. *Babiali* insisted that Istanbul and the Straits would not be placed under the control of the German general<sup>41</sup>, that the Straits were not within the operational jurisdiction of the First Army Corps<sup>42</sup>, and that Sanders' authority would be equivalent to that of Limpus<sup>43</sup>. However, Russia remained unconvinced, as its primary concern was that the First Army Corps had been entrusted to Liman von Sanders, a development that would grant Germany complete political control and dominance over Istanbul. Consequently, the assurances provided by *Babiali* failed to ease Russian anxieties<sup>44</sup>.

38 DDF/3/8, "Note de L'ambassade De Russie" No. 595, Paris, 8 Décembre 1913.

39 BD/10/1, Grey to Mallet, No.420, FO, December 12, 1913.

40 BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No.412, St. Petersburg, 9 December 1913.

41 DDF/3/8, Bompard a Doumergue, No. 611, Pera, 11 Décembre 1913.

42 BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.400, Constantinople, 4 December 1913.

43 BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.426, Constantinople, 13 December 1913.

44 BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No.412, St. Petersburg, 9 December 1913.

Amidst all these debates, Liman von Sanders and his team finally arrived in Istanbul on December 13, 1913<sup>45</sup>. Immediately upon arrival, Sanders donned an Ottoman uniform and was promoted to the rank of *Birinci Ferik* (Lieutenant General). In its article providing detailed information about the delegation and portraying General Sanders in a favorable light, *Tasvir-i Efkar* described his appointment as that of “a figure closely concerned with the future of our army”<sup>46</sup>. During their first days, Sanders and his team engaged in a series of protocol visits, meeting with the Minister of War, the Grand Vizier, various ministers, the Sultan, and the Crown Prince. According to a report sent by France’s military attaché in Istanbul, Lieutenant Colonel Maucorps, to War Minister M. Noulens on December 18, 1913, Sanders was scheduled to assume his duties on December 20. His responsibilities included commanding the First Army Corps, serving as the general inspector of military training, and holding a seat on the Supreme Military Council. However, as previously discussed, he would not hold the title of General Inspector of the Army and would not have authority over corps commanded by other inspectors. Additionally, his jurisdiction would not extend to martial law or military tribunals, reinforcing the idea that his position was not of a political nature<sup>47</sup>.

## II. “A Consolatory Solution?”: Germany’s Decision to Restrict Sanders’ Role and the Reaction of the Unionists

The arrival of the mission in Istanbul did not put an end to the debates; on the contrary, it further intensified tensions. Under Russian pressure, the Entente Powers escalated their diplomatic efforts on the Babiali, seeking further clarification on the nature of the mission. On the very day the mission officially began its duties, the ambassadors presented a new note to the *Babiali*, demanding an explanation from Grand Vizier Said Halim. During this process, *Babiali* was effectively subjected to diplomatic interrogation<sup>48</sup>. Over the course of two days, intense discussions took place between Mallet and Said Halim. The Grand Vizier stated that the German general would command

45 “Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi Meselesi”, *Tasvir-i Efkar*, 14 December 1913.

46 “Ordumuzun Hayatı Müstakbesine Şiddetle Alakadar Olan Bir Sima”, *Tasvir-i Efkar*, 16 December 1913.

47 DDF/3/8, Bompard a Doumergue, No.647, Pera, 18 Décembre 1913.

48 BD/10/1, O’Beirne to Grey, No.429, St. Petersburg, December 14, 1913.

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the First Army Corps and establish model regiments where other Ottoman officers would be trained. He emphasized that the primary objective of the general was to reform and restructure military schools and that, as part of this process, a model division would be formed, through which all officers would pass as part of their training. Additionally, Said Halim made it clear that the German general would have no authority over the Straits and would not assume command of Istanbul under martial law<sup>49</sup>. When Mallet inquired about the differences between General von Sanders' role and that of Field Marshal von der Goltz, Said Halim explained that unlike Goltz, Sanders held a command position, which was deemed an absolute necessity for the army's reform. He further stressed that *Babiali* regarded this reform as a top priority and was fully committed to its implementation<sup>50</sup>.

The systematically increasing Russian pressure forced Germany to make a revision decision before Sanders could officially assume his duties. Russia had gone beyond merely demanding compensation for the mission, escalating the situation to the point of questioning the partition of the Ottoman Empire and even proposing the occupation of certain regions. Although Britain and France opposed this proposal, Russia's increasingly aggressive stance made the prospect of severe sanctions against the *Babiali* more likely. At this stage, the attempts by Germany and the Ottoman Empire to legitimize the mission appeared to be reaching an impasse. While *Babiali* was unwilling to entertain any modification to the mission under any circumstances, Germany, seeking to appease Russian concerns while maintaining the international balance, saw a revision as an inevitable step. Consequently, Germany pragmatically assessed that making some concessions to Russia would be necessary to ensure the mission's continuity without deviating from its original purpose. Meanwhile, Ottoman-Russian relations were deteriorating rapidly. Defusing Russian hostility was crucial not only to prevent further deterioration in bilateral

49 **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No.430, Constantinople, 15 December 1913.

50 **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No.433, Constantinople, 15 December 1913. During this period, diplomatic instructions to embassies regarding reports in the British and French press about the German mission recommended emphasizing the argument that the matter was an internal affair of the Ottoman Empire. For instance, in his report dated December 14, Rıfat Paşa stated that Said Halim had requested information on the nature of the mission to counter the campaign being conducted in the French press. **BOA, HR.SYS**, 1879-5, Rıfat Paşa a Said Halim, 14 Dec 1913; **BOA, HR.SYS**, 1879-5, Said Halim a Rıfat Paşa, 16 December 1913.

relations but also to preempt any unexpected Russian moves against Istanbul and the Straits. The Kaiser remained firm in his commitment to keeping the mission in Istanbul and believed that some tactical compromises were necessary to achieve this objective. In this context, the “yielding attitude”<sup>51</sup> exhibited by Germany was purely a tactical maneuver and did not diminish its broader goal of maintaining its influence over the Ottoman Empire. The Russian ambassador in Germany made the most accurate observation on this matter:

“One must, however, not lose sight of the fact that General Liman’s relinquishment of the command of the First Army Corps is only a formal concession. The General retains his decisive influence upon the military questions of Turkey”.<sup>52</sup>

The framework of the revision was clarified based on Wangenheim’s views and recommendations. According to Wangenheim, although Russia sought to bring the partition of the Ottoman Empire into discussion, it did not feel strong enough to pursue this aggressively and lacked confidence in securing support from its allies. If Russia had been truly determined, it could have exploited opportunities during the Balkan Wars or the Armenian issue. While this situation strengthened the expectation that Russia would ultimately calm down and remain within diplomatic boundaries alongside its allies, it nonetheless became inevitable to offer a “consolatory solution” to ease tensions<sup>53</sup>.

The objections of Sazonov and the Russian public regarding the increasing effectiveness of Turkish forces were rooted in the fear that this development could obstruct Russia’s “historic mission” regarding the Straits<sup>54</sup>. Thus, removing the perceived threat posed by Sanders’ position could be a way to resolve the crisis. By “consolatory solution,” Wangenheim meant that Sanders would relinquish his command of the First Army Corps in Istanbul. According to a note presented by the Russian ambassador in Paris to French Foreign

51 **Entente Diplomacy and the World: Matrix of the History of Europe, 1909-14**, (Translated by B. De Siebert; Edited, arranged and annotated by George Abel Schreiner), The Knickerbocker Press, New York and London 1921.

52 Siebert/Schreiner, The Russian Ambassador at Berlin to Sazonov, No. 836, Jan. 3-16, 1914, p. 707.

53 **GPEK/38/1**, Wangenheim an den Jagow, Nr. 15 493, Pera, den 17 Dezember 1913.

54 **The entente diplomacy**, p. 708.

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Minister Doumergue, after assessing the situation with Liman von Sanders, Wangenheim reported to Berlin on December 18, suggesting in a telegram that, as one of the possible solutions to the crisis, the German general did not necessarily have to command the First Army Corps and could instead be reassigned to the corps in Edirne<sup>55</sup>.

This recommendation was accepted in Berlin, and the Kaiser decided to initiate direct dialogue with Russia. Starting on December 18, a series of meetings took place in Istanbul between Wangenheim and Giers. These discussions focused on alternative solutions that would balance the sensitivities of both sides while preserving their prestige (*amour-propre*)<sup>56</sup>. Among the key proposals were relocating the entire mission to Edirne, transferring the headquarters to Edirne while assigning Sanders a symbolic role<sup>57</sup> in overseeing Istanbul's military schools, and reassigning Sanders from his command of the First Army Corps to an inspectorate role similar to that of Goltz Paşa<sup>58</sup>. The most progress was made on the proposal to remove Sanders from his position as commander of the First Army Corps, which was originally intended to serve as a model corps, following Wangenheim's advice. Russia insisted that Sanders' authority be strictly limited to military training, and if this was not possible, the mission should be entirely moved to Edirne<sup>59</sup>. By the end of December, a general framework for modifying the mission began to take shape between the two sides<sup>60</sup>. According to a report sent by Russia's chargé d'affaires in London to

55 DDF/3/8, Note De L'ambassade De Russie No. 681, Paris, 29 Décembre 1913.

56 GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 489, Konstantinopel, den 18 Dezember 1913.

57 This was the most acceptable solution for Russia. Although the relocation of the Limpus mission to İzmit was also discussed as a means to persuade Germany, no resolution was reached. The main reason for Russia's insistence on this proposal was Germany's (and the Ottoman Empire's) continuous argument that the mission should be considered similar to the Limpus mission (BD/10/1, Grey to Mallet, No.409, FO, 9 December 1913). To eliminate the perception of double standards and inequality in Germany's stance, Russia had devised this solution.

58 DDF/3/8, Boppe a Doumergue, No. 669, Pera, 25 Décembre 1913; BD/10/1, Buchanan to Grey, No.458, FO, St. Petersburg, January 5, 1914.

59 DDF/3/8, Note De L'ambassade De Russie No. 681, Paris, 29 Décembre 1913.

60 Wangenheim also visited London during this process, aiming to persuade Russia through Britain. However, according to Sazonov, Germany's true objective was to create a rift between Britain and Russia, driving these two powers apart (Siebert/Schreiner, Sazonov to the Russian Charge d'Affaires at London, No. 827, Dec. 22, 1913/Jan. 4, 1914, p. 702). Given the debates between Britain and Russia throughout the crisis-particularly Russia's



Sazonov, Sanders would resign from his command of the First Army Corps and serve only as the director and inspector of military schools<sup>61</sup>. The issue had also leaked to the press. The French newspaper *Le Temps*, in an article published on December 28, 1913, reported that Sanders would step down from his position as commander of the First Army Corps but would remain in Istanbul in an official capacity<sup>62</sup>.

However, Germany needed time to implement the solution it believed could convince Russia. During this process, persuading both Sanders and the CUP became a top priority. Additionally, it was crucial to avoid creating the perception-both in Germany and the Ottoman Empire-that Berlin was yielding to Russian pressure. Such an impression would not only weaken Germany's influence over *Babiali* but also undermine Ottoman confidence in Germany as a reliable ally. According to a note from the Russian Embassy, Wangenheim specifically requested a one-month period, citing public opinion concerns as justification<sup>63</sup>. It appears that for Germany, the issue was not just about appeasing Russian objections but also about maintaining control over public sentiment and political dynamics within the Ottoman Empire. Thus, rather than making a sudden retreat, Germany sought to manage the process carefully, ensuring that the adjustment was implemented in a controlled manner while maintaining public support.

During this process, Wangenheim was engaged in negotiations on multiple fronts-while bargaining with Giers, he was also attempting to convince both the *Babiali* and Sanders to accept the proposed reassignment. Sanders, however, was reluctant to comply and proved difficult to persuade. According to Wangenheim's account, Sanders was deeply committed to his position, and when the proposed changes were presented to him, he reacted with intense frustration, viewing the modification as a step backward. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with the stance taken by the German Foreign Ministry. Despite Sanders' resistance, Wangenheim tried to

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grievances towards Britain -it is evident that Germany partially achieved this goal. While it did not dismantle the alliance, it successfully sowed distrust among the parties, creating significant tensions between Russia and its allies (Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 45). For a detailed analysis of this process, see Gürhan Yellice, "Britain, Russia and the German Military Mission to Istanbul, 1913-1914," *CUJOSS*, Vol 48, No 2, 2024, p. 247-260.

61 Siebert/Schreiner, Sazonov to the Russian Charge d'Affaires at London, No. 834, Dec. 30, 1913/Jan. 12, 1914, p. 706.

62 "German Military Mission in Turkey", *Aberdeen Journal*, Dec. 29, 1913.

63 *DDF/3/8*, Note De L'ambassade De Russie No. 681, Paris, 29 Décembre 1913.



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reassure him, arguing that the adjustments would not weaken but rather strengthen his position. Ultimately, Sanders agreed to relinquish his role as corps commander and instead accept an inspectorate position<sup>64</sup>. However, İttihatçılar outright rejected the proposed reassignment, insisting on strict adherence to the original contract, which led to a deadlock in negotiations. Ahmet İzzet Paşa maintained that Sanders would be more effective as the commander of the First Army<sup>65</sup>. İttihatçılar's insistence on upholding the contract was based on three key reasons, which shaped their rigid stance on the issue.

The first reason for İttihatçılar's unwavering stance was their strong belief that Russia and its allies would not impose serious sanctions on the *Babiali* regarding the mission. They were convinced that Russia was bluffing and that it could not act alone<sup>66</sup>. Although Russia had reacted strongly to the issue, it had not declared it a *casus belli*. In the event of war, Russia was not in a position to send a fleet to the Straits alone; it could only do so with British support. However, Britain, under the prevailing circumstances, was also not prepared to risk a direct confrontation with Germany. According to Wangenheim, İttihatçılar reached this conclusion based on their discussions with Entente ambassadors and reports from their representatives in Paris, London, and St. Petersburg.

The second reason was that the issue was directly linked to the *Babiali*'s credibility, both domestically and internationally. All preparations for Sanders'

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64 Liman von Sanders recounts this process in his memoirs as follows: “*After the contract was drafted and approved by the Turks, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Mr. von Jagow, repeatedly pointed out that this command position would disturb the Russian government. Mr. von Jagow advised me that if I insisted on working in an operational capacity, I should assume command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps in Edirne in addition to my role as Head of the Military Mission*”. These statements indicate that this alternative was seriously considered. However, Sanders notes in his memoirs that he objected to this proposal: “*Such a change was not possible because the Head of the Military Mission needed to remain in Istanbul until the foundations of a broader reorganization were established, and Edirne was a 12-hour train journey from Istanbul. I did not want to begin my work with a contract modification that could be perceived as a retreat in the face of Russian influence.*” Later, Sanders acknowledged that this insistence had been unnecessary: “*Looking back at the circumstances of that time today, I realize that the army's reorganization could have been achieved even without this command.*” (Sanders, *op. cit.*, p. 12).

65 DDF/3/8, Boppe a Doumergue, No. 669, Pera, 25 Décembre 1913; GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 489, Konstantinopel, den 18. Dezember 1913.

66 Sidney Bradshaw Fay, **The Origins of War, Volume I: Before Sarajevo: Underlying Causes of the War**, The Macmillan Company, New York 1930, p. 522.

assumption of command had been completed, and the matter had already been made public through the press. Cemal Bey<sup>67</sup> had officially declared that the First Army had been entrusted to a German general. After such a public announcement, any reversal would weaken the Turkish government domestically and cause significant reputational damage internationally. Thus, allowing Sanders to assume command as planned had become not only a military necessity but also a political imperative for the *Babıali*<sup>68</sup>. The third reason was strategic. İttihatçılar had deliberately chosen to establish the mission in Istanbul, under the direct authority of the general command. This decision was not only aimed at military reform but also at securing Istanbul and the Straits against potential Entente interventions while safeguarding their own political future. In this context, the mission functioned both as a defense mechanism against external threats and as a tool to maintain internal political stability.

The fourth and final reason was directly related to Ottoman-Russian relations. In Istanbul, anti-Russian sentiment among İttihatçılar and generally in public opinion was at an all-time high, fueled by a resurgence of nationalist pride. Relations between the two countries had deteriorated rapidly after the Balkan Wars. İttihatçılar firmly believed that Russia had played a decisive role in forming the Balkan Alliance and, despite the territorial losses suffered in the war, continued to pursue a policy aimed at the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Anatolia. The Russian-backed Armenian issue in Eastern Anatolia placed considerable strain on İttihatçılar. Cemal Paşa, in his memoirs, articulated this view:

“To weaken Turkey, Russia sought to encircle it by relying on Bulgaria in Rumelia, where it believed its orders would be obeyed, and by establishing an independent Armenia in Anatolia. Once all threats to Russia were eliminated, it aimed to sever the Turks’ connections with the Muslims of the Caucasus completely. Thereafter, implementing its plans for Istanbul would become an easy task for Russia”<sup>69</sup>.

67 Cemal Bey was appointed to this position on October 30, 1913, following the proposal to abolish Ahmet İzzet Paşa’s office as the Commander of the Istanbul Garrison and appoint him as the Acting Commander of the First Army Corps. (Nevzat Artuç, **Cemal Paşa. Askeri ve Siyasi Hayatı**, TTK, Ankara 2023, p. 132-133).

68 **GPEK/38/1**, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 489, Konstantinopel, den 18. Dezember 1913.

69 Cemal Paşa, **Hatıralar**, Yay. Haz. Alpaz Kabacalı, Türkiye İş Bankası Publishing, İstanbul

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Ottoman-Russian relations were indeed deteriorating during this period. A steadily growing anti-Russian atmosphere had taken hold in the public sphere. The news coverage in the Ottoman press regarding the Liman von Sanders Mission played a significant role in shaping the increasingly evident anti-Russian sentiment within public opinion<sup>70</sup>. In particular, *Tanin*, the influential newspaper closely aligned with the CUP sought to steer public perception by interpreting the international crisis provoked by the mission in line with its political stance. In its articles, *Tanin* consistently drew attention to the international tension caused by the mission, characterized Russia's reaction as "excessive," and portrayed the military delegation as a purely technical reform initiative-hence "innocent" in nature-while associating Russian objections with imperialist anxieties.

In this context, the article titled "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi" ("The German Military Delegation"), published on 5 December 1913, summarized the debates in the European press and argued that the main purpose of the Sanders Mission was "to reform and discipline the army." The newspaper emphasized that the role of the German officers should be regarded not as political but as technical military assistance, and described Russia's response to the mission as "exaggerated." The article also questioned what kind of political consequences the issue might produce at the level of the Ottoman government and whether it could potentially lead to a diplomatic crisis between Germany and Russia<sup>71</sup>.

Following the delegation's arrival in Istanbul, another article titled "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: General Liman Paşa" ("The German Military Delegation: General Liman Paşa"), published on 14 December 1913, placed special emphasis on Sanders' direct appointment as commander of the First Army Corps. According to the report, this development prompted the ambassadors of the Triple Entente powers to urgently convene-at the initiative of Britain-and

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2020, p. 26.

70 For a general overview of the press's stance on the military mission, as reflected in newspapers such as *İkdam*, *Peyam*, *Sabah*, *Tanin*, *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, and *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, see Erdem Karaca, "Türk Basınında Alman Askerî Heyeti Meselesi (1913-1914)", *Akademik Bakış*, Vol 3, No 9, 2011, p. 203-212.

71 "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi" *Tanin*, 5 December 1913.

demand an official explanation from the Ottoman government<sup>72</sup>. In the follow-up article published on 15 December, *Tanin* this time referred to comments appearing in the Paris press, reporting that Russia regarded the Sanders Mission as a serious threat to its interests in the Balkans. According to Tanin, Russia's main concern was the question of the Straits. The government in St. Petersburg made it clear that it would not tolerate the presence of any foreign-particularly German-military or political influence in this strategically vital region of Ottoman territory. The newspaper criticized the prevailing discourse in the Russian public sphere by stating: "Articles in the Russian press portray the presence of a German commander in Istanbul as tantamount to handing over the Straits of Istanbul and Çanakkale to Germany." Tanin interpreted this as a form of propaganda aimed at shaping public perception rather than presenting an objective analysis<sup>73</sup>. Another key point highlighted by Tanin was Russia's effort to persuade Britain-seen as the leading power directing the overall policy of the Entente-to align with its own position regarding the Sanders Affair. In this context, the newspaper cited an article published in the Daily Telegraph, noting that the strong reaction to the Sanders Mission, particularly among opposition circles in Russia, had led to the emergence of views suggesting that the British Naval Mission in Istanbul (the Limpus Mission) should also be recalled. Tanin described this stance as a manifestation of the "hypocrisy" of Russian diplomacy<sup>74</sup>.

The newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar* also featured similar criticisms in its columns. In its issue dated 14 December 1913, the article titled "Despite the Russian Newspapers, the German Delegation Arrives Today" strongly rejected the criticisms directed at the German Military Mission in the Russian press. The newspaper particularly drew attention to political cartoons targeting Ottoman-German relations and denounced the imagery that portrayed Germany as a dominant force directing the Ottoman Empire. *Tasvir-i Efkar* harshly condemned caricatures published in Russian newspapers that included depictions such as "the German officer pointing somewhere with his finger," implying that "Germany will dictate what Turkey must do."

72 "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: General Liman Paşa", *Tanin*, 14 December 1913.

73 "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi: Rusya'nın Noktayı Nazarı" *Tanin*, 15 December 1913.

74 "Rus Muhalefatın Fikri", *Tanin*, 16 December 1913.

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The paper stressed that it was impossible for Germany to exercise any control over the Ottoman Empire, including the Straits. Arguing that “it is absolutely clear and self-evident that the delegation has no other function than to train and discipline our army,” the article framed the German mission purely as a technical military reform initiative. *Tasvir-i Efkâr* claimed that the Russian press was attempting to portray a routine military cooperation as “a major political event,” and accused it of engaging in deliberate efforts to incite public agitation. “Such a thing will not happen,” the newspaper asserted, flatly rejecting these claims. The newspaper found Russia’s concerns about control over the Straits groundless and strongly maintained that the arrival of the first group of ten German officers in Istanbul carried no political intentions whatsoever<sup>75</sup>. *Tasvir-i Efkâr*’s stance was a typical example of the broader discourse within the Ottoman press at the time that sought to legitimize the German military presence. By framing Russian criticisms as unjustified and politically motivated, the newspaper aimed to reassure the public that the independence of the Ottoman army was not under threat.

*Tasvir-i Efkâr* also adopted a notable strategy in its efforts to defend the legitimacy of the German military mission—an argument that also aligned with the official discourse of the Ottoman administration at the time<sup>76</sup>. In order to persuade public opinion, the newspaper cited the views of Admiral Limpus, the head of the British Naval Mission. In an article titled “The Issue of the German Military Delegation,” *Tasvir-i Efkâr* referred to Limpus’s remark: “My duty and position are no less significant than that of the German officers.” These statements were further emphasized in another article titled “The Words of Admiral Limpus,” which aimed to portray the activities of

75 “Rus gazetelerine rağmen Alman Heyeti Bugün Geliyor”, *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, 14 December 1913.

76 For instance, in an interview he gave to *The Daily Telegraph*, which was later published in *İkdam* on 14 December 1913, Talat Pasha based his principal defense of the Sanders Mission on the presence of Admiral Limpus, the head of the British Naval Mission, already stationed in Istanbul. Talat Pasha remarked, “We do not understand why there is so much excitement and anxiety about this delegation.” According to him, the German mission was no different from the British and French military advisers already serving in the Ottoman capital. The Ottoman government was actively cooperating with both countries in its efforts to modernize the military establishment. In fact, a thirty-year agreement had recently been signed with Britain concerning the construction of shipyards and dry docks as part of the naval modernization program. Therefore, Talat Pasha regarded the controversy surrounding the Sanders Mission as unjustified and exaggerated. See, “Talat Bey’in Beyanâtı”, *İkdam*, 14 December 1913.

the German mission as harmless. By quoting Limpus's comment -"It will not last as long as mine"- the newspaper sought to create the impression that the German mission was a temporary arrangement. This rhetorical strategy was intended to neutralize Russian objections by presenting both the British and German military missions as comparable and equally legitimate<sup>77</sup>. It seems that this editorial policy reflected a typical defensive mechanism employed in the Ottoman press. While emphasizing that the German mission was merely a form of ordinary military cooperation, *Tasvir-i Efkar* also drew parallels with the British mission in order to counterbalance international criticism. By invoking Limpus's words, the newspaper aimed to reinforce the message that the German delegation was neither permanent nor politically motivated.

The newspaper *Ahenk*, published in Izmir, also contributed to the public debate by featuring a significant interview in this context. In its 14 December 1913 issue, an article titled "What Does Imhoff Paşa Say?" presented the views of Imhoff Pasha, a seasoned military officer and writer who had served in both the Prussian and Ottoman armies and acted as a bridge between the two cultures. In his remarks, Imhoff Pasha acknowledged that the broad powers granted to the German military delegation had caused "a certain tension" in Europe, but he emphasized that this development would mark "a new phase" for the Ottoman army. He spoke highly of Liman Pasha, stating, "Very good commanders have arrived." According to Imhoff, the delegation had come to Istanbul as a result of a direct request made by the Sultan to Kaiser Wilhelm II. This, he argued, clearly demonstrated that the German advisors were not being held responsible for the existing difficulties and that the Ottoman Empire's trust in Germany remained intact. In Imhoff Pasha's view, the Ottoman government had invited the mission because it had "no other choice." Therefore, criticisms in the press directed at German military practices should come to an end. He also rejected international reactions as unjustified, claiming that the German delegation in Istanbul was no different from the British Naval Mission led by Limpus. Just as Limpus had been appointed under a new contract to replace his predecessor, Imhoff argued, Sanders, too, had been assigned to lead a new mission, and there was no fundamental difference between the two cases. Hence, there was nothing in the situation that should cause controversy<sup>78</sup>.

77 "Alman Heyeti Askeriyesi Meselesi", *Tasvir-i Efkar*, 14 December 1913.

78 "İphof Paşa Ne Diyor?", *Ahenk*, 14 December 1913. (It appears that the name was misspelled in the newspaper headline.).

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As Ottoman-Russian relations continued to deteriorate and debates in the press intensified, Russia simultaneously increased its diplomatic pressure on the Ottoman Empire. In alignment with its opposition to the Sanders Mission, Russia increasingly brought up the Armenian issue as a means of exerting pressure on the *Babiali*. During negotiations with Britain, Russia suggested that the deployment of British and Russian officers to the regions in Anatolia and the East where Armenians were concentrated-effectively a form of indirect occupation-or encouraging an Armenian uprising could help bring about the desired resolution regarding the mission<sup>79</sup>. However, at a time when the Great Powers were still preoccupied with the unresolved “European Turkey” issue<sup>80</sup> and had yet to determine the fate of “the Asia Minor Question” (*Küçük Asya Meselesi*), Britain was reluctant to provoke another crisis that could escalate into a conflict between the two major blocs. Beyond the Armenian issue, Russia’s attempts to interfere in Ottoman internal politics through the German mission also caused serious unease within the Ottoman administration. Facing growing demands and pressure from Armenians encouraged by Russia, *Babiali* firmly rejected any solution that would place the empire under direct European control. Instead, the Ottoman response to the Armenian question aimed at preserving its sovereignty. Rather than accepting a system of European-supervised administrators, *Babiali* sought to resolve the issue by appointing its own general inspectors (*Müfettiş-i Umumiler*) who would operate directly under the *Babiali*<sup>81</sup>. This approach reflected both the empire’s determination to maintain its sovereignty and its resistance to external intervention. In Russia, frustration with *Babiali* mounted as both of its key objectives -the Armenian reforms and restrictions on the German mission- failed to materialize. This growing resentment was explicitly conveyed in a report sent to Berlin on January 3, 1914, by the German Military Attaché in St. Petersburg. The report stated:

79 **BD/10/1**, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 379, St. Petersburg, 25 November 1913; **BD/10/1**, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 429, St. Petersburg, 14 December 1913.

80 Ahmed Rüstem Bey, **Cihan Harbi ve Türk Ermeni Meselesi**, Trans. Cengiz Aydın, Second Edition, Bilge Kültür Sanat, İstanbul 2005, p. 151-152.

81 Cavid Bey, **Meşrutiyet Ruznamesi**, Vol.II. (Ed. Hasan Babacan, Servet Avşar), TTK, 2014, p. 208-209.



“One day, we will settle accounts with Turkey. When that time comes, we want to find it in a weakened state. Germany’s current reform initiatives are strengthening Turkey militarily. For this reason, while we would not have objected to German officers in mere advisory roles-as such roles have proven ineffective in the past-we strongly oppose the present structure, which promises success by granting German generals direct command authority”<sup>82</sup>.

Russia’s threat was real and carried a serious potential for military action. On January 5, 1914, Sazonov submitted a report to Tsar Nicholas II, in which he proposed that “Russian forces occupy Trabzon or Bayezid and remain there until their demands were met”. This revealed that Russia was now actively considering military intervention to increase pressure on the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, Russian naval authorities proposed the occupation of Sinop. According to Kurat, this issue was extensively debated on January 13 in the Special Advisory Council. During the meeting, Prime Minister and Finance Minister Vladimir Kokovtsev strongly opposed Sazonov’s proposals for military intervention. Kokovtsev argued that it would not be appropriate for Russia to risk war with Germany over the mission issue and insisted that Germany’s military influence should be counterbalanced through diplomatic means rather than force. His cautious approach helped restrain the more aggressive factions within the Russian Foreign Ministry and Navy<sup>83</sup>.

Although no decision for an immediate military operation was taken, Russia did not rule out the possibility of occupying the Straits and entered a phase of strategic preparations. As part of this process, on January 14, 1914, a commission was established to work on an invasion plan for the Straits, and on February 8, the commission officially began operations. According to the plan approved on March 23, 1914, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, stationed in Crimea and Ukraine, were assigned the task of occupying the Straits. The necessary transport and naval fleets for the operation were also identified<sup>84</sup>. These developments clearly demonstrated that Russia was not limiting its response

82 GPEK/38/1, Pourtalés an den Hollweg, Nr. 15 520, St. Petersburg, den 10 Januar 1914.

83 Akdes Nimet Kurat, **Türkiye ve Rusya**, Kültür Bakanlığı Publishing, Ankara 1990, p. 194.

84 Mehmet Perinçek, **Türk-Rus Diplomasinden Gizli Sayfalar**, Kaynak Publishing, Second Edition, İstanbul 2011, p. 37; Bernadotte E. Schmitt, “Triple Alliance and Triple Entente, 1902-1914”, **The American Historical Review**, Vol 29, No 3, 1924, p. 468-169.



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to diplomatic pressure alone but was also preparing for potential military intervention. However, internal political considerations and the risk of direct war with Germany ultimately prevented these plans from being implemented. Nevertheless, the process underscored Russia's determination to achieve its strategic objectives over the Ottoman Empire. Against this critical backdrop, *İttihatçılar* were convinced that any retreat in the face of Russian pressure would not only wound national honor but also weaken the Ottoman Empire's position in the international arena. Wangenheim summed up *İttihatçılar*'s resolute stance with the following striking statement: "Resisting the Great Powers! Better to go down with honor than to allow further interference in the nation's internal affairs!"<sup>85</sup>

This resistance pushed Germany into a deadlock in its negotiations with Russia. According to Sazonov, Germany was not acting in good faith, merely buying time, and had no real intention of making any changes to the mission<sup>86</sup>. Even though Germany had agreed to reassign Sanders to an inspectorate role, similar to Goltz Paşa, the issue remained unresolved<sup>87</sup>. As British Ambassador to Berlin, Goschen, reported, Russia's greatest concern was that in the event of a revolution, the German general might seize control of Istanbul. These fears further complicated the resolution of the crisis<sup>88</sup>. The situation had become so critical that on January 7, the same day Babıali officially confirmed Liman von Sanders as commander of the First Army Corps through an imperial decree, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey sent a telegram to Goschen, stating: "Today, I told the German Ambassador that the issue of German command in Istanbul is causing more concern than any other matter"<sup>89</sup>. This statement reflected not only Grey's personal alarm about the growing assertiveness of German diplomacy, but also the broader apprehension within the Entente regarding Berlin's deepening strategic foothold in the Ottoman Empire. More

85 The original wording in the German archival document is as follows: "Durchhalten gegenüber den Mächten! Lieber anständig untergehen, als noch weiter Einmischung in die inneren Verhältnisse des Landes zulassen". **GPEK/38/1**, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 489, Konstantinopel, den 18. Dezember 1913.

86 **TNA, FO**, "Minute by Sir Eyre Crowe: German Military Command at Constantinople", No. 452, December 29, 1913.

87 **BD/10/1**, Buchanan to Grey, No.468, **FO**, St. Petersburgh, January 5, 1914.

88 **BD/10/1**, Goschen to Grey, No.456, Berlin, January 1, 1914.

89 **BD/10/1**, Grey to Goschen, No.461, **FO**, 7 January 1913.

than a routine diplomatic friction, the Sanders crisis had evolved into a symbol of the shifting power dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean-raising fears that German military presence in Istanbul might destabilize the regional balance, aggravate Russo-German tensions, and hasten the overall deterioration of European diplomacy on the eve of war.

### III. The Enver Paşa Factor and the Implementation of Sanders' Reassignment

While *İttihatçılar* sought to put an end to the controversy by formalizing Liman von Sanders' appointment through the Sultan's decree (*İrade*) on January 7 1914<sup>90</sup>, the matter still appeared to be deadlocked. At this stage, Germany took a radical decision: despite Unionist objections, it opted to reach an agreement with Russia on Sanders' reassignment to remove the issue from the agenda. Between January 8 and 11, negotiations finally led to a compromise. According to this agreement, Sanders would be removed from his post as commander of the First Army Corps, promoted to the rank of lieutenant general, and appointed as Inspector General of the Army and Military Schools. This development marked a clear shift in Germany's approach-abandoning its earlier efforts to convince *Babiali* and instead adopting a more coercive stance in favor of resolving the dispute with Russia.

One of the key reasons behind Germany's urgency to resolve the mission crisis with Russia was the appointment of Enver Paşa as Minister of War. This development was seen by Germany both as an opportunity and as a strategic necessity to mitigate potential escalations resulting from Russian backlash<sup>91</sup>. Germany feared that Enver's ambitious and combative nature -demonstrated by his initiative in retaking Edirne and his insistence on reclaiming the islands-would further provoke reactions from the Entente Powers. On January 8, Jagow sent a telegram to Mutius, warning Berlin:

"Enver's appointment appears to have been received extremely negatively by all the Great Powers. Distrust toward Turkish internal

90 "The Ottoman Army Appointments, *The Times*, 9 January 1914.

91 According to Jehuda L. Wallach, in Istanbul, Mutius took advantage of Enver's appointment as Minister of War to persuade both Berlin and Sanders. He convinced Sanders by emphasizing Enver's ambition for rapid promotion and his authoritarian tendencies. (Jehuda L. Wallach, *Bir Askeri Yardımın Anatomisi: Türkiye'de Prusya-Alman Askeri Heyetleri, 1835-1919*, Genelkurmay Harp Tarihi Başkanlığı Stratejik Etütler Publishing, Ankara 1977, p. 134).

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affairs is likely to increase further. This situation is exacerbating the misinterpretation of our military mission. Russia continues to resist the idea of a German commander in Istanbul. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the proposed solution be accepted as soon as possible, as this is a critical step in preventing Russian demands from escalating further”<sup>92</sup>.

Following instructions from Berlin, chargé d'affaires Mutius first met with Liman von Sanders to inform him of the final decision. In a report written that same day, Mutius noted that Sanders, who had been experiencing significant tensions with Enver Paşa, was willing to accept the reassignment-provided that he was given a higher-ranking position. Mutius reported:

“General Liman is fully prepared to relinquish his command of the First Army Corps. He is concerned that remaining in this position could lead to further friction with Enver. In return, he requests a higher rank and, if necessary, an appointment as Army Inspector General<sup>93</sup>. I also emphasized to General Liman the need to exercise particular caution, given Enver’s appointment and his dictatorial tendencies, as the internal political situation is already extremely tense”<sup>94</sup>.

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To convince Enver Paşa and İttihatçılar, Germany sought to implement a “promotion strategy”<sup>95</sup> as a means of achieving a resolution. The plan was to elevate General Liman von Sanders to a higher rank within the Ottoman army, thereby providing a justification for his departure from the command of the First Army Corps. Mutius detailed this strategy in his January 9 report, outlining his approach to persuading İttihatçılar:

92 **GPEK/38/1**, Jagow an den Mutius, Nr. 15 514, Berlin, den 8 January 1914.

93 Under normal circumstances, Sanders would have needed at least a year for the promotion he requested. However, it seems that the Kaiser, possibly as a gesture in response to recent developments, expedited the process. (Siebert/Schreiner, *The Russian Ambassador at Berlin to Sazonov*, No. 836, Jan. 3-16, 1914, p. 707).

94 **GPEK/38/1**, Mutius an das AA, Nr. 15 515, Konstantinopel, den 8 Januar 1914.

95 The idea of transferring the corps through a rank change was first proposed by Zimmermann on January 3. Mutius, noting that Liman was positioned just ahead of the commanding generals in the ranking order, made the following assessment: “*This situation could serve as an opportunity to secure a promotion for him within the Ottoman army, thereby creating a justification for transferring the corps*”. (**GPEK/38/1**, *Lichnowsky an den Hollweg*, Nr. 15 517, Konstantinopel, den 9 Januar 1914).

“In my opinion, personally convincing the Grand Vizier to accept General Liman’s removal from command of the First Army Corps will not be difficult. However, the Grand Vizier’s influence over figures like Talat Bey, Enver Paşa, and Cemal Paşa may not be strong enough. Therefore, my initial plan is to secure Enver Paşa’s approval through direct discussions with General Liman and von Stempel. If resistance arises during this process, I suggest proposing that General Liman be granted the rank of cavalry general on the occasion of the Emperor’s birthday. On the basis of this promotion, we could then request his appointment as a Turkish field marshal. Naturally, this would necessitate his departure from the command of the First Army Corps. Since the Turks can sometimes make unexpected decisions very quickly, I believe it is crucial to clarify as soon as possible whether the emperor is willing to expedite this promotion in order to facilitate a resolution”<sup>96</sup>.

Indeed, developments unfolded exactly as Mutius had predicted; *İttihatçılar* made a remarkably swift decision, accepting Germany’s request for a limitation of Sanders’ authority within just a few days. With the collapse of Ottoman resistance that had lasted for over a month, the final obstacle in resolving the Sanders crisis was eliminated. However, the primary reason behind *İttihatçılar*’s retreat was not merely the acceptance of the promotion proposal. Instead, three key dynamics played a decisive role in their decision to step back. Firstly, despite their absolute reliance on the mission, *İttihatçılar* lacked the power to overturn Germany’s final decision. The Ottoman army’s pressing need for modernization and continued German support left *İttihatçılar* with no choice but to accept Germany’s authority on such critical issues.

Secondly, there was a widespread unease over the “excessive” powers granted to Sanders. From the very beginning, significant discontent and discord had emerged within the army regarding the extraordinary authority bestowed upon him. According to Kazım Karabekir, the appointment of a German general to the highest operational command position in Istanbul had sparked serious unrest and complaints within the military<sup>97</sup>. Reports that the First Army Corps was to be placed under General Liman von Sanders’ command and that he would become a member of the Military Council had fueled heated debates among officers. This frustration was entirely expected. As British Military

96 GPEK/38/1, Mutius an das AA, Nr. 15 516, Konstantinopel, den 9 January 1914.

97 Karabekir, *op. cit.*, p. 316-317.

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Attaché in Istanbul, Lieutenant Colonel Tyrell, reported to Ambassador Mallet on December 2, 1913, the mission had not been established through a consensus among military officials or public opinion. Instead, it was orchestrated by the pro-German faction within the government<sup>98</sup>.

Due to this dissatisfaction, several high-ranking officers and generals submitted a memorandum to the government expressing their grievances about the mission. Cemal Bey, the commander of the First Army Corps, also supported this memorandum<sup>99</sup>. According to the Russian Ambassador in Berlin, the number of officers and generals unhappy with the privileged status of the Germans had grown significantly under Enver Paşa's influence<sup>100</sup>. Ali İhsan Sabis' remarks reflect the sentiment shared by some officers:

“Marshal Liman von Sanders, the head of the German military mission in Turkey, naturally wanted to bind us closely to Germany. However, he was an arrogant man, seeing himself through a magnifying glass, stubborn, and yet of only moderate knowledge, ability, intelligence, and foresight. He was a rough and harsh German general”<sup>101</sup>.

This critique underscores the complex dynamics between the Ottoman military and their German counterparts and provide significant insights into the perspective of Ottoman generals toward Liman von Sanders and the German military mission. Sabis' remarks reflect a broader sentiment among some Ottoman officers, revealing their frustration with Sanders' personality and leadership style. His description of Sanders as “arrogant, stubborn and of only moderate knowledge, ability, intelligence, and foresight” highlights the cultural and professional clashes that arose during this collaboration. The critique suggests that while the German mission aimed to modernize and strengthen the Ottoman army, Sanders' approach often alienated the very officers he was meant to lead.

98 **BD/10/1**, Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrell to Mallet, No.391, Constantinople, 2 December 1913.

99 **BD/10/1**, Mallet to Grey, No.395, Constantinople, December 3, 1913.

100 Siebert/Schreiner, The Russian Ambassador at Berlin to Sazonov, No. 836, Jan. 3-16, 1914, p. 707.

101 Ali İhsan Sabis, **Harp Hatıralarım**, Vol I, Nehir Publishing, İstanbul 1990, p. 76. Sabis frequently uses even harsher expressions about him throughout his memoirs: “Liman Paşa's harshness, thick-headedness, quick temper, rudeness, and military mistakes”. See, Sabis, **op. cit.**, p. 78-83.

Thirdly, and most crucially, the issue was directly tied to Enver Paşa's leadership style and vision. On January 4, 1914, he replaced Ahmet İzzet Paşa, who had been forced to resign by party decision<sup>102</sup>. As Wangenheim observed, İttihatçılar demonstrated remarkable speed in making decisions during this period. While Liman von Sanders was preparing to arrive in Istanbul, Enver Paşa was rapidly ascending to the Ministry of War<sup>103</sup>. The appointment of a new War Minister had been a subject of long-standing debate, and Enver Paşa had been actively pursuing this position. His rise to power was strongly supported by Talat Paşa and Cemal Paşa, the de facto leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), who saw him as a dynamic figure capable of restructuring the army and enforcing the party's decisions. Enver Paşa's meteoric rise within the military was unprecedented. In June 1912, while still a lieutenant colonel, he had played a pivotal role in the *Babıali Coup*, which brought *İttihatçılar* back to power. After the recapture of Edirne, where he gained the title "the second conqueror of Edirne"<sup>104</sup>, his influence in the army grew significantly. He was promoted to colonel on December 15, 1913, and within just three weeks, on January 3, 1914, he was further promoted to brigadier general (*mirliva*), effectively gaining the title of "Paşa". Enver's power continued to consolidate—on January 4, 1914, he was appointed Minister of War<sup>105</sup>, and two days later, on January 6, 1914, he became the Chief of the General Staff. With Enver Paşa now at the helm of the military, the Grand Vizier was weak, and the Sultan's authority was almost nonexistent. In practice, the administration of the Ottoman Empire had fallen into Enver Paşa's hands. This development effectively placed *İttihatçılar* in full control of the state, solidifying their grip on power.

One of the primary reasons behind Ahmet İzzet Paşa's forced resignation was his opposition to the Sanders Mission from the very beginning<sup>106</sup>. Later, in a

102 The change is also mentioned as having occurred on January 3 in other sources. See, Metin Ayışığı, **Mareşal Ahmet İzzet Paşa (Askerî ve Siyasî Hayatı)**, TTK, Ankara 1997, p. 112; Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, **Türk İnkılap Tarihi, Vol II/4**, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1983, p. 319.

103 Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, **Enver Paşa**, Vol II: 1908-1914, Remzi Publishing, İstanbul 1971, p. 417-32.

104 Aydemir, **op. cit.**, p. 403.

105 **Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri**, p. 112.

106 The fact that he was not the one to sign the agreement was not a coincidence, either for the Unionists (*İttihatçılar*) or for himself. Military Attaché Tyrell noted: "*İzzet Paşa is particularly keen to emphasize that he did not sign the agreement himself and that it was*

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seemingly contradictory stance, he opposed Liman von Sanders' reassignment, positioning himself as a significant source of opposition to İttihatçılar<sup>107</sup>. İzzet Paşa was not only against modifying Sanders' powers, but he also made controversial appointments<sup>108</sup> within the army that unsettled *İttihatçılar*. Furthermore, he was reluctant to take radical steps toward modernizing and restructuring the army<sup>109</sup> and resisted<sup>110</sup> the growing German influence

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*signed in his absence by the Minister of the Navy on his behalf*" (BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.391, Constantinople, 2 December 1913).

107 DDF/3/8, Boppe a Doumergue, No. 669, Pera, 25 Décembre 1913. Sanders' stance on the modification of his authority appears contradictory. In reality, Ahmet İzzet Paşa had opposed the mission and the uncontrolled expansion of German influence in the empire from the very beginning. He expressed his concerns in his memoirs as follows: "*However, the kind of submission indicated by Mahmut Şevket Paşa's explanations about the German military mission and his conversation with Cemal Paşa was so severe and detrimental that even the most extreme advocates of a mandate following the World War would not have been able to comprehend it. While there was a desire to abolish capitulations, at this rate, we would have completely handed over the reins of governance to European administrators*" (Ahmet İzzet Paşa, **Feryadım**, Vol I, Timaş Publishing, İstanbul 2019, p. 182).

108 The appointment of Cemal Bey as Acting Commander of the First Army Corps following the abolition of the Istanbul Guard, to which he had been assigned after the 1913 Ottoman coup d'état (*Babıali Baskını*) led to a decline in confidence in İzzet Paşa within the ranks of the Committee of Union and Progress. (Artuç, **op. cit.**, p. 132-133).

109 After the defeat in the Balkan War, one of the most pressing issues in domestic politics was the rejuvenation of the army. The "defeatist attitudes" of elderly officers in key command positions had "demoralized patriotic young officers of lower ranks during the war." Despite the controversial "implement and keep" (*yap-kal*) proposal, which was allegedly supported by young officers who had successfully retaken Edirne, Ahmet İzzet Paşa refused to dismiss his "friends" from their posts. His dismissive response -"Let someone else act as a deputy and do it" (*Canım birisi vekil olsun, yapsın.*)- became the final straw, leading to his forced resignation. At the beginning of January, İzzet Paşa was pressured to step down (Metin Ayışığı, **Mareşal Ahmet İzzet Paşa (Askerî ve Siyasî Hayatı)**, TTK, Ankara 1997, p. 112-114). The Sanders Mission required the rejuvenation of the army (Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, **Türk İnkılabı Tarihi**, Vol. II/IV, p. 316-317; **Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi Halil Mentеше'nin Anıları**, Hürriyet Vakfı Publishing, İstanbul 1986, p. 180). According to Bayur, the CUP had no intention of reinstating İzzet Paşa after the army's rejuvenation (Bayur, **ibid.**, p. 316-317). However, Feroz Ahmad argues the opposite, citing Grand Vizier Said Halim's assurance to the Russian ambassador that Enver's appointment was only temporary (Feroz Ahmad, **İttihat ve Terakki, 1908-1914**, 5th edition, Kaynak Publishing, İstanbul 1999, p. 179).

110 Ahmet İzzet Paşa, **op. cit.**, p. 112. For instance, regarding rapprochement with Germany and the German mission, İzzet Paşa diverged from the views of the Committee of Union and Progress. Metin Ayışığı explains this in his study as follows: "*However, the most concerning issue for İzzet Paşa was the army falling largely under the control of the German military mission. Contrary to the government's stance, he opposed the inclusion of more German military experts in the army ranks and insisted that those recruited should come to Turkey*



within the Ottoman military<sup>111</sup>. His attitude caused deep frustration among *İttihatçılar*, who sought absolute power and a stronger military alliance with Germany. As a result, his removal marked a turning point, allowing the CUP to fully consolidate its power.

İttihatçılar had long aimed to place one of their own in a critical government position, particularly in the Ministry of War, in order to secure unquestioned dominance over the government. With the recapture of Edirne, the CUP had further strengthened its influence and was now determined to achieve total control over state affairs through a “fully pro-Unionist” (“*tam İttihatçı*”) officer<sup>112</sup>. Ahmet İzzet Paşa’s lack of affiliation with the CUP and his incompatibility with its political strategies made him an obstacle to their ambitions. By appointing Enver Paşa, İttihatçılar not only solidified their hold over the military but also ensured that CUP directives regarding Sanders’ role would be fully implemented. Moreover, not wanting to alienate their potential ally Germany, they adopted a more assertive and decisive approach in handling the mission’s restructuring.

40 The leadership traits and military approach of the newly appointed Minister of War, Enver Paşa, played just as crucial a role in the decision to revise Sanders’ position as the desire for harmonious cooperation with Germany. Enver Paşa was an ambitious and resolute leader -or, in the words of his predecessor Ahmet İzzet Paşa, he was “bold, eager for faits accompli, young, and highly excitable”<sup>113</sup>. He was a leader who disliked sharing power and decision-making authority, preferring full control over the military and striving for absolute command. His authoritarian personality, coupled with his determination to act independently, made him resistant to any external influence over his leadership. Ambassadors in Istanbul widely agreed that Enver Paşa was a figure who could not be easily directed or manipulated. For instance, French diplomat Boppe described him as “a man eager to justify his reputation, even

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*under controlled and binding conditions. He rejected the request for German experts to establish model units while maintaining their independence”.* (Ayışığı, **op. cit.**, p. 109-110).

111 Ayışığı, **op. cit.**, p. 111.

112 Ayışığı, **op. cit.**, p. 111-112; Artuç, **op. cit.**, p. 140.

113 Metin Ayışığı, **op. cit.**, p. 112.



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willing to undertake the worst initiatives to achieve it”<sup>114</sup> His bravery during the recapture of Edirne not only cemented his status as a “hero of liberty” but also elevated him to the position of a “national hero”.

Indeed, as soon as he assumed office, the rapid decisions Enver Paşa made to consolidate power confirmed both the positive and negative traits attributed to him. His first move was to centralize all high-ranking military positions under his direct control and launch a comprehensive military reform program to identify and address the army’s deficiencies. The idea of modernizing and rejuvenating the army had long been a priority for İttihatçılar, encapsulated in their “Open the Way for the Young” motto. Enver Paşa, with his decisive and energetic nature, appeared to be the ideal leader to implement this vision. Wasting no time, he immediately put this plan into action. As part of this effort, a Sultan’s decree was issued on January 7, retiring 280 officers, including Hadi Paşa and Minister of the Navy Hurşit Paşa<sup>115</sup>. However, his leadership approach was not limited to structural reforms alone. He further solidified his authority through key diplomatic and administrative changes, such as the dismissal of former Berlin Ambassador Nizami Paşa and the recall of Ambassador Muhtar, who was favored by the German government<sup>116</sup>.

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For a leader like Enver Paşa, who made swift decisions, asserted his authority with force, and sought to showcase his leadership, it was almost inevitable that he would clash with Liman von Sanders, who possessed similar leadership traits but was far more experienced. As Şevket Süreyya Aydemir described, Enver was both a “man of fate” and one who “created his own fate”, making him unsuited for power-sharing of any kind<sup>117</sup>. His independent and authoritarian style of governance directly conflicted with Sanders’ broad authority, which

114 DDF/3/9, Boppe a Doumergue, No.71, Pera, 13 Janvier 1914.

115 “New Turkish Military Measures: Energy of Enver Paşa”, *The Times*, 8 January 1914.

116 DDF/3/9, Manneville a Doumergue, No.42, Berlin, 9 Janvier 1914.

117 Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Enver Paşa, Vol II: 1908-1914*, Remzi Publishing, İstanbul 1971, p. 8-11. Kazım Karabekir provides the following account on this matter: “*When Enver Paşa became Minister of War, he initially felt quite uneasy upon entering his office for the first time, but within a few days, he had completely adapted. Once he became comfortable in his position, he could no longer tolerate not only those of higher rank but also those superior in intellect. Just as he took a stance against Liman Paşa, the head of the military reform commission, he also saw no need to consult anyone regarding the matters he intended to implement.*” Kazım Karabekir, *Tarih Boyunca Türk-Alman İlişkileri*, (Ed. Orhan Hülagü-Ömer Hakan Özalp), Emre Publishing, İstanbul 2001, p. 413-414.

symbolized the German military presence within the Ottoman army. Under the signed agreement, Sanders was granted extraordinary powers, including the authority to oversee and appoint Turkish officers<sup>118</sup>. While Enver Paşa admired Germany, this was not a situation he could easily accept. He valued close ties with Germany, but he was unwilling to cede his own authority entirely to Sanders. On January 9, 1914, Manneville, the French Chargé d’Affaires in Berlin, made an insightful observation regarding this dynamic. According to him, Enver Paşa, despite his admiration for Germany, saw himself as the man destined to lead his country toward a great historical turning point. However, far from allowing himself to be directed by Sanders, he sought to remind the leader of the German Military Mission that he, like all others, was ultimately subordinate to the Ottoman Minister of War<sup>119</sup>.

The power struggle between these two authoritarian-minded military figures quickly surfaced. Enver Paşa’s aggressive reform initiatives and rapid decisions caused significant unease for Liman von Sanders. From the moment he assumed his position, Sanders began sending detailed reports outlining his disagreements with Enver Paşa, their authority disputes, and the difficulties he faced in carrying out his duties. As previously mentioned, Enver Paşa’s appointment as Minister of War played a crucial role in convincing Sanders to step down from his original command. In a report dated January 8, 1914, Sanders openly expressed his frustration over the situation:

“Your Majesty, I feel compelled to inform Your Excellency of the difficulties I have encountered in my current position. The appointment of former Colonel Enver Bey as Minister of War has made my role as head of the Military Mission so difficult and complex that, at this moment, it is impossible to predict the course of future events”<sup>120</sup>.

After Enver Paşa’s appointment as Minister of War, the Liman von Sanders Mission faced a serious crisis. The first major conflict arose when Enver Paşa

118 **Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi**, p.110-111. According to the agreement signed between the Ottoman Empire and Germany, Lieutenant General Sanders held the second-highest position within the Turkish Army, ranking immediately after the Ministry of War.

119 **DDF/3/9**, Manneville a Doumergue, No.42, Berlin, 9 Janvier 1914.

120 **GPEK/38/1**, Mutius an das AA, Nr. 15 515, Konstantinopel, den 8 Januar 1914.

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attempted to appoint Lieutenant Colonel (Ottoman Colonel) von Lossow as the Deputy Chief of the General Staff.<sup>121</sup> According to a report Sanders sent to General von Lyncker, Chief of the German Military Cabinet, this incident occurred while Sanders was away from Istanbul on official duties in Kırklareli and Edirne. During his absence, Enver Paşa summoned von Lossow and offered him the position of Deputy Chief of the General Staff, a move made without Sanders' knowledge or approval. However, according to the military mission agreement between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, such critical appointments required the approval of the German commander. When von Lossow stated that he could only accept the position with Sanders' consent, Enver Paşa firmly rejected this condition. His stance demonstrated his absolute desire for control over the Ottoman military. Upon his return to Istanbul and learning of the situation, Liman von Sanders demanded an explanation from Enver Paşa and issued warnings, emphasizing that the terms of the military agreement must be strictly followed.<sup>122</sup>

This crisis was not merely a dispute over military authority but also a political reaction from İttihatçılar against German influence in the Ottoman army. While Enver Paşa sought to limit Germany's control over Ottoman affairs, Liman von Sanders was determined to maintain the effectiveness of Germany's military reform program. This created a deep trust deficit between the two sides, marking a turning point that shook Ottoman-German military cooperation. Enver Paşa's stance can also be interpreted as a response to Germany's pressure for modifications to the mission. The Austro-Hungarian military attaché's observation on the matter is particularly revealing:

“These developments have dealt a severe blow to Germany's prestige in Turkey. They have caused significant morale loss and unrest among German officers in Istanbul, as well as within the broader German circles in the capital.”<sup>123</sup>

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121 Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, **Aus meiner Dienstzeit, 1906–1918, III**, Verlag für Kulturpolitik, Wien: 1925, p. 564; Regarding the Lossow crisis see also, Charles D. Haley, “The Desperate Ottoman: Enver Paşa and the German Empire: II”, **Middle Eastern Studies**, Vol 30, No 1, 1994, p. 42-43.

122 **GPEK/38/1**, Mutius an das AA, Nr. 15 515, Konstantinopel, den 8 Januar 1914.

123 Hötzendorf, **op. cit.**, p. 564.

After Enver Paşa also approved the “limitation of authority,” Liman von Sanders resigned from his position as Commander of the First Army Corps on January 11, 1914. On January 14, he was prematurely awarded the rank of cavalry general<sup>124</sup> (*süvari orgeneralliği*) and, in accordance with the contract, was promoted to the rank of Turkish marshal by the Sublime Porte and appointed to his new position as Inspector General. Sanders would continue to serve as the head of the Military Mission and retain his authority to inspect all military units and fortifications<sup>125</sup>. This reassignment was officially announced to the public a few days later, on January 14<sup>126</sup>. In an effort to save face (*itibarını korumak*) *Babıali* emphasized that this decision had been made independently and was not a result of Russian pressure but rather an initiative by War Minister Enver Paşa<sup>127</sup>. The official statement framed the transition as solely Enver Paşa’s decision, aiming to conceal the true motivations behind it. During a meeting in Istanbul with French military attaché Maucorps, he stated the following:

“Enver Paşa told me that he considered the triple role assigned to General Liman von Sanders (as head of the German Military Mission, Commander of the First Army Corps, and General Inspector of Military Schools) to be excessively burdensome, and that it would therefore be more appropriate for Liman to relinquish command of the First Army Corps. In this arrangement, General Liman would retain leadership of the German Mission and the general supervision of military schools, thereby assuming a role similar to that held by General von der Goltz. The First Army Corps, on the other hand, would be entrusted to a Turkish general but would still have a German chief of staff, ensuring that it remained a model corps. Enver Bey stated that he hoped to secure the approval of both His Majesty and General Liman for these plans soon. He also confirmed the abolition of the Supreme Military Council,

124 Sanders, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

125 DDF/3/9, Boppe a Doumergue, No. 172, Pera, 11 Janvier 1914.

126 “Liman Paşa’s Appointment”, *The Times*, 16 January 1914.

127 “German Military Mission in Turkey”, *Evening Telegraph*, 12 January 1914; “Turkish Army Reform”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 January 1914.

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which, in my view, is a method of sidelining General Liman from this body. Additionally, he stated that he would do everything in his power to facilitate my duties and to secure the goodwill of the French government”<sup>128</sup>.

The change in Sanders’s position was widely interpreted in the Ottoman press as a decision driven by the personal will of Enver Pasha. While avoiding direct commentary on the broader German-Russian rivalry, newspapers emphasized that the CUP had resisted considerable foreign pressure and refused to withdraw the German military delegation. This narrative was reinforced by references to foreign press reports, which likewise asserted that the decision had been made not under Russian pressure, but on the initiative of Enver Pasha<sup>129</sup>. For example, in its article dated 13 January 1914, titled “Around the Reform: The Appreciation of the Bulgarians,” *Tasvir-i Efkar* reported that the German military mission had not been recalled despite pressure from the ambassadors of Russia, Britain, and France. The article quoted a newspaper published in Sofia stating: “Despite the ambassadors of Russia, Britain, and France, the Ottoman government resisted the pressure.” The report underlined that the Ottoman Empire had not allowed any external interference in its internal affairs<sup>130</sup>.

On the following day, in its 14 January 1914 article titled “Around the Reform: On Liman Paşa,” *Tasvir-i Efkar* cited a report from the French newspaper *Le*

128 **DDF/3/9**, Boppe a Doumergue, No.65, Pera, 12 Janvier 1914. Cemal Paşa’s memoirs confirm these concerns: “Enver Paşa was the first to recognize the drawbacks of Liman von Sanders Paşa holding the position of First Army Corps Commander. He determined that it would be more beneficial for the head of the military reform commission to serve as a General Inspector rather than a corps commander. This change was not made due to pressure from the Russians, French, or British, but solely because he deemed it appropriate.” (Cemal Paşa, **op. cit.**, p. 83).

129 “Liman Paşa’nın Yeni Memuriyeti”, **Tasviri Efkar**, 13 Ocak 1914. According to the newspaper’s account, General Sanders did not raise any objections to the change in his assignment. As the reported dialogue between him and Enver Pasha suggests, Enver Paşa said, “*I am offering you the position of inspector,*” to which Sanders replied, “*Whatever the position, I am ready to serve for the sake of reform.*”. This claim does not correspond with Liman von Sanders’s memoirs or with archival documents. As frequently emphasized throughout this study, the change in Sanders’s position was only achieved after a rather difficult and protracted process. Both the Ottoman government and Sanders himself had initially resisted the change. Even if Sanders’s remark-“I am ready to accept any position”-was indeed accurate, reaching that point had not been easy.

130 “İslahat Etrafında: Bulgarların Taktiri”, **Tasviri Efkar**, 13 Ocak 1914.

*Matin*. After outlining the extensive powers granted to the German military mission, the article drew attention to a statement reportedly made by the Minister of War, Enver Pasha, during the most recent meeting of the Council of Ministers:

“The appointment of General Liman von Sanders as commander of the First Army Corps will obstruct and occupy all military functions to the detriment of the army as a whole. It would be a thousand times preferable for General Liman von Sanders to serve solely as Inspector-General of the army. In this way, the Ministry of War would benefit much more from his presence.”<sup>131</sup>

On the surface, Russia appeared to be the victor. After two months of sustained pressure, despite not receiving the full support it had hoped for from its allies, Russia had managed to force both Germany and the Ottoman Empire into retreat. It had successfully intervened in the “internal affairs” of both states and achieved its desired outcome. However, in reality, the true winner was Germany. From a German perspective, the modifications to the original plan might have seemed like a concession at first glance (and Germany itself portrayed them as a significant compromise<sup>132</sup>), but Germany was by no means the losing side. On the contrary, in line with its long-term strategic objectives, it had succeeded in keeping General Liman von Sanders in Istanbul, thereby maintaining and even strengthening its influence over the Ottoman army. While the initial approach of appointing Sanders as commander of the First Army Corps had failed, Germany’s broader strategy of drawing the Ottoman Empire into its own alliance in the event of war had ultimately been successful. Germany’s primary goal was to establish a lasting influence within the Ottoman military—an influence that extended beyond purely military matters to shape political dynamics as well. In this regard, Sanders’ continued role as head of the Military Mission and General Inspector ensured that Germany’s strategic objectives remained intact. Indeed, despite his clashes with Enver Paşa, Sanders took significant and effective steps in the restructuring of the Ottoman army, with the First Army Corps serving as a focal point of this transformation.

The concession made to Russia was purely tactical, as Sanders’ “real role” and

131 İslahat Etrafında: Liman Paşa’ya Dair”. *Tasviri Efkar*, 13 Ocak 1914.

132 **Fall of the German Empire**, Vol I, (Ed. Ralph Haswell Lutz) Octagon Books, New York 1969, p. 66.

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his actual influence remained unchanged. During the debates on whether the defense of Istanbul and the Straits would be entrusted to a German general, the observation made by French Ambassador Boppe proved to be highly accurate, particularly in light of Sanders' later role in World War I:

“While official statements emphasize that the defense of the Straits and the Dardanelles is directly under the authority of the Minister of War, it is difficult to see how they can prevent German advice from being sought in their reorganization.”<sup>133</sup>

- 133 **DDF/3/9**, Boppe a Doumergue, No.44, Pera, 10 Janvier 1914. **DDF/3/9**, Boppe a Doumergue, No.44, Pera, 10 Janvier 1914. The role of Liman von Sanders at the Gallipoli Front and his contribution to the eventual success of the campaign has long remained a subject of scholarly debate in military historiography. The traditional Turkish narrative tends to portray Sanders' influence as largely “advisory” and “supportive.” This perspective attributes the victory at Gallipoli primarily to the strategic foresight of Esad Paşa, the tactical brilliance of Mustafa Kemal, and the extraordinary resilience of the Turkish soldiers. It should be noted that this view is supported by well-grounded arguments based on the command structure of the period and developments on the battlefield. In contrast, Western military historians such as Edward J. Erickson emphasize Sanders' organizational contributions in structural areas, including the deepening of defensive lines, the strategic deployment of reserve forces, and the modernization of artillery and logistical systems. From this standpoint, Sanders is not regarded merely as a symbolic figure, but as an active military agent who directly shaped the Ottoman Empire's defense capabilities. Within the framework of this study, regardless of the divergent evaluations regarding the extent of Sanders' influence, it must be remembered that the primary motivation behind the Committee of Union and Progress's invitation to the German Military Mission was the desire to overcome the military collapse that followed the Balkan Wars through the adoption of the German model. Therefore, even if a definitive judgment on Sanders' contributions cannot be reached, completely dismissing them would mean overlooking the strategic significance the Unionists attributed to the German mission -an oversight that would risk distorting the broader historical context. Although Sanders' formal authority may have appeared limited at times, his actual influence within the Ottoman military structure continued to grow throughout the prewar period. His involvement in key negotiations -such as those between Enver Paşa and German Ambassador Wangenheim regarding the Empire's entry into the war- reflects the enduring, albeit increasingly informal, nature of German military influence within Ottoman decision-making circles. Erickson notes that this illustrates not only Sanders' operational importance but also the evolving structure of German-Ottoman military collaboration in determining the Empire's wartime alignment. In this regard, even if the operational effectiveness of the mission remains subject to debate, its strategic deterrent effect should not be overlooked. The internal political divisions observed in Greece during the war may well be considered an indirect yet important consequence of this deterrence. Following its occupation of the northeastern Aegean islands during the First Balkan War, the Greek government planned to use these islands as a springboard to target İzmir, a strategy it intended to implement through participation in the Allied Gallipoli Campaign. In a memorandum prepared at the request of Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, General Ioannis Metaxas advocated a “surprise assault” on the Gallipoli Peninsula. (See: Ünsal Başak, “Greece's Gallipoli Plan:



Furthermore, the entire episode demonstrated how successful Germany had been in sowing distrust among the Entente powers. While it had not broken the alliance, it had managed to create friction among its members. Germany not only succeeded in persuading İttihatçılar to accept the restrictions on Sanders' authority, but it also demonstrated that the military mission ultimately remained under its control<sup>134</sup>.

This significantly bolstered Germany's strategic presence and influence in the region. Thus, while Germany's actions in this process might have seemed like short-term concessions, in reality, they did not hinder its long-term objectives. On the contrary, they represented a critical step toward achieving them. Aware of Germany's strategic maneuvering, Russia remained deeply uneasy, and tensions between the two nations continued to escalate. This crisis made it increasingly clear to the international community that the core of the German-Russian conflict centered around Istanbul and the Straits. The Sanders crisis not only impacted Ottoman domestic politics but also disrupted the broader balance of power in Europe. As the road to war unfolded, hostility between Germany and Russia reached its peak. The German press openly adopted a hostile tone toward Russia, using propaganda to shape public opinion around this growing tension. In retaliation, Russia arrested numerous German citizens, accusing them of espionage. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, on July 18, 1914, Britain's Ambassador to Paris, Earl Granville, sent a telegram to Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, in which he unequivocally stated that, in the wake of the Liman von Sanders affair, Russia no longer considered normalization of relations with Germany a possibility<sup>135</sup>.

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Metaxas' Amphibious Assault Memorandum," **A Centennial Perspective on the Gallipoli Campaign**, International Gallipoli Symposium, 2024, p. 38–46; from the same author also see, "The Gallipoli Campaign in Greek Sources," **Atatürk Yolu**, No. 56, Spring 2015, p. 1-10.). However, as the war progressed, despite the generous offers extended by the Entente Powers, Metaxas adopted a cautious stance regarding Greece's direct involvement in the operation. To what extent this shift was influenced by the deterrent effect generated by the German-Ottoman defensive preparations under Sanders' leadership remains an unresolved and significant issue in the historiography of the Gallipoli Campaign. See also **Esat Paşa'nın Çanakkale Hatıraları** (Ed. İhsan İlgar, Nurer Uğurlu), Örgün Publishing, İstanbul 2004.

134 Fritz Fischer, "World Policy, World Power and German War Aims", in **The Origins of the First World War: Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims**, ed. H. W. Koch, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1984, p. 45.

135 TNA/World War I and Revolution in Russia, 1914-1918, Russia: Correspondence **F.O. 371**, Volume: 2094: Increased Russian Military Strength: Present State of Russian Army, July 16 - 20, 1914.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined the political and military transformation in Ottoman-German relations through the lens of the Liman von Sanders Mission, shedding light on the international power dynamics and the strategic choices of the Unionist administration. The findings underscore that while the mission initially appeared to be a product of bilateral negotiations, it was ultimately shaped by Germany's unilateral decisions in response to Russia's vehement opposition and the pressures exerted by the Entente Powers. This outcome significantly constrained the Ottoman Empire's diplomatic autonomy and revealed the limits of its sovereignty in the face of great power politics.

Germany's decision to modify the mission was not made lightly. The Entente Powers, particularly Russia, perceived the mission as a direct threat to the Ottoman Empire's political integrity and the broader balance of power in the region. Russia viewed the presence of German officers in Istanbul as a challenge to its strategic interests in the Straits, leading to demands for the mission's annulment. Although Germany initially resisted these demands and proposed compromises, such as relocating the mission to Edirne, it ultimately acquiesced to reducing Sanders' authority. This adjustment was driven not only by the need to placate Russia but also by Germany's desire to avoid destabilizing the European balance of power and to prevent discussions about the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman administration, led by Enver Paşa, attempted to frame the modification of the mission as an internal initiative. However, it is evident that the decision was ultimately dictated by Berlin. Throughout this process, İttihatçılar were not decisive actors but rather a party compelled to accept and adapt to externally imposed decisions. Germany's decision to curtail Sanders' authority not only disrupted the Ottoman army's modernization efforts but also temporarily undermined İttihatçılar's ambitions to restructure the military with German support. For İttihatçılar, Sanders' role as a powerful military leader was not merely about military reform; it was also a strategic safeguard for the defense of Istanbul and the Straits. By prioritizing its balance of power with Russia, Germany withdrew this guarantee, damaging the Ottoman Empire's perception of sovereignty and eroding its trust in Germany.

The change in Sanders' role had far-reaching consequences. It fueled anti-German sentiment within Ottoman politics and led İttihatçılar to question

their reliance on Germany as a partner. While İttihatçılar viewed Germany as a crucial ally in their modernization efforts, Germany's coercive approach exceeded the boundaries of Ottoman sovereignty, resulting in a profound crisis of confidence. This process also exacerbated diplomatic tensions between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, further weakening their already strained relations. The Sanders Mission escalated the Ottoman-Russian conflict, solidifying Russia's perception of the Ottoman Empire as a firm ally of Germany. Consequently, Russia intensified its plans for the occupation of Istanbul and accelerated its efforts to partition Anatolia through the Armenian issue.

In conclusion, the Liman von Sanders Mission exemplifies how the Ottoman Empire's modernization efforts were profoundly influenced by the interplay of international power politics. The diplomatic crises triggered by the mission not only reinforced Germany's control over the Ottoman state but also highlighted the Empire's limited capacity for independent decision-making. This process played a pivotal role in shaping the Ottoman Empire's alignment in World War I and in determining the trajectory of its alliance with Germany. The mission's legacy underscores the complex interplay between domestic aspirations and external pressures, offering valuable insights into the challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire in its final years.

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**Etik Beyan****Ethical Statement**

Bu makalede Etik Kurul Onayı gerektiren bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. | *There is no study that would require the approval of the Ethical Committee in this article.*

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