

Research Article/Araştırma Makalesi

**Sultan Vahdettin's Policy towards England after the
Mudros Armistice**

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Abstract

Sultan Vahdettin was the last representative of the Ottoman dynasty who assumed the sultanate in one of the last months of the First World War. He assumed responsibility not only for himself, but also for a six-hundred-century-old empire that was being defeated. The policy he would pursue and the decisions he would make would affect his fate and that of the country. The first decision was to wage a great struggle against all kinds of occupation by relying on the nation, and the second was to protect the sultanate and caliphate under the sovereignty of a powerful occupying state. The decision to be made was to wage a great struggle for independence by leading the nation with the responsibility imposed on him by history, with the heroic spirit he had received from his ancestors, against the Entente states, which he could not prevail against, even though he had the German Empire as an ally, and perhaps to lose the sultanate, or to gain the friendship of England, a great and powerful state,

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to enter its patronage and to protect all its gains. The subject is important in terms of illuminating the debates about Vahdettin in recent political circles. The study was prepared using British and Turkish archival documents. The aim of the study is to reveal the policy of Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin IV, the last Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, towards England after the Armistice of Mudros and its reasons.

Keywords: Vahdettin, England, Mudros, Politics.

Sultan Vahdettin'in Mondros Ateşkes Anlaşması Sonrası İngiltere'ye Yönelik Politikası

Öz

Sultan Vahdettin, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın son aylarından birinde saltanat makamına oturmuş Osmanlı Hanedanı'nın son temsilcisidir. Sadece kendisi için değil, yenilmekte olan altı yüz asırlık bir imparatorluğun en ağır sorumluluğunu da üstlenmişti. Takip edeceği siyaset ve vereceği kararlarla hem kendi hem de ülkenin kaderini etkileyecekti. Bu kararın ilki, millete güvenerek her türlü işgale karşı büyük bir mücadele vermek, ikinci ise güçlü bir işgalci devletin egemenliği altında sahip olduğu saltanat ve hilafeti korumaktı. Vereceği karar; sonu ne olursa olsun, yanında müttefik olarak Alman İmparatorluğu olduğu halde galip gelemediği İtilaf devletlerine karşı, tarihin kendisine yüklemiş olduğu sorumlulukla, ecdadından almış olduğu kahraman ruhla, milletine önderlik yaparak büyük bir istiklal mücadelesi vermek ve belki de saltanat makamını kaybetmek veya büyük ve güçlü bir devlet olan İngiltere'nin dostluğunu kazanarak, himayesine girmek ve tüm kazanımlarını korumak olacaktı. Konu, son dönem siyasi çevrelerde Vahdettin hakkındaki tartışmaları aydınlatması bakımından önemlidir. Çalışma, İngiliz ve Türk arşiv belgeleri kullanılarak hazırlanmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son Padişahı Sultan IV. Mehmet Vahdettin'in Mondros Mütarekesi sonrası İngiltere siyasetini ve nedenlerini ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Vahdettin, İngiltere, Mondros, Siyaset.

Introduction

From the beginning of July 1918, Mehmet Vahdettin VI, the son of Sultan Abdülmecit's fourth son, who became the sultan, had been the Ottoman Sultanate. The suicide of his elder brother, Crown Prince Yusuf İzzetin, due to depression, had paved the way for him to the sultanate, even though he had never wanted it. This was a great misfortune for

him and for his country. When Vahdettin became the sultan, he said the following to SheikhuIslam Musa Kazım Efendi who came to congratulate him:

I was not prepared for the sultanate. Since I was physically ill since my childhood, I did not receive proper education. I reached the age of maturity (57 years old). I was not ready for the sultanate as it was not known which of my brother (Yusuf İzzettin) and I would die earlier. But by divine providence, I became the sultan. I received this heavy duty. I am in a state of bewilderment. Please pray for me.¹

On another day, Vahdettin told the former Minister of Justice İbrahim Bey: "*I am helpless, I am afraid. I am not afraid of anything material. But I have undertaken a heavy duty*".² For him the sultanate had no attraction. Because being a sultan was not a reward for him, it was actually a great punishment that would end in death or exile. He had witnessed the assassination of his uncle Sultan Abdülaziz, the madness of his elder brother Sultan Murat, the exile of his elder brother Sultan Abdülhamid, and the suicide of his elder brother Yusuf İzzettin. For years he had shunned all court intrigue, hiding his presence like a sleepwalker and living a quiet and peaceful life. And he was very happy about it.

Vahdettin was aware of his helplessness and inadequacy. His awareness was reflected in his decision for himself and the country. He had no intention of saving the country from its desperate situation and leading it, and as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stated in the Speech, "*Vahdettin, the degenerate occupant of the throne and the Caliphate, was seeking for some despicable way to save his person and his throne, the only objects of his anxiety*".³

This condition of Vahdettin would also determine his domestic and foreign political approaches as the head of state. According to him, you can only survive in the shadow of a powerful and mighty nation if you are weak and powerless. His elder brother Sultan Abdulhamid's Islamist and Germanist approach had led him and the country to disaster. At

¹ Sabahattin Selek, *Milli Mücadele, Ulusal Kurtuluş Savaşı*, Doğan Kitap, İstanbul, 1971, p.97.

² Selek, op. cit., 97.

³ Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk*, Fark Yayınları, Ankara, 2007, p.1.

that time, this powerful nation was the British, a nation that had proven itself in world domination. Following his father Sultan Abdülmecit's policy, he thought that British imperialism would be a salvation for his dynasty.

The aim of the study is to evaluate Sultan Vahdettin's political attitude towards Britain in determining the Ottoman foreign policy after the Armistice of Mondros. In this context, the negative impact of this policy of Vahdettin on the period of national struggle is controversial. In the study, the literature review method and mostly accessible archival documents were used. This study will set an example for recent history researchers. However, it is insufficient. Especially in the research of the foreign policies of the late Ottoman politicians, a much wider evaluation can be reached by examining the archives and documents of the relevant countries. In this context, this study is an original article.

In this study, the reasons for Sultan Vahdettin's pro-British policy during the occupation period, his efforts to approach the British and the British reaction will be analysed.

Occupied Istanbul and Vahdettin

When the Allied fleet crossed the straits and anchored in front of Dolmabahçe Palace on November 13, Vahdettin was gripped by fear. His sole aim, therefore, was to secure the goodwill of the invaders in order to preserve his throne, and to achieve this he hoped to gain the support of the British; he attached great importance to being the Caliph of all Muslims. At the time, the fact that the majority of Muslims around the world were within the borders of the British Empire prompted him to establish relations with the British in the hope that they would protect his throne. The Spanish writer Jorge Blanco Villalta comments, "The heart of the Ottoman Empire was not interested in the Turkish people, their happiness, and respect for their glorious traditions. Vahdettin's new ally had taken everything he wanted from him. Lloyd George was now rubbing his hands in satisfaction because the Eastern Question had been resolved in England's favour."⁴

⁴ George Blanco Villalta, *Atatürk*, Ankara, 1982, p.61. (Cited in Salahi R. Sonyel, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Dış Politika*, Ankara: 1973 ve 1986, p.16-76).

On November 16, 1918, Yeni Istanbul newspaper said: "There is no Sultan in Ottoman history more miserable than Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin VI. The nation should gather around this saintly crown with deep awe."⁵ On the other hand, the Times newspaper published in London wrote in its issue dated November 19, 1918, that Vahdettin, since his accession, wanted peace under any circumstances in order to protect his own position and the order of Turkey, and that he wished to gain influence by forming a party for this purpose; he even took Mahmut II as an example even in his dress.⁶

Meanwhile, the British occupied the region up to Kilyos on November 21, 1918, and landed in Gallipoli on November 27. The French occupied Dörtyol on December 2 and entered Antakya on December 7.⁷ The Sultan saw no harm in approaching the British, especially to save his throne and whatever he could from the ruins of his empire. His intrigues with Rear Admiral Richard Webb, the deputy British High Commissioner, are the first evidence of his pro-British attitude. When he acted against the Union and Progress Party and decided to dissolve the Ottoman Parliamentary Assembly, he indirectly inquired from the British High Commissioner whether he could count on the support of the British administration. He did not hesitate to describe Vahdettin as a Sultan with purely pro-British tendencies.⁸ Meanwhile, the British had imposed censorship on the press and the post.⁹

On November 23, the Sultan moved from Dolmabahçe Palace to Yıldız Palace because he was concerned about the possibility of a Greek warship anchored in front of Dolmabahçe causing a riot.¹⁰ On the same day, General Franchet d'Esperey, Commander-in-Chief of the French

⁵ Mehmet Zeki Sarihan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, İstanbul, 1982, p.30.

⁶ *The Times*, London, November, 19, 1918.

⁷ On the occupation of Dörtyol and İskenderun (Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, Doğa Sahaf Yayınevi, Ankara, p.1973)

⁸ Gotthard Jaeschke, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı Kronolojisi Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar (30 Ekim 1918–11 Ekim 1922)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1989, p.1.

⁹ Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76.

¹⁰ Sina Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Millî Mücadele*, İstanbul: 1976 ve 1992, p.82.

Eastern Armies, entered İstanbul on a white horse, a gift from a Greek, and was greeted with wild demonstrations by minorities.¹¹

On November 24, Vahdettin gave the following statement to the correspondent of the Daily Mail newspaper published in London: "*I inherited the love and admiration I have for the British nation from my father Abdülmecit. I will do my best to strengthen the friendship between my country and England.*"¹²

Vahdettin and his supporters were particularly close to the British as revealed in the following letter written by Tom Hohler, one of the officials of the British High Commissioner in İstanbul, to George Kidston, Chief of the East Desk at the British Foreign Office, on December, 5:¹³

"It would be a great pity if the present circumstances were not taken advantage of to put an end to the rule of this city (İstanbul) by the Turks... I am ready to see it under any government you can name, provided it is not a Turkish government, for they are not capable of governing a pigsty. The Turks know well that they are utterly defeated... Their organization is shattered and defeated; they themselves are in misery... İstanbul is living in the days of occupation. The administration here is so low as to disgust any Englishman..."¹⁴

Rear Admiral Richard Webb, Deputy British High Commissioner in Constantinople, wrote in a private letter to Sir Ronald Graham, Under-Secretary of State at the British Foreign Office, on January 19, 1919:

"... Although ostensibly we are not occupying the country, we are now appointing or removing its governors, directing its police, controlling its press, entering its dungeons and setting Greek and Armenian prisoners free, regardless of the crimes they have committed... We keep the railroads firmly under our control and confiscate anything we want... Our policy is based on the sharp point of the bayonet... As long as we have the Caliph at our disposal, we have an additional instrument of

¹¹ *İstanbul Press*,. November, 23-25, 1918. (Cited in Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76).

¹² Akşin, op. cit., p.97.

¹³ Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76.

¹⁴ IDA, FO 371/3411/211362: Private letter from Hohler to Kidston, İstanbul, December,5, 1918.

control over the Islamic World... As you know, the Sultan wishes to settle us here..."¹⁵

In reality, Vahdettin wanted to place the British not only in Istanbul but throughout Anatolia, but the political situation was not favourable for this. In this regard, the following secret telegram was sent from the British General Headquarters in Istanbul to the British Chief of Military Intelligence on December, 16:

"Sami Bey, who arrived at the General Headquarters today, said in the name of the Sultan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs that Britain should take over the administration of Turkey at the earliest possible moment and that it would be too late if we waited until peace was concluded. Sami Bey wants British rule to be established in Arabia. He wishes British officers to be sent to the interior of the country for control purposes and British officials to be dispatched to assist the administration. Turkish troops in the Caucasus will be placed under our (British) command; any officer whom we wish to dismiss will be dismissed."¹⁶

It was also around this time that Vahdettin and his supporters, in order to please the Entente Powers, especially Britain, and to discredit the wartime Talat Pasha Cabinet, had, between November 5 and December 21, through the 5th Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, set up a commission of inquiry to identify those accused of war crimes. On February 16, 1919, the Sultan issued a decree establishing the notorious 'Extraordinary Martial Law Court', which would begin to try Ottoman civilian and military officials accused of committing atrocities against Greeks and Armenians during their displacement (deportation). On the other hand, on December 27, the French occupied Pozantı and on January 3, 1919, the British occupied the town of Jarablus, located on the railway between Urfa and Bilecik.¹⁷

On January 5, arrests began; on January, 7, Kemal Bey, the former district governor of Boğazlıyan, who would later be sentenced to death

¹⁵ IDA, FO 371/4164/191127: Private letter from Webb to Graham, İstanbul, January, 19, 1919

¹⁶ IDA, FO 371/3421/214122: Secret telegram from British General Headquarters to the British Chief of Military Intelligence, İstanbul, December, 16, 1918.

¹⁷ Sabahattin Selek, *Anadolu İhtilali*, İstanbul, 1965, p.59.

and executed on April 10, was arrested in Istanbul.¹⁸ The British High Commissioner in Istanbul, Sir Arthur Calthorpe, sent a secret telegram to the British Foreign Office on January, 22, stating:

"I informed the Grand Vizier and the Minister of Foreign Affairs on January 18th that it was necessary to punish those who had committed abuses against prisoners of war and Armenians. They replied that they were ready to carry out our orders in this matter. Yesterday the Sultan sent his brother-in-law, Damat Ferit, to Tom Hohler, informing him that he wished to punish these persons and that he intended to form a cabinet of more active men in place of the less energetic cabinet in power... He is, however, anxious that there should be trouble against him (the Sultan) and asks what our attitude would be if there should be trouble. Hohler said that he expected the British administration to insist on the punishment of criminals, to prevent public disorder, and in all its actions to side with the authorities in power; but he did not promise any assistance to the Sultan. In my opinion, we must assure the Sultan that we will help him to carry out his plan."¹⁹

Two days later, on January 24, 1919, in a 'highly urgent and secret' telegram to the Foreign Office, Calthorpe added the following:

"According to what the Grand Vizier informed me a few days ago, between 160 and 200 persons have been arrested... The Minister of the Interior has prepared a list of about 60 persons in Constantinople who are connected with the Armenian massacres. He intends to have them arrested at once and asks what our opinion is on this matter. Apparently, action is being postponed because of Sultan's cowardice... I am encouraging the Grand Vizier to act alone, and I am informing him."²⁰

In response, on the night of January 29-30, 30 members of the Committee of Union and Progress were arrested.²¹ Meanwhile, those arrested in Istanbul were locked up in the Bekiraga division. Among them were Hüseyin Cahit, Hüseyin Canbolat, Kara Kemal, Hüseyin Kadri,

¹⁸ *İkdam*, January, 9,1919 (Cited in Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76).

¹⁹ IDA, FO 371/4172/13694: Secret telegram from Calthorpe to the British Foreign Office, January, 22,1919

²⁰ Secret and urgent telegram from Calthorpe to the British Foreign Office, January, 24, 1919. (Cited in Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76).

²¹ Akşin, op. cit., p.153.

Tevfik Rüştü, Ziya Gökalp, Mithat Şükrü, Rahmi, Karasu, etc.²² After a while, they would all be deported to Malta. Vahdettin lied to Türkgeldi that he had been caught in a fait accompli and to Ahmet Rıza that he had no knowledge of the arrests.²³ In a secret telegram sent to the British Foreign Office on February 9, Vice Admiral Calthorpe reported that the arrests had been very effective and that the supporters of the Committee of Union and Progress had been intimidated, at least in Istanbul.²⁴

Andrew Ryan, a political official, and chief interpreter at the British High Commission, who was one of those who was intrigued with the Sultan, later claimed in his memoirs that the Sultan and Damat Ferit were trying to save both the Ottoman dynasty and whatever could be salvaged from the ruins of the state destroyed by the Committee of Union and Progress by pursuing a conciliatory policy towards the victorious Entente and that the Sultan '*was a good Turk like his other predecessors*'.²⁵ Ryan's views were confirmed by Harry Luke, then a member of the British High Commission, as follows: "*... the Sultan and Damat Ferit... were no less true patriots than Mustafa Kemal and his followers, but they believed that Turkey's interests were best served by adhering to the Cession and cooperating with the Allied Powers.*"²⁶

The views of these two British officials should be analysed in light of their duties at the time. Andrew Ryan, who had established a close relationship with the Sultan, played a major role in leading Vahdettin astray. As Halide Edip explained, Ryan was "*well known to harbour feelings of hatred against the Turks*".²⁷

Meanwhile, the pro-British policy of the Ottoman administration continued. On March 6, 1919, Halil Pasha, the former Governor of Beirut province and then President of the Albanian Council, through the

²² *İstanbul Press*, January, 31, 1919 (Cited in Sonyel, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Dış Politika*, 16-76).

²³ Falih Rifki Atay, *Mustafa Kemal'in Bana Anlattıkları*, Hisar Matbaası, İstanbul, 1955, p.26-29.

²⁴ IDA, FO 371/4172/23004: Secret telegram from Calthorpe to the British Foreign Office, İstanbul, February, 9, 1919.

²⁵ Sir Andrew Ryan, *The Last of the Dragomans*, Londra. 1951, p.127.

²⁶ Sir Harry Luke, *The Making of Modern Turkey* Londra, 1936, p.66.

²⁷ Halide Edip Adivar, *The Turkish Ordeal*, Londra, 1928, p.17.

intermediary of Dr. Howard Bliss, a US missionary, met with Sir Louis Mallet, a British element, and conveyed to him a message from the Sultan and Tefvik Pasha. According to this message, both Ottoman leaders wished that Britain would save the Turkish Empire and guide it in the future by placing it under her protection. According to them, the only solution was to entrust their future to Britain, the best Islamic Power.²⁸

One day later, on March 7, 1919, the French occupied Kozan, and on March 8, Zonguldak and Ereğli. On March 8, Rear Admiral Richard Webb, the acting British High Commissioner in Istanbul, sent a report prepared by the Intelligence Office of the British Military Force in Salonika to Foreign Secretary Balfour. This interesting report summarized as follows:

"According to Sami Bey, Sultan Vahdettin is intelligent; he favors a peaceful solution to the country's problem. He wants to get rid of the Committee of Union and Progress, but he is afraid of this organization. After the suspicious death of Prince Yusuf İzzettin, Vahdettin's hatred and fear of the Union and Progress increased. Among those who signed İzzettin's death certificate was Enver Pasha's personal physician. According to the rumors circulating among high officials, Vahdettin, with the help of Ahmet Rıza, made a secret agreement with the British to get rid of the Union and Progress. According to credible sources, Vahdettin consulted Ahmet Rıza about forming a new cabinet. Between 1913 and 1915, the old Hurriyet ve İtilaf Party, most of whose members had been killed or exiled, and the newly formed Peace and Salvation Party promised to support the Sultan. In recent days, Ahmet Rıza established relations with this new party."²⁹

As soon as he came to power, Damat Ferit visited the British Deputy High Commissioner, Richard Webb, on March 9 and informed him that *"the hopes of his master, the Sultan, and himself rested on God and the British administration"*.³⁰

In the meantime, Damat Ferit had resumed the arrests that had stopped for some time and wanted to appoint a British advisor to each

²⁸ IDA, FO 371/4156/3802 Mallet - Halil meeting, March, 6,1919.

²⁹ IDA, FO 371/49194 Webb to Balfour, Istanbul, March, 8,1919.

³⁰ IDA, FO 371/4141/40280 Secret telegram from Webb to the British Foreign Office, Istanbul, March, 9,1919.

Governor. On March 12, the Courts of War in Istanbul were abolished and replaced by the "*Martial Law Administration*";³¹ on March 13, the interrogation of members of the war cabinets began.³² On March 14, the British Foreign Office sent telegrams to its Ambassadors in Paris, Rome and Washington, informing them that the Sultan's government had begged for British protection, but Britain had refused.³³

Meanwhile, the occupations continued. On March 24, Urfa was occupied by the British. On March 28, the Italians had captured Antalya, Kaş and Silifke. On the other hand, Damat Ferit visited Richard Webb on March 30 and told him that he had been sent by the Sultan whom he had met the day before; that the Sultan's father, Abdülmecit, had raised him with feelings of friendship towards the British and that he intended to place the Ottoman power completely under British rule. Damat Ferit stated that the Sultan did not wish to appeal for help to any other state than England; that Turkey had been defeated in the war only by England; that it would therefore be intolerably difficult and bitter to fall under the yoke of any other state than the victor; and that England would be committing a great mistake if she were persuaded by her own allies to open a breach between the two countries. Asserting that he was speaking on behalf of the Sultan as Caliph and on behalf of his own person, who occupied the highest office in the State, Damat Ferit reiterated Turkey's allegiance to England and to England alone and added that he was seeking England's help and that, in return, the Turkish administration would show goodwill to the British administration by providing it with all kinds of support in the usual way.³⁴

According to German historian Gotthard Jaeschke, Admiral Calthorpe, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, reported to the British Foreign Office on April 5 that the Sultan and Damat Ferit did not trust anyone, not even their ministers.³⁵ Five days later, on April 10, Kemal Bey, the District Governor of Boğazlıyan, who had been on trial

³¹ *Hadisat*, March, 12,1919 (Cited in Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76).

³² *İstanbul Press*, March, 14,1919. (Cited in Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76).

³³ Akşin, op. cit., p.168.

³⁴ Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76.

³⁵ Jaeschke, op. cit., p.24

for some time and had been sentenced to death the day before on charges of war crimes, was executed.³⁶

Sultan Vahdettin's Attempts to Come Under British Rule

The first attempt was on December 16, 1919. It was a man called Sami Bey who came to the headquarters, claiming to be sent by the Sultan and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was instructed to "*implore*" Britain to take over the government of Turkey as soon as possible. If they waited until peace, it would be too late. Help was sought to extend to Turkey the same "*enlightened*" rule that had been extended to the millions of Muslims living in "peace and prosperity" under British rule in Medina and elsewhere. He requested that British officers be sent into the interior of the country to supervise and assist in the administration. In return, since it was difficult to send British troops to the Caucasus, there was a readiness to place the Turkish troops there under British command, to remove undesirable officers from their posts and to place troops under the command of British officers.³⁷

The second attempt was the result of a visit to the Sultan by a "*very respectable English gentleman*" who had lived in Turkey for many years, "*private and independent*". He came and told Calthorpe what the sultan had told him. Vahdettin said that he had always been an Englishman, that he did not say this under the pressure of difficult circumstances, that it was the truth, that this was why he had always been surrounded by Union and Progress spies since 1908, and that this was why he had suffered so much. He said that now all his hopes were in the British, that he wanted to change his cabinet before Saturday, January 11, 1920, and that he mentioned Mustafa Arif, the Minister of Interior,³⁸ who was a convert and leaned towards the Committee of Union and Progress, as a "*sharp*" person in the cabinet, He said that he knew that Turkey would spare no effort against the Committee of Union and Progress, which he considered responsible for the suffering at the time, and that the British wanted to punish those who had mistreated British prisoners as well as

³⁶ *Istanbul Press*, April, 11-15, 1919 (Cited in Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76).

³⁷ Akşin, op. cit., p.113-166.

³⁸ Sonyel, op. cit., p.16-76.

those who had committed the massacres, and that he was ready to ensure that "*every single person*" the British wanted was arrested and punished. He had only one fear, which was that "*if he acted on a large scale, he might provoke a revolution, which would lead to his dethronement and perhaps his murder before any good could be achieved.*" He wanted to know whether he could count on the support of the Allies if he acted violently, and he feared that in such a case he would not be interfered with because it was the internal affairs of the Turks. He wanted to be friends with all the Allies, but he expected real help and long-lasting friendship only from Britain. Was there no way of contacting the High Commissioner? He was ready to act "according to any sign" from there. Vahdettin then raised the issue of the caliphate. His two "weapons" were Britain's help and the caliphate. He wanted to know whether Britain had any intention of supporting his claim to the caliphate. When his interlocutor, surprised, said that this was the first he had heard of such a problem, he replied that he attached great importance to it. Calthorpe, who reported the incident to Balfour in a private letter, said that the Sultan's attitude was almost identical to that of the Grand Vizier in their first meeting.³⁹

It can be seen that within forty days "*special contact*" was established with the British in three ways - through the High Commissioner's Office, the Headquarters and a private person - and that Britain was asked to claim Turkey "*before it was too late*". It is possible to see a sense of urgency in this event, and perhaps it is no coincidence that these initiatives coincided with the emergence and development of the current in favour of US patronage. We have seen above why this trend could alarm the Palace. On January 15th, Lewis Heck, the American "*political representative*" who came to visit Cavit Bey, said that the US assistance in the broadest sense would be accepted by everyone, provided that Turkish independence was preserved, but that it was necessary to decide immediately because the British were trying to find a party in their favour. According to him, the French also wanted to monopolize the country's economy. However, the capital needed for the country's development could only come from the United States, and it would be better if it came directly. It is

³⁹ Jaeschke, op. cit., p.274.

noticeable that the Americans were also alarmed by the British activity this time. Heck's visit to Cavit Bey is also interesting as it shows once again and clearly the circles they were relying on.⁴⁰

Vahdettin had sought reassurance from the army when he dissolved the Parliament. Now he needed the support of the British when he acted against the Unionists and Progressives. The reason for this is not well understood. Perhaps he believed that the army would not want to support him in this matter, or that it could not support him even if it wanted to because it was too weakened due to demobilizations and demoralization. Perhaps he thought it appropriate to appeal to the British on this issue just to agree with the British. But in any case, these initiatives of the sultan marked the beginning of an intimate relationship with the British.⁴¹

Conclusion and Evaluation

In July 1918, when Sultan Mehmet Vahdettin VI ascended the Ottoman throne as the fourth brother upon the death of his older brother Sultan Mehmet Reşat V, the First World War was in its last days under the dominance of the Entente powers. The German Empire, on which great hopes were pinned, had been defeated, the army was exhausted, the economy had collapsed, the people were desperately praying for the best of the worst and looking to the future with despair. In short, as soon as he came to power, he found an empire that was collapsing and waiting for an opportunity to be shared. Just as Hüseyin Nihal Atsız said, "*He was the most unfortunate and unlucky of the Ottoman Sultans*".

With the signing of the Armistice, he knew very well that there was nothing much he could do for himself. He did not have a fighting spirit like the resistance and rebellion of his ancestors. His only thought was that the existence and continuity of the country depended on his own existence and continuity. As long as his reign continued, the state would survive, and as long as he continued with the caliph, the unity of the ummah would be preserved. For him, the nation was like a flock of sheep in need of a shepherd, and he was the shepherd who would lead

⁴⁰ Akşin, op. cit., p.113-166.

⁴¹ Akşin, op. cit., p.195-196.

them. However, since the great defeat threatened his existence, he inevitably turned to England, just as his grandfather Mahmut II had turned to England when he was stuck in the rebellion of his governor Mehmet Ali Pasha, and just as his father Abdülmecit had turned to England and France for help when he was stuck against the Russians in the Crimean War, Vahdettin saw England, even though it was his enemy in the great war, as a port of refuge and a great power that would ensure the continuity of his reign and caliphate by protecting and securing its future. Another factor supporting Vahdettin's sympathy and trust in England was the suggestions of Damat Ferit Pasha, who was married to his sister Mediha Sultan and was an incorrigible Anglophile. This sympathy even went so far as to become a member of the "British Correspondents (lovers) Association"⁴² which was chaired by Reverend Frew and vice-chaired by British agents such as Sait Molla.

At the end of the First World War, every individual living on the territory of the homeland had placed all the sacred values they believed in and valued on the responsibility and shoulders of Sultan Vahdettin, the sole and absolute ruler of the country. Every decision he would make would either make the nation live free and independent or make it a servant of another nation and all the sacred values it cherished would be disrespectfully trampled and taken away from it. And so, it happened... With the signing of the Armistice, every Greek, Armenian, French, and British soldier who set foot in Anatolia mercilessly slaughtered women, children, old and young, and trampled and defiled all the sacred things of the nation. While even a shepherd resisted the wolves attacking his flock at the cost of his life, Vahdettin could only watch as jackals and hyenas tore his people and subjects, whom he saw as a flock, to pieces. He sought ways to act together with the British who slaughtered our holy martyrs who sacrificed their lives in Gallipoli, Palestine and Yemen in order not to give an inch of homeland soil, and even became a member of associations established "*in the name of those who love*" them.

The concepts of "*national sovereignty and full independence*" were unacceptable and dangerous discourses for Vahdettin, who thought only of his own existence and continuity and relied on England, which

⁴² Atatürk, op. cit., p.10.

was considered to be the most powerful state in the conditions of that day. For Britain, which used democracy only for its own purposes, the continuity of Vahdettin was seen as an important authority that could be used for British interests. For this reason, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who started the national struggle, had to be destroyed as soon as possible for both of them and the movement he started had to be ended. The fact that Vahdettin, as the Islamic Caliph, organized rebellions in Anatolia in order to disrupt the national struggle with the sects and communities affiliated to him, and as the head of the Sultanate, he issued edicts condemning those who started the national struggle, especially Mustafa Kemal Pasha, to death, is seen as the result of the idea of protecting his own existence with the British, with whom he acted together.

As a result, as a head of state, Sultan Vahdettin made a choice to govern the country in cooperation with the British. This choice was neither in accordance with his heroic ancestors nor with the character of the noble Turkish nation, but only to protect and maintain his own existence. With this choice, he could neither protect his own existence and dynasty, nor prevent the collapse of a six-hundred-year-old empire.

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