



## Britain, Russia and the German Military Mission to Istanbul, 1913-1914

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines Russia's strong reaction to the German Military Mission sent to Istanbul under the leadership of General Liman von Sanders during the winter of 1913-1914 and the impact of this reaction on Anglo-Russian relations. Although the mission was publicly presented as a military initiative aimed at restructuring the Ottoman army, it was perceived by the Entente Powers as a strategic move to enhance Germany's influence over the Ottoman Empire. Within the context of the balance of power among the Great Powers, demands for the cancellation of the mission initially caused a crisis between the Entente and Central Powers and later escalated into a major conflict within the Entente itself due to resistance from Germany and the Ottoman Empire.

While Britain sought to resolve the crisis diplomatically to avoid provoking Germany further, Russia, alarmed by the perception that Istanbul and the Straits had fallen under German influence and interpreting this development as a call to war, adopted a more aggressive stance. Russia advocated for stricter measures, including the occupation of certain strategic locations in Anatolia. This divergence in responses within the Entente bloc led to a significant trust crisis, deepening the internal divisions within the alliance. The mission became one of the most critical crises in European diplomacy during the period between the Balkan Wars and the First World War. This study aims to analyze this process with a particular focus on Britain and Russia. Relying predominantly on a comparative analysis of British, French, and German archival documents, the research evaluates the mission within the framework of the power struggle between the Entente and Central Powers.

**Keywords:** Germany, Britain, Russia, Ottoman Empire, Liman von Sanders, German Military Mission

## Rusya, İngiltere ve Alman Askeri Misyonu, 1913-1914

### Öz

Bu çalışma, 1913-1914 kışında General Liman von Sanders liderliğinde İstanbul'a gönderilen Alman Askeri Misyonu'na yönelik Rusya'nın sert tepkisini ve bu tepkinin İngiliz-Rus ilişkileri üzerindeki etkisini ele almaktadır. Osmanlı ordusunun yeniden yapılandırılmasını hedefleyen bir askeri girişim olarak duyurulan misyon, İtilaf Devletleri tarafından Almanya'nın Osmanlı üzerindeki stratejik etkisini artırmaya yönelik bir hamle olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Büyük Güçler arasındaki güç dengesi bağlamında, misyonun iptali talepleri başlangıçta İtilaf-İttifak blokları arasında, ardından Almanya ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin bu talebe karşı direnmesi nedeniyle İtilaf bloğu içerisinde büyük bir krize dönüşmüştü. İngiltere, Almanya'yı daha fazla tepki göstermeye sevk etmemek için krizi diplomatik kanallar üzerinden çözmeyi hedeflerken, İstanbul ve Boğazların Alman etkisi altına girdiği algısıyla paniğe kapılan Rusya, bu gelişmeyi bir savaş çağrısı olarak değerlendirmiş ve Anadolu'daki bazı stratejik noktaların işgalini de içeren daha sert yaptırımlardan yana bir tutum benimsemiştir. İtilaf bloğu içerisindeki bu tepki farklılığı, blok içinde bir güven bunalımına yol açacak kadar büyük bir krize neden olmuştur. Misyon, Balkan Savaşları'ndan Birinci Dünya Savaşı'na kadar olan süreçte Avrupa diplomasisini meşgul eden en önemli krizlerden biri olmuştur. Bu çalışma, söz konusu süreci İngiltere ve Rusya'yı merkeze alarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ağırlıklı olarak İngiliz, Fransız ve Alman arşiv belgelerinin karşılaştırmalı analizine dayanan araştırma, misyonu İtilaf ve İttifak blokları arasındaki güç mücadelesi bağlamında değerlendirmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Almanya, İngiltere, Rusya, Osmanlı Devleti, Liman Von Sanders, Alman Askeri Misyonu

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### Introduction

After suffering a heavy defeat in the First Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire, in a state of great panic, sought assistance from Germany to strengthen the defense of

Istanbul. Germany, unwilling to allow Istanbul to fall under the control of any Balkan state, Britain, or Russia, accepted this request (Sanders, 2020, pp.7-8;).

Negotiations between the two parties, which began in June 1913, were completed by the end of October, and a contract was signed on October 27, 1913 (Bayur, 1983, p.277; Kerner, 1927, p.14). According to the contract, Germany would send 42 German officers, mostly ranked as majors and captains, to reorganize and modernize the Ottoman army under the leadership of Liman von Sanders. Liman von Sanders was appointed for five years with the rank of *Birinci Ferik* (Lieutenant General) and as the President of the Reform Committee. During this period, he would also assume command of the First Corps stationed in Istanbul. His role extended beyond command to encompass authority over all military schools and foreign military personnel in the Ottoman Army, with responsibilities including appointments, conscription, dismissals, and allowances. As the head of the mission, Sanders was granted all the powers of an Ottoman lieutenant general, including the authority to impose disciplinary measures.

He was also vested with extensive powers over key aspects of military operations, such as the selection of foreign military advisors, the promotion of Ottoman officers and generals, the assignment of German officers, and the oversight of artillery schools, military training institutions, and procurement processes. As per the agreement, Sanders was positioned as the second-highest-ranking military official in the Ottoman hierarchy, subordinate only to the Minister of War. Notably, in the event of Germany's engagement in a European war, Berlin retained the right to terminate Sanders' and his team's contracts. In his capacity as the direct superior of all German officers in Ottoman service, Sanders was authorized to conduct inspections across the empire and held the power to veto the inclusion of foreign officers he deemed unsuitable. He was also granted control over military training and education facilities, including artillery schools, training grounds, and demonstration units. Additionally, Sanders was made a member of the High Military Council, where his opinions were to be consulted on the promotions of Ottoman officers, particularly generals. The contract, which was drafted for a five-year term, granted Sanders extraordinary authority, underscoring the significant role envisioned for him within the Ottoman military (GPEK/38/1, Jagow an den Rominten, Nr.15 444, Berlin, den 20. September 1913; Uyar, 2019, p.39; Civgin, 2023, p.144).

### Russia's Response to the German Military Mission

Although the specifics of the agreement had not yet been fully disclosed, the news that Liman von Sanders would lead a military mission to Istanbul caused a significant stir

among the Entente Powers. Embassies in Berlin sent detailed reports to their governments regarding the mission and its leader ((DDF/3/8), Manneville a Pichon, No.411, Berlin, 30 Octobre 1913). On October 31, 1913, Alick Russel, the British military attaché in Berlin, informed the War Office that the 58-year-old Sanders was energetic, highly capable, and strong-willed, and that he would wield extensive and unrestricted authority in his new position in Istanbul (BD/10/1, Russell to Goschen, No. 377, Berlin, 31 October 1913).

The announcement of this appointment quickly reverberated across Europe, triggering intense debate. Throughout November, the British Times published in-depth analyses of the mission, scrutinizing Germany's motives behind the appointment. Discussions primarily centered on the potential increase in Germany's influence over the Ottoman Empire and the strategic implications of the agreement. A prevailing consensus in the press suggested that Germany aimed to expand its dominance over Ottoman territories, a move perceived as a potential flashpoint for conflict between the Entente and Central Powers (*The Times*, 31 Oct, 2;10;16;28 Nov 1913). These predictions by the British media were soon borne out. The mission swiftly escalated tensions between the Entente and Central Powers, with the prospect of war becoming a tangible possibility. Russia's response played a central role in heightening the crisis. Russia's uncompromising stance and demand-driven approach intensified diplomatic pressure, transforming the issue into a far more serious geopolitical conflict.

Russia ascribed great significance to the Liman von Sanders Mission, viewing it as a direct threat to its national security and foreign policy strategies. The mission was perceived not as a continuation of Germany's longstanding approach of amicable passive penetration—an effort to influence Ottoman economics and military through indirect means—but rather as a decisive shift towards active establishment of a German presence on Ottoman territory. According to Sazonov, the mission represented the final stage of the Ottoman Empire's prolonged process of submission and cooperation with Germany. In his memoirs, he expressed this view as follows: "*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 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 were destined to be sealed on the same day” (Sazonov, 1927, p.124)*

Russia’s primary concern revolved around the possibility that the Sanders Mission would lead to the complete subordination of the Ottoman army to German control. This, in turn, was seen as paving the way for Istanbul and the strategically critical Bosphorus Straits to fall under German influence. Such an outcome posed an existential challenge to Russia’s strategic and geopolitical interests in the region. As noted by the memoirs of Austria-Hungary’s Military Attaché Joseph Pomiankowski, the appointment was perceived as a definitive move towards placing Istanbul and the Straits under German control: *“The appointment of Liman von Sanders as Corps Commander in Istanbul was nothing less than the disguised annexation of the Straits”*. Pomiankowski also recounted the initial reaction of Russian Military Attaché General Leontyev to the matter: *“General Leontyev was profoundly outraged and openly stated to me that Russia was compelled to view the deployment of Missionary Liman as a hostile act against itself. He made it unequivocally clear that Russia would not tolerate any German fortification attempts within Istanbul, a region that lay within its sphere of influence”*. (Pomiankowski, 2014, p.36)

The military strengthening of the Ottoman Empire, and more importantly, the transfer of Istanbul’s military administration to a German general, was utterly unacceptable to Russia’s strategic interests in the region. The Libyan War and The Balkan Wars had already revealed the Ottoman Empire’s significant weaknesses. This situation, as described by Wangenheim, created an opportunity for Russia to realize its “dark plans”-namely, to establish dominance over the Bosphorus Straits (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an den Jagow, Nr. 15 493, Pera, den 17. Dezember 1913). However, Germany’s intervention in this process posed a severe challenge for Russia, undermining its prospects for regional hegemony. Russia believed that with an alliance among its Entente partners, it could easily defeat the Ottoman Empire and secure control over Istanbul and the Straits. However, it lacked the naval capacity to confront a power as

formidable as Germany. In this context, the Sanders Mission signified a double challenge for Russia: it had to contend with both Germany and a potentially revitalized Ottoman Empire capable of altering the regional balance of power (Henig, 2002, pp.11-12). Additionally, Russia was deeply unsettled by the possibility of the Ottoman navy becoming stronger alongside its military reforms. Already anxious about warships the Ottoman Empire had ordered from Britain, Russia sought to prevent the Ottoman navy from achieving superiority in the Black Sea. The prospect of the Ottoman army being modernized under the German military system exacerbated these concerns further. A militarily robust Ottoman Empire, supported by an efficient German organizational structure, represented an unacceptable threat to Russia’s strategic considerations. This explains Russia’s vehement opposition to the Sanders Mission, which it viewed as a direct and multifaceted challenge to its geopolitical and military dominance in the region.

The potential transfer of Istanbul and the Bosphorus under German control could also have been an economic catastrophe for Russia. The region held critical importance for Russia’s strategic and economic goals, particularly as a gateway to the Mediterranean. Over half of Russia’s exports passed through this area, making the controlling power of the region a vital economic partner-if not a dependency. Under the prevailing balance of power among the Great Powers, Russia’s trade could continue under relatively favorable conditions imposed on the Ottoman Empire. However, the prospect of this critical region falling into the hands of a powerful Germany could spell economic ruin for Russia. Germany had already established extraordinary economic and political influence through projects like the Baghdad Railway. Its next ambition appeared to be the establishment of a naval base in the Eastern Mediterranean, via the Bosphorus. This move was perceived as the final straw by Russia. The Bosphorus and Istanbul represented Russia’s red line (Bradshaw, 1930, p.500). The depth of Russia’s sensitivity on this issue is best captured in the words of Sazonov: *“The possession of the Straits by a strong power would mean Russia’s complete economic submission to this state in the south. Furthermore, strategically, Russia’s efforts to achieve military, naval, and economic dominance in the Black Sea would be meaningless if the Straits were not under Russian control. A power that dominates the Straits would not only gain supremacy over the Black Sea and the Mediterranean but also have the opportunity to establish hegemony over Anatolia and the Balkans”* (Fox, 1993, p.265).

It was precisely these concerns that led Russia to openly oppose the Sanders Mission. By the end of October, when rumors about the mission first surfaced, Russia had formally conveyed through diplomatic channels that it was unacceptable for this appointment to proceed. Furthermore, in the interest of maintaining stable relations between the two nations (*deviennent mauvais*), Russia urged Germany to reconsider its decision. During a meeting on November 7, 1913, between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Neratov and the German Ambassador to St. Petersburg, Count Friedrich von Lucius, Russia's strong objections were explicitly stated: "*Every development in Istanbul and the Bosphorus holds great significance for Russia. If this were merely about the ordinary training of the Ottoman army, it would not concern Russia. However, we cannot view this step as anything other than an act directed against Russia*" (GPEK/38/1, Lucius an das AA, Nr. 15445, St. Petersburg, 7 November 1913).

The mission issue was thoroughly discussed during the summit held in Berlin between November 17-20, 1913. During the discussions, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Nikolayevich Kokovtsov reiterated the claim that "Sanders will take command of the Ottoman Army". In response, German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg dismissed this argument as "nonsensical" and categorically rejected it. Hollweg defended Germany's stance, emphasizing that the mission posed no threat to Russia. He stated: *The idea that Russia might take offense at our military mission never occurred to me and remains entirely incomprehensible to me. As I can conclude from the course of Russian policy as a whole, and as Mr. Sazonov explicitly and repeatedly stated to me, Russia shares our view that Turkey must remain intact. Therefore, I can only assume that Russia must desire a strict organization of the Turkish army. The war has sufficiently proven that the Turkish army is incapable of conducting aggressive actions of any kind. A Turkish action against Russia, in particular, is an absolute absurdity. If Mr. Sazonov criticizes that the military mission is to be stationed in Constantinople, this is absolutely not a new phenomenon. Field Marshal von der Goltz directed the reorganization of the entire Turkish army from Constantinople for twelve years... If our military mission, active in this context, were to be stationed in Constantinople, this would be the most logical and natural course of action, as the Turkish military administration, along with the military educational institutions, has its center precisely in Constantinople*" (GPEK/38/1, "Aufzeichnung des Reichskanzlers von Bethmann Hollweg" Nr. 15 450, Berlin, 18 November 1913).

Hollweg's response highlighted Germany's perspective, framing the mission as a continuation of historical precedent and a necessary measure to ensure Ottoman stability. By referencing earlier military missions, such as Field Marshal von der Goltz's efforts, Hollweg aimed to reassure Russia that the Sanders Mission was neither a threat nor an attempt to dominate the Ottoman military. Throughout November, Germany pursued various diplomatic efforts to defuse the growing crisis, but these measures ultimately failed. From Germany's perspective, the significance attributed to the Sanders Mission was greatly exaggerated. German officials argued that the mission was not designed as a threat to Russia, nor was its purpose to place the Ottoman army under German control. Instead, they framed the Sanders Mission as comparable to the British Limpus Mission in Istanbul or the French Military Mission in Greece, both of which were seen as non-threatening modernization efforts (DDF/3/8, Bompard a Pichon, No.436, Péra, 3 Novembre 1913). Both countries effectively turned the issue into a matter of national pride. Although Russia openly stated that the decision signified a preference for Ottoman friendship over Russian goodwill (DDF/3/8, Delcassé a Pichon, No.539, Saint-Pétersbourg, 28 Novembre 1913) and argued that the fate of Russo-German relations should not hinge on the appointment of a single German commander, Germany refused to back down (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 385, St. Petersburg, 1 December 1913). As a result, Russia came to believe that convincing Germany alone was impossible and concluded that collective action with its allies was necessary.

In its discussions with the Allies, Russia underscored the critical nature of the situation, aiming to elevate the appointment into a "European issue". Within this framework, Russia sought to persuade Britain and France to adopt coercive measures against both Germany and the Ottoman Empire (GPEK/38/1, Jagow an den Pourtalés, Nr. 15 512, Berlin, den 6 Januar 1914). For instance, on November 25, 1913, Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov proposed a joint sanction to force the Ottoman Empire into retreat during a meeting with Sir George O'Beirne, Britain's ambassador to St. Petersburg. Sazonov suggested that the deployment of British and Russian officers to regions in Anatolia and the East where Armenians predominantly resided, effectively implying the indirect occupation of these territories, could serve as a solution to the crisis (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 379, St. Petersburg, 25 November 1913). Additionally, Sazonov recommended taking the initiative to occupy strategic points in Anatolia, which he viewed as crucial for



Germany's integration efforts (BD/10/1, Bunsen to Grey, No. 449, Vienna, 26 December 1913). His proposals clearly demonstrated that Russia did not regard the mission merely as a military issue but also as a political and strategic challenge. Furthermore, they highlighted Russia's efforts to devise a coordinated action plan with its allies to address the matter comprehensively.

However, Britain and France were not inclined to approach the matter as radically as Russia. While both allies expressed concerns regarding the Sanders Mission, they were reluctant to support the harsh measures proposed by Russia. Both countries believed that a more conciliatory solution should be sought instead of Russia's "impatient and hasty" stance. Britain, in particular, was worried that a strong response to the Sanders Mission could provoke Germany, potentially triggering a domino effect that might lead to an early war. On November 27, Grey conveyed this sentiment to Sazonov via the British ambassador, emphasizing the complexity of the developments and the need for time to fully understand the situation. Grey also suggested requesting further clarification from Germany regarding the mission (BD/10/1, Grey to O'Beirne, No. 381, Foreign Office, 27 November 1913). France shared a similar perspective. Foreign Minister Stéphen Pichon argued that taking action in line with Russia's proposal could initiate the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. This, at least at that time, was a scenario that Britain, France, and Germany all sought to avoid, making such a course of action unacceptable (BD/10/1, Grey to O'Beirne, No. 381, Foreign Office, 27 November 1913). In this phase, France proposed alternative solutions and specifically urged the Ottoman Empire to adopt a more conciliatory approach (BOA, HR.SYS/1879-5, Rifat Paşa a Said Halim Paşa, Paris, 26 Nov 1913)

The "passive" stance of Britain and France led to significant disappointment in Russia. The two countries' fears that Germany might perceive unilateral action by the Entente Powers as provocative-potentially triggering an early war-seemed to hold little sway over Russia. Instead, Russia remained resolute in its call for immediate coercive measures. According to O'Beirne's report to Grey on November 29, Sazonov expressed his hope for much greater involvement from Britain. Sazonov once again attempted to convince Britain to reconsider the proposal of appointing Anglo-Russian governor-generals to the regions inhabited by Armenians-a solution he saw as the only viable way to compel the Ottoman Empire to retreat from its position. The rejection of this proposal by Britain

once more deeply angered Russia (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 383, St. Petersburg, 29 November 1913).

On December 1, during a meeting with the British ambassador, Sazonov urged Britain to grasp the extraordinary gravity of the situation. He went further, asserting that this issue represented a critical "test of the value" of the Triple Entente. He reiterated his belief that if the three states acted together, Germany would have no choice but to back down. In the view of Sazonov, a strategy of coercive measures (*coactiva mensura*) needed to be implemented without delay. This strategy would involve a series of escalating actions. The Entente Powers were first expected to adopt a unified stance and undertake diplomatic initiatives in Istanbul, demanding the cancellation of the German military mission by the Ottoman government. Should this demand be rejected, economic sanctions would be applied, accompanied by threats to sever diplomatic relations if necessary. If these diplomatic and economic pressures failed to achieve the desired results, Sazonov argued that military intervention would be the final resort. Within this framework, it was proposed that Britain and France occupy the ports of Beirut and Izmir, while Russia would seize the port of Trabzon. Furthermore, Russian military commanders would be appointed to Erzurum and Beyazit, thereby establishing de facto control over these regions. These occupations were intended to persist until the Ottoman government complied with demands regarding the German mission (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 385, St. Petersburg, 1 December 1913). As evident, this strategy encompassed a wide range of actions, from diplomatic pressure to outright military intervention, aiming for the direct involvement of the Entente Powers in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire.

One of the main reasons Russia elevated the Sanders Mission issue to a level that risked triggering a war between alliances was its deep concern for national prestige. While Britain and France sought to de-escalate the situation, Russia found itself facing the possibility of significant reputational damage both domestically and internationally. The issue was particularly sensitive due to the harsh criticisms from the Russian press, which placed the government under severe public scrutiny. In general, the Russian media viewed the mission as a step toward increasing Germany's influence over the Ottoman Empire, perceiving it as a severe threat to both Ottoman sovereignty and Russia's security. Additionally, the press criticized Entente Powers for failing to deliver a unified and effective response to this critical development. While highlighting the shortcomings of the Entente, the Russian

press also condemned its own government for being insufficiently “alert” and for failing to take decisive measures to protect Russia’s strategic interests (*Komov*, 2012, pp. 127-134).

According to George Buchanan, Britain’s new ambassador to Russia, the press widely portrayed these events as a diplomatic fiasco for Russia. For instance, in his report to Grey on November 25, 1913, Buchanan referenced a recent article from the liberal newspaper *Novoe Vremya*. The article sarcastically dismissed claims that command authority during a potential siege of Istanbul would rest with a Turkish officer rather than General von Sanders, labeling such assurances as unrealistic. It mockingly described the government’s acceptance of this situation as a “diplomatic success” and suggested that those responsible for this “success” should have their names inscribed on golden tablets. Another prominent Russian newspaper, *Retch*, described the situation as having devolved into a complete impasse, where distinguishing cause from effect had become impossible. The paper criticized Russia’s diplomacy as weak and indecisive, asserting that Russian efforts had failed to counter Germany’s growing influence over the Ottoman Empire effectively (BD/10/1, Buchanan to Grey, No.448, St. Petersburg, 25 December 1913). The perception of a “defeat to Germany” that emerged in Russian public opinion significantly undermined the government’s prestige. The most notable consequence of this “reputational damage” was an increase in Sazonov’s pressure on Britain to support the annulment of the Sanders Mission.

Britain and France harbored significant concerns that implementing Russia’s proposed strategy—particularly any territorial occupation in Anatolia—could escalate into a continent-wide war. Consequently, despite the risk of further disappointing Russia, they once again rejected its proposal and opted to continue diplomatic efforts. In this context, on December 2, Britain delivered a stern diplomatic note to Babiali (the Porte), emphasizing the dangers posed by the appointment. The note highlighted that the assignment of Liman von Sanders could potentially lead to the Bosphorus falling under German control. It also warned that decisions influenced by Germany might weaken the Sultan’s authority and disrupt the balance of power (*equilibrium potentiarum*) among the Great Powers, which was crucial for ensuring Ottoman independence. Furthermore, the note cautioned that other Great Powers might present similar demands under the pretext of securing their own interests in Ottoman

territories (BD/10/1, Grey to Mallet, No.387, Foreign Office, 2 December 1913).

In response to increasing pressure from Russia, Britain introduced a series of compromise solutions aimed at accommodating the interests of both sides. One such proposal suggested relocating General Sanders from Istanbul to Edirne. This idea, put forth by British Foreign Secretary Grey, was discussed in Istanbul by the British Ambassador Mallet with his German and Russian counterparts. Another suggestion involved Germany and the Ottoman Empire issuing a formal statement clarifying that the First Army Corps stationed in Istanbul did not have command over the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. Russia viewed both proposals favorably and appeared open to negotiation. However, Germany rejected these suggestions, citing concerns over a potential loss of prestige. Berlin emphasized that requesting such concessions from the Ottoman government was not a viable option (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).

From Russia’s perspective, Britain’s stance on this critical development seemed contradictory. Considering Britain’s traditional Mediterranean policy, it would have been reasonable to expect a stronger reaction than Russia’s to “Germany’s attempt to establish dominance over Istanbul and the Straits”. Why, then, did Britain fail to respond as expected? Three primary reasons can be identified: The first reason pertained to the strained relations between the Ottoman Empire and Britain. Following the Balkan Wars, relations between the two nations deteriorated rapidly. Britain’s support for Greece in the Aegean Islands dispute had deeply disappointed the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Partisi*), leading them to interpret Britain’s actions as part of a strategy to dismantle the Ottoman Empire. With no resolution reached during negotiations, the final decision was left to the Great Powers, and Britain worked intensively to ensure the outcome favored Greece. Britain feared that a decision against the Ottoman Empire would irreparably damage their relationship. As a result, Britain was hesitant to exert pressure on the Ottoman government over the Sanders Mission, wishing to avoid further antagonizing Istanbul. Grey recognized the significance of the Sanders Mission and its potential to alter the balance of power. Correspondence with Mallet indicated that Britain was also cautious about being perceived as the only nation exerting pressure on the Ottoman government (BD/10/1, Grey to Mallet, No.392, London, 2 December 1913). The second reason was the

disputes between Britain and Germany over the Aegean Islands. While Britain argued that the islands of Chios and Mytilene should be ceded to Greece, Germany insisted they be returned to the Ottoman Empire. Adopting the firm stance demanded by Russia on the Sanders Mission could risk influencing Germany's decisions on this matter and undermine Britain's desired outcome (Yellice, 2022, pp.148-217). The third reason was tied to the British Admiral Limpus, who headed the Ottoman navy. Germany countered criticisms of the Sanders Mission by citing the Limpus Mission as a precedent. To Germany, the Sanders Mission was no different from the Limpus Mission and should not be given undue significance. Reports from Mallet emphasized the sensitivity surrounding Limpus and advised Britain to approach Russia's objections to the Sanders Mission with caution (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 492, Konstantinopel, den 19. Dezember 1913)

As a result, Russia failed to convince its allies, and the imperial decree (*Padişah İradesi*) approving the Liman von Sanders Mission was issued on December 4, 1913. In a telegram sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wangenheim reported that the decree had been issued for Liman von Sanders' appointment, with an addition stating that the headquarters of the First Corps would be located in Istanbul and that its units would be garrisoned around the city. He also noted that Grand Vizier Said Halim Pasha had requested the mission to arrive in Istanbul as soon as possible to prevent further controversy (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 464, Konstantinopel, den 4. Dezember 1913). The decree signified the failure of Russia's month-long efforts to block the mission and demonstrated that neither Germany nor the Ottoman Empire could be persuaded to relent.

At this point, the die had been cast.

The developments in St. Petersburg following this news caused, to put it mildly, an uproar. As documented by O'Beirne's report to Grey dated December 7, 1913, Sazonov was unwilling to believe the news and immediately sent a telegram to the Russian ambassador in Berlin, stating that he wished to think the decree was issued without the German government's knowledge. He called on the allies to undertake an immediate joint démarche. In his view, since Sanders had not yet arrived in Istanbul, it was not too late to act. Swift measures directed at both the Ottoman Empire and Germany could still yield results. Previously proposed actions such as a financial boycott, rejecting the 4% customs duty increase, and even threatening to sever diplomatic relations were presented as essential steps to pressure the Ottoman

government. If these measures failed, Sazonov suggested that it would be inevitable for the Entente powers to occupy Mediterranean and Black Sea ports with their navies (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 406, St. Petersburg, 7 December 1913).

Sazonov also believed that Britain needed to make some sacrifices to compel Germany into concessions. He had two proposals in this regard. The first was to relocate the Limpus Mission, frequently cited by Germany to legitimize the Sanders Mission, to another region, such as İzmit (DDF/3/8, Bompard a Doumergue, No.626, Péra, 14 Decembre 1913). If this was achieved, it might encourage Germany to move the Sanders Mission from Istanbul to Edirne. According to Bompard, this idea was first proposed by the Russian Ambassador in Istanbul. The suggestion aimed to address criticisms that the Russian government applied double standards regarding Germany and England, while also preserving the dignity of the Germans. In a telegram sent to Paris on December 14, 1914, Bompard accurately predicted that "due to the lack of any naval infrastructure in this port, the proposal would be unacceptable both to Limpus and to Britain (DDF/3/8, Bompard a Doumergue, No. 626, Pera, 14 Décembre 1913). The second proposal involved turning British naval power into a means of applying sanctions against Germany. According to Sazonov, if Britain took this step, Germany would have no choice but to back down. He argued that Germany could not afford the risk of losing its fleet entirely. A defeat in a naval conflict with Britain would spell disaster for Germany (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No.412, Foreign Office, 11 December 1913).

In his report dated December 11, 1913, O'Beirne, concerned that the issues raised in his December 7 report may not have been fully understood, emphasized the gravity of the matter as follows: " ... I do not know how far H[is] Majesty's Government regard the question of the German Mission in Turkey as one in which they would be prepared to go to any considerable lengths, but I hope I have made it clear to you by my telegrams that it is regarded here as a question of the first importance. Sazonov has spoken to me about it with greater seriousness and openness than on any other occasion that I can remember. He says that he does not attach great importance to its purely military aspect. General von Sanders may very likely not be more successful with the Turkish Army than was von der Goltz. But he is firmly convinced that the command of the First Army Corps will give Germany such a complete political preponderance at Constantinople that other Powers will find themselves definitely reduced to a secondary position in Turkey, to

*which Delcassé adds that this will be only a prelude to the fact that Germany will inevitably proceed to obtain a naval base in the Aegean or so forth. Sazonov has said to me that this question will be a test of the value of the Triple Entente, inasmuch as it will show whether the three Powers take a really decided stand in Turkey. Germany may have weighed the chances of a conflict with France and Russia and may be prepared to run the risk, but that she would not face the likelihood of a naval war and therefore he relies in this matter greatly on us...I really have nothing else to write to you about but this question of the German Mission which is absorbing the interest of the Russian Government to the exclusion of everything else”* (BD/10/1, O’Beirne to Grey, No.412, Foreign Office, 11 December 1913).

Indeed, as O’Beirne pointed out, there was little left to say. For the first time, Russia had openly declared that a joint action was essential to retract the Sanders Mission and was pressuring its allies to make a decisive choice. At this juncture, Britain faced two options: either to passively witness Germany’s diplomatic victory and the consequent increase in its influence over the Ottoman Empire—risking the complete alienation of Russia in the process—or to adopt Russia’s proposal by taking decisive steps to prevent the mission from proceeding to Istanbul, potentially triggering a chain of events that could lead to war with Germany. Both options carried significant risks for Britain. Therefore, the position Britain chose to adopt would not only determine the outcome of the Sanders Mission but also have critical implications for the balance of power within the Entente and the future of diplomatic relations among the Great Powers.

However, the type of collective action desired by Russia was, in the eyes of Britain and France, tantamount to a declaration of war against Germany. Neither country was prepared for such a conflict and thus refrained from any steps that could provoke Germany. Instead, they once again opted for diplomacy, seeking to de-escalate the situation. Both nations viewed Russia’s approach as overly hasty and emotional, believing that a more measured and calculated strategy would yield better results. Acting on this stance, Britain decided to intensify its diplomatic engagements with both the Ottoman Empire and Germany. On December 11, 1913, Grey instructed Ambassador Mallet in Istanbul to urgently meet with Said Halim Pasha to ascertain how Sanders’ role differed from that of his predecessor, Von der Goltz, and to obtain details of the contractual arrangements. Subsequently, on December 13, the British, French, and Russian ambassadors formally requested a verbal explanation

from the Ottoman government regarding the Sanders Mission (BD/10/1, Grey to O’Beirne, No.417, Foreign Office, 11 December 1913).

The Ottoman response largely echoed Germany’s earlier arguments intended to placate Russian concerns. According to Mallet, the Ottoman authorities strongly opposed the demand for verbal clarifications, firmly rejecting claims that the government would be under Sanders’ control (BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.426, Constantinople, 13 December 1913; BD/10/1, Grey to Mallet, No.420, London, 12 December 1913). In diplomatic engagements with Germany, Britain revisited the proposal to relocate the Sanders Mission to Edirne and even offered assurances that Admiral Limpus could be stationed in Izmit if Germany agreed to the adjustment. The Limpus concession is highly significant as it demonstrates Britain’s determination to resolve the issue through diplomatic channel. Although the proposal had previously been brought to the table by Russia, Britain had not been receptive to the idea at the time. As we mentioned earlier, Britain was reluctant to exert much pressure on the Porte due to its sensitivity regarding Limpus. However, Germany also resisted these proposals, refusing to make any concessions. In this phase, France’s approach to the matter was notably detached, even risking aggravating Russia’s frustration. From France’s perspective, Russia was ascribing undue significance to the Sanders Mission. The French ambassador to Russia Pourtalès, in discussions with his British counterpart in St. Petersburg, argued that Sanders’ role in the Ottoman army was analogous to that of British Admiral Limpus in the Ottoman navy, asserting that the situation was being unnecessarily exaggerated. To Pourtalès, Sanders’ position was even less significant than that of General von der Goltz, who had previously overseen the entire Ottoman army. In contrast, Sanders would only command specific army units. Furthermore, Sanders held the rank of Major General, making it impossible for him to assume authority over the entire Ottoman military. Additionally, Pourtalès stressed that the appointment of Sanders was an exercise of Ottoman sovereignty, a decision no external power had the right to contest (BD/10/1, O’Beirne to Grey, No. 413, St. Petersburg, 9 December 1913).

Similarly, Bompard, the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, conveyed to Paris in his telegrams that there was no reason for alarm regarding Sanders. In his report dated December 11, summarizing developments in the Ottoman front, he stated: *“The Grand Vizier will provide all the assurances we could desire regarding the harmless nature of the powers granted to General Liman,*



ensuring that they do not undermine the independence of the Ottoman government or its authority over Istanbul and the Straits" (DDF/3/8, Bompard a Doumergue, No.611, Péra, 11 Decembre 1913) From Russia's viewpoint, the underlying reason for France's seemingly naive stance was its economic interests in the Ottoman Empire. France held the largest investments in Ottoman territories and was reluctant to jeopardize its financial stake by confronting the Ottoman government directly. At the same time, France was negotiating the provision of a £20 million loan to the Ottoman government. These economic priorities influenced France to adopt a more conciliatory attitude toward the Sanders Mission (*Financial Times*, 26 January 1914).

As can be observed, the approaches of both Britain and France fell far short of meeting Russia's expectations. This divergence highlighted a significant disagreement among the Allied Powers regarding the issue. While Britain and France pursued cautious, economically driven strategies, these approaches clashed with Russia's more assertive and radical stance. Consequently, the Sanders Mission not only became a point of contention between the Ottoman Empire, Germany, and Russia but also evolved into a source of discord within the Allied Powers themselves. This lack of cohesion among the Allies complicated the development of an effective joint policy against Germany and the Ottoman Empire, transforming the Sanders Mission into far more than a mere diplomatic crisis.

Russia failed to convince its allies and was also stalled by Germany during this process. In early December, a dialogue began between Germany and Russia regarding the relocation of the German military mission to another region. In its discussions with Russia, Germany stated that it was considering sending the mission to a location outside Istanbul. However, leaving this decision to the discretion of General Sanders revealed that Germany's approach was more tactical than sincere. Russia emphasized that the issue was not only military but also political and insisted that the change should be implemented by the German government (DDF/3/8, Cambon a Pichon, No. 589, Berlin, 4 Décembre 1913). Nevertheless, Germany ignored these warnings from Russia. Instead, Germany chose to stall Russia until Sanders arrived in Istanbul, indicating that it had no genuine intention to make significant progress during this process. This situation demonstrated that Germany was pursuing a strategy aimed at appeasing Russian pressures while simultaneously safeguarding its own strategic interests. Ultimately, Germany and the Ottoman Empire

successfully deflected Britain's diplomatic pressures. As planned, the German Military Mission under Sanders' leadership arrived in Istanbul on December 14, 1913, and officially commenced its duties.

### **The Arrival of the German Military Mission in Istanbul and the Reassignment of Sanders' Role**

On the very day the Mission arrived in Istanbul, the British, French, and Russian ambassadors paid a visit to the Porte and presented a memorandum to Said Halim Pasha. This memorandum, which carried the tone of a protest and demanded clarification, contained the following statements: "*We have learned that a German general has been vested in Constantinople with broad and significant effective command authority. This command would grant this officer a position unlike any that any officer in Turkey has ever held. We presume that the Porte has made no commitment that would undermine the independence of the Ottoman Government or diminish its authority over the Straits and the city of Constantinople. Other Powers are gradually becoming interested in these matters, and they would be obliged to request the Porte to provide information on both the agreement concluded with the German general and the extent of the authority granted to him, as well as how the Ottoman Government perceives the situation of this officer*" (BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.433, Constantinople, 15 December 1913).

Neither the memorandum submitted by the Allied ambassadors nor the Ottoman Empire's response-which assured that Sanders would hold no authority over the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus and would not assume command of Istanbul in the event of a siege-succeeded in alleviating Russia's concerns (BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.430, Constantinople, 15 December 1913). Russia continued to perceive the Sanders Mission not as a mere military modernization initiative but as a calculated move by Germany to strengthen its strategic influence over the Ottoman Empire. Assurances about Ottoman sovereignty and diplomatic commitments failed to assuage Russia's apprehensions. In fact, these declarations served only to harden Russia's position and further highlighted the divergent approaches among the Allied Powers. Russia insisted on the complete cancellation of the mission, arguing that the moderate language of the memorandum lacked the firmness necessary to yield meaningful results. For Russia, stronger and more resolute actions were imperative to prevent the mission from proceeding. This lack of alignment among the Allies left Russia deeply dissatisfied. The failure of its allies to take decisive action not only intensified Russia's frustration but also exposed

significant rifts in the Allied Powers' unity regarding the Sanders Mission.

According to O'Beirne, the arrival of Sanders in Istanbul caused a significant uproar in Russia, and the inability of the Allies to present a unified stance on the matter led to profound disappointment. Russia was distinctly dissatisfied with the "peaceful means of pressure" approach favored by Britain and France. In particular, Britain's passive stance became the focal point of Russia's criticism. Britain's emphasis on "soft power" and its reluctance to adopt a firmer position engendered considerable frustration and distrust in Russia. In his report to Grey, O'Beirne explicitly highlighted this discontent, warning that if Britain failed to take actions that would reassure the Russian government, Russia might reassess the value of its current alliance with Britain: *"I am afraid that, unless we satisfy the Russian Government of the contrary, it is certain that they will revise their estimate of the value to them of their present understanding with us"*. (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 429, St. Petersburg, 14 December 1913) As reported by O'Beirne, the consequences could extend beyond the mere loss of Russian support. Should the Allies fail to adopt the decisive measures Russia was expecting, it might decide to act unilaterally, potentially triggering actions of such magnitude that they could precipitate war between the blocs. In this context, Russian Foreign Minister Sazonov's remarks shed even greater light on the gravity of the situation: *"...Further, a consideration which weighs heavily with Minister for Foreign Affairs is the following: The only probable contingency which he thinks certain to lead to war is an Armenian rising, which would necessarily induce the armed intervention of Russia. He believes that if the three Powers suffer defeat on the question of the German Mission the Turkish Government will definitely conclude that the strength lies on the side of the Triple Alliance. They will then show themselves intractable on the subject of reforms, and an Armenian rising will surely follow"* (BD/10/1, O'Beirne to Grey, No. 429, St. Petersburg, 14 December 1913).

Sazonov's concluding remarks were nearly equivalent to a call for action. Russia openly articulated its plans to incite uprisings among Armenians in the East, viewing this move as an effective tool for resolving the crisis. Reports in the British press indicated that Russia was demanding immediate and decisive action to address the issue. Among its demands were the safeguarding of the status quo in the Straits, the appointment of Russian gendarmerie officers to regions in Anatolia inhabited by Armenians, and the reorganization of local railways

according to Russian strategic plans (*Financial Times*, 24 December 1913). While Russia's ultimate goal was to persuade Britain to take firm and definitive steps, its approach carried risks that could make war between the blocs inevitable. Such demands highlighted not only the gravity of the situation but also the extent to which Russia was willing to escalate the crisis to secure its objectives.

The British government was acutely aware that Germany would never tolerate developments in Anatolia that could lead to its disintegration, particularly when such outcomes were contrary to its strategic interests. In Britain's estimation, any move by Russia to fragment the region would be interpreted by Germany as tantamount to a declaration of war. This was undeniably a valid observation. One of the mission's key objectives was the integration of Anatolia. Throughout the process leading to the mission's execution, Wangenheim repeatedly highlighted the looming threat of Anatolia's disintegration (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das Hollweg, Nr.15 312, Pera, 21 Mai 1913). While the rapid dissolution of the Ottoman Empire aligned with Russia's long-term objectives, the Entente Powers lacked a unified strategy regarding such an eventuality. Amid this uncertainty, the Sanders Mission emerged not only as a focal point in Ottoman-German relations but also as a symbol of the strategic divergences and conflicting regional interests within the Entente. The inability of the Entente Powers to present a cohesive stance drove Russia to consider more radical measures. At the same time, the diplomatic approaches favored by Britain and France perpetuated the risk of this crisis escalating into a broader conflict. Thus, the Sanders Mission transcended its original purpose as a military modernization initiative, becoming a pivotal element in the political and strategic rivalry among the great powers. The issue had suddenly turned into one of the most significant diplomatic crises in Europe and increasingly began to highlight the possibility of war.

At this stage, faced with Russia's resolute stance and its apparent willingness to risk war, Britain intensified its diplomatic efforts to negotiate a resolution. The British government demonstrated firm determination in its discussions with Germany, seeking modifications to the Sanders Mission. Rumors that Russia was prepared to take unilateral action by deploying a naval vessel to the Straits and refusing to back down unless the Sanders Mission was adjusted in line with its demands significantly influenced Germany's decision to reconsider its position. For Germany, such a scenario would have inevitably meant war, a risk that Russia appeared willing to take. Recognizing the growing peril, Germany came to believe

that the time had arrived to make concessions. According to Count Max Montgelas, one of the two editors of *German Documents Relating to the Outbreak of War (Kautsky Documents)*, in his work *The Case for the Central Powers: An Impeachment of the Versailles Verdict*, it was France's Ambassador in Istanbul, Bompard, who brought forward this proposal (Montgelas, 1925, p. 94). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Russia, given its occupation threats, was inclined to consider such an approach. In fact, Russia was prepared to risk war with Germany. For Germany, Russia's strategy had always been to escalate the matter into a broader European issue involving the Great Powers—a goal it seemed to have successfully achieved. At this juncture, Germany deemed it essential to de-escalate the crisis in order to mitigate tensions within the Entente bloc and counteract the rising wave of anti-German sentiment, particularly within European and Russian public opinion (GPEK/38/1, Jagow an den Pourtalés, Nr. 15 512, Berlin, den 6 Januar 1914). Thus, Germany concluded that softening its position was necessary to preserve its broader strategic interests.

However, Germany's approach should not be interpreted as a definitive retreat from the Sanders Mission or as an abandonment of its long-term ambitions over the Ottoman Empire. Instead, this step was a tactical concession aimed at diffusing the crisis without deviating from the overarching strategic objectives. Germany's primary goal was to offer Russia a symbolic reassurance without enacting radical changes to the mission's structure. In his reports, Wangenheim emphasized that Russia was not in a position to act on its threats. He articulated these sentiments in a report sent to the German Foreign Office on December 17, 1913, summarizing his perspective as follows: *"Russia has repeatedly expressed in recent months, regarding Edirne, the Armenians, and other matters, that it will not passively accept the course of events and will follow its own path. These threats, in my opinion, have lost their significance. Based on my observations here, two conclusions can be drawn about Russia's position: First, Russia does not feel strong enough to address a major issue such as the partitioning of Turkey. Second, it does not fully trust the support of its allies. If Russia had been resolute, it would have acted during the Armenian question or seized opportunities presented during the Balkan War. Therefore, I conclude that Russia will ultimately calm down this time as well, and the cooperation among its allies will not extend beyond diplomatic measures. Our objective should be to provide Russia with a 'consolation document' (fiche de consolation). Should we fail, we can await subsequent developments without significant concern.*

*From this point forward, much will depend on Liman and his team's tactical approach"* (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an den Jagow, Nr. 15 493, Pera, den 17. Dezember 1913)

A few days later in another telegram Wangenheim highlighted that even Russian circles in Istanbul believed that the Tsar would not demonstrate a sufficiently strong will in addressing the crisis. For instance, his report dated December 19 referred to the opinions of Russian circles, stating: *"Alexander III would have mobilized the army. The current Tsar will retreat once again"* (GPEK/38/1, Wangenheim an das AA, Nr. 15 492, Konstantinopel, den 19. Dezember 1913). Wangenheim's report clearly highlights the perception that the Russian Tsar (Nicholas II) lacked the decisive resolve and strong leadership necessary to effectively manage crises during that period, a situation that undoubtedly created favorable conditions for Germany to implement its tactics. A tactic that seemingly resolves the issue but in reality, does not deviate from the true objective in any way.

The secret negotiations regarding "a mission change" between Germany and Russia began on December 18, one day after this telegram (DDF/3/8, Note De L'ambassade De Russie, No. 681, 29 Décembre 1913). Discussions between Wangenheim and Giers primarily focused on relocating the mission to Edirne. According to Bompard, Wangenheim informed his Russian counterpart that it was unnecessary for the German general to command the First Army Corps, as long as sufficient troops were allocated to him for training military school students. A German officer could instead be appointed to command the Corps in Adrianople. The technical details of this compromise could be jointly reviewed by the Russian and German Military Attachés in Istanbul, along with General Sanders's Chief of Staff. Bompard also noted that Wangenheim requested approximately one month to ensure that public opinion in Germany and Babiali would not interpret the situation as Germany yielding to Russian pressure (DDF/3/8, Note De L'ambassade De Russie, No. 681, 29 Décembre 1913).

While Russia proposed transferring the mission entirely to Edirne, Germany found this suggestion problematic, citing the presence of military academies in Istanbul. As far as Germany is concerned, it was essential for the officer tasked with reorganizing the army to remain in close proximity to these institutions. By the end of December, both parties sought a compromise. Wangenheim suggested that while the headquarters could be relocated to Edirne, a small contingent could remain in Istanbul for military training purposes (BD/10/1, Grey to Buchanan, No.454, St. Petersburg, 31 December

1913). Although this seemed like a significant concession, it was not sufficient, Russia introduced two additional conditions: that only a small military contingent remain in Istanbul and that this change be publicly announced within a month (BD/10/1, Grey to Buchanan, No.454, St. Petersburg, 31 December 1913). However, Germany refused these demands. Moreover, it rejected the proposal to declare Sanders' position temporary, citing disagreements over the duration. Germany insisted on a minimum period of one year, which ultimately prevented the two sides from reaching a consensus (BD/10/1, Goschen to Grey, No.455, Berlin, 31 December 1913).

The ongoing failure to reach a resolution on the issue placed the Russian government under significant public scrutiny. During a meeting with Buchanan on January 6, 1914, Sazonov openly acknowledged this challenge, stating: *"This question of Constantinople had moved Russian public opinion more than almost anything that had happened during the whole course of the Balkan war"* (BD/10/1, Buchanan to Grey, No.459, St. Petersburg, 6 January 1914). According to another report Buchanan sent to Grey on the same day, the opposition newspaper *Novoe Vremya* was particularly critical of the government. The newspaper made the following remarks: *"Novoe Vremya says that it really seems incredible that Russia should accept this so called 'compromise,' and, moreover, insist on its immediate execution. It points out that the compromise consists in giving still wider powers to the German Generals. General von Sanders would perhaps not have actual command of the First Army Corps but it would be at his disposal for carrying out the measures recommended by him. Thus, he would have the real command of the Corps while another German General would have command of Turkey's second Capital, Adrianople"* (BD/10/1, Buchanan to Grey, No.460, St. Petersburg, 6 January 1914).

The Porte's response to the negotiations between the two countries and Germany's pressure for "change" was once again radical. On January 8, the Porte issued an imperial decree (Padişah İradesi) approving Liman von Sanders as the Commander of the First Army. This move further exacerbated the difficulties faced by the Russian government in managing public opinion. Criticism of the government intensified in the Russian press, with public reactions to the matter growing increasingly severe (BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, No.464, Constantinople, 8 January 1914). Although the issue appeared to be at an impasse, Germany and Russia had decided to resolve it as soon as possible—whether for better or worse—to remove it from their agenda. Consequently, the Sublime

Porte's move had no impact on the outcome. On the very day the Ottoman Empire approved Sanders' appointment as Commander of the First Army, Germany's ambassador to Paris conveyed to French Foreign Minister Doumergue that the matter had been resolved. In a telegram sent to all embassies, the French minister summarized the situation as follows: *"I believe I can inform you that the Sanders Mission issue will be amicably resolved between the cabinets in Berlin and St. Petersburg. Russian public opinion has been overly hasty in expressing its concerns. General Sanders will soon reach an arrangement with the Porte, and he will be assigned an inspectorate rather than a command. Everything will conclude in the best possible way"* (DDF/3/9, Doumergue, Aux Ambassadeurs De France À Londres, Berlin, Vienne, Constantinople, Rome, Saint-Petersbourg, No.33, Péra,, Saint-Petersbourg, 8 Janvier 1913)

The Ottoman Empire neither had the political power to object to the compromise between the two sides nor the intention to do so. This situation might even have suited the newly appointed Minister of War, Enver Pasha, who had begun experiencing an authority crisis with Sanders from the very first days. As soon as Sanders assumed his position, he had begun submitting detailed reports outlining his disagreements with Enver Pasha and the challenges associated with his role. For instance, in his report dated January 8, 1914, he stated: *"Your Excellencies, I feel compelled to report the difficulties I have encountered in my current assignment. The appointment of the former Colonel Enver Bey as Minister of War has rendered the conditions for my position as the head of the Military Mission so challenging and complex that it is now impossible to foresee the future course of events"* (GPEK/38/1, Mutius an das AA, Nr. 15 515, Konstantinopel, den 8 Januar 1914). During this period, French diplomats in their telegrams to Paris also highlighted Enver Pasha's dissatisfaction with Sanders' authority. For example, in his report dated January 9, 1914, Chargé d'Affaires Manneville wrote: *"I am told that General Liman von Sanders will not be allowed to impose his direction, but rather, if necessary, the head of the German Mission will be made to feel that he is, like the others, subject to the Ottoman Minister of War as an ordinary Ottoman general"* (DDF/3/9, Manneville à Doumergue, No. 42, Berlin, 11 Janvier 1914).

Following the agreement, Sanders was the first to be informed. At the time, Sanders was experiencing significant disagreements with Minister of War Enver Pasha, and he immediately accepted the proposal in exchange for a promotion to a higher rank. Likely



influenced by these disagreements, the Ottoman Empire also agreed to the arrangement, and a resolution was finally reached on January 11, 1914. According to the agreement, Sanders would remain in Istanbul, resign from his position as Commander of the First Army Corps, and be promoted to the role of Inspector General.

On January 12, it was publicly announced that Germany had taken a full step back in the interest of peace. Liman von Sanders was relieved of his command of the Istanbul Corps and accepted an appointment as the Chief Inspector of the Ottoman Army, without direct command authority. In his report to Paris on the same day, France's Chargé d'Affaires in Istanbul, Boppe, noted that Enver Pasha also recognized that the triple responsibilities assigned to Sanders (Commander of the First Army Corps, Leader of the German Mission, and Inspector General of Military Schools) constituted an excessively heavy burden, and he conceded the necessity of the adjustment (DDF/3/9, Boppe a Doumergue, No.65, Pera, 12 Janvier 1914). At a stage where Germany and Russia had reached a mutual understanding, continued resistance from the Ottoman Empire could have exacerbated the crisis. However, it can be argued that Enver Pasha's ascension to the Ministry of War played a critical role in preventing the escalation of this issue. The Porte's lack of objection to the change might also have been influenced by Germany's assurance to the Ottoman Empire that "there would be no change whatsoever in the mission's objective". Considering that Enver Pasha had just been appointed Minister of War and the Sanders Mission was a state decision, this argument also seems reasonable. Whatever the true reason may be, it appears that a secret agreement was reached between Germany and the Ottoman Empire during this process. The later expansion of Sanders' authority and his role in World War I can be cited as evidence of this.

At the conclusion of these processes, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg expressed the resolution of the matter with the following statement: "*His Majesty the Kaiser has granted General von Liman the rank of Cavalry General. The Porte will now facilitate his appointment as a Field Marshal, which will naturally bring his corps command to an end. In this manner, we consider the issue resolved in accordance with the assurances provided to Mr. Kokovtsov*" (GPEK/38/1, Hollweg an den Pourtalés, Nr. 15 521, Berlin, den 15 Januar 1914; DDF/3/9, Schoen a Margerie, No.87, Paris, 15 Janvier 1914). Similarly, Pourtalés conveyed Russia's satisfaction with the outcome: "*At yesterday's New Year's reception, His Majesty Tsar Nicholas II briefly mentioned the matter of*

*General von Liman, remarking that the 'resolution' of this issue was an auspicious start to the year. Mr. Sazonov noted that he had not yet received official confirmation regarding the change in the general's position. However, I assured him, based on press reports, that there was no room for doubt on the matter"* (GPEK/38/1, Pourtalés an den Hollweg, Nr. 15 522, St.Petersburg, den 15 Januar 1914). These statements clearly demonstrated a consensus among the parties that the crisis surrounding the Sanders Mission had been resolved. Nevertheless, the political tensions sparked by the process would continue to leave their mark, both within the Ottoman Empire and among the Entente Powers, for some time to come.

### Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman Empire, facing a significant military collapse, sought to "save the remaining homeland" by requesting a military mission from Germany. Germany's decision to send a team led by Liman von Sanders to Istanbul and the subsequent revelation of this decision to the Entente Powers quickly escalated into an international crisis. What initially appeared to be an effort to modernize the Ottoman military rapidly developed into a confrontation between the Entente and Central Powers and eventually led to divisions within the Entente itself. The Sanders Mission Crisis emerged as one of the most critical diplomatic crises in Europe in the lead-up to World War I.

The mission, particularly in Russian eyes, was not merely a military reform initiative but was perceived as a strategic maneuver by Germany to expand its influence over the Ottoman Empire, potentially even a step toward controlling Istanbul and the Straits. When demands for the mission's cancellation were dismissed, Russia exerted pressure on its allies to adopt "coercive measures." However, the lack of a decisive response from its allies frustrated Russia, leading to a more aggressive stance that further deepened divisions and created a trust deficit within the Entente. Britain's cautious diplomatic approach, aimed at avoiding direct conflict with Germany, caused significant disappointment in Russia, while France's more lenient stance, motivated by economic interests in the Ottoman Empire, further strained intra-Entente relations.

Germany, fearing the crisis could spiral into an early conflict, decided to take a step back. As part of a compromise, Sanders was removed from his position as Commander of the First Army and appointed as Inspector General of the Ottoman Army. While this resolution appeared to ease the crisis, its long-term repercussions

persisted. For Russia, this outcome was publicly portrayed as a diplomatic success, but Sanders's new role did not diminish Germany's influence over the Ottoman military and government. On the contrary, Sanders continued to play a pivotal role both in the lead-up to the war and during World War I itself. Germany's move was tactical and was certainly not made to comply with Russia's demands. From the perspective of Russian public opinion, the compromise was perceived as a "hollow victory," and such an assessment was not unfounded. In light of subsequent developments, it can be argued that this was an accurate assessment.

In conclusion, the Sanders Mission Crisis illuminated the power dynamics and diplomatic tensions that defined Europe on the brink of World War I. The crisis not only exacerbated the divisions between the Entente and Central Powers but also exposed the underlying struggle for influence over the Ottoman Empire. While the Sanders Mission succeeded in reshaping the Ottoman military structure, it also significantly influenced Europe's geopolitical landscape, marking a turning point in the events leading to World War I. Although the crisis appeared to have been resolved, the trust deficit it created within the Entente and between the Entente and Central Powers persisted, ultimately contributing to the outbreak of World War I.

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