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THE DOMINATION STRUGGLE OF BRITAIN IN THE NORTH OF IRAQ AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH KURDS

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Abstract

With the withdrawal of Ottoman State from the Northern Iraq after the World War, Britain contacted with the local elements in order to control the areas where the Kurdish were living, especially in Mosul. The British administration in Iraq sent liaison officers to the region with the directives of London Government and began field work in order to be able to establish a satellite Kurdish state, including parts of Anatolia. The British administration in Baghdad, especially in Suleymaniye wanted to strengthen their dominance over Kurdish tribes by getting in touch with Kurdish tribal chiefs, making promises and providing money, weapons and equipment. A treaty with Sheik Mahmut Berzenci was signed in November, 1918 for this purpose. Although this policy did not work at the first stage, rebellion movements against the British were seen for several reasons such as no clear decisions about the Kurdish in Paris in spring of 1919, struggle of Kurdish elements with each other and the real intentions of Britain. Although the British tried all elements including military and political forces to suppress these rebellions they could not manage, there was no peace and tranquility in Mesopotamia with the rebellion attempts between Arabs in 1920.

Key Words; Britain, Kurdish tribal chiefs, Iraq, Mesopotamia, Major Noel.

BİRİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI HEMEN SONRASINDA İNGİLTERE'NİN İRAK'IN KUZEYİNDE HÂKİMİYET MÜCADELESİ VE KÜRTLERLE İLİŞKİLERİ

Öz

Birinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra Osmanlı Devleti'nin Irak'ın kuzeyinden çekilmesi ile birlikte İngiltere, Musul başta olmak üzere Kürtlerin yaşadığı

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bölgelerde denetimi sağlamak amacıyla yerel unsurlarla bağlantılar tesis etmişti. Irak'taki İngiliz yönetimi Londra Hükümetinden aldığı direktifle bölgeye irtibat subaylarını göndererek Anadolu'nun bir kısmı da dâhil olmak üzere, uydu bir Kürt Devleti tesis edilebilmesi için saha çalışmalarına başlamıştı. Başta Süleymaniye olmak üzere Bağdat'taki İngiliz yönetimi, nüfuzlu Kürt aşiret reisleri ile irtibat kurmak, onlara çeşitli vaatlerde bulunmak, para, silah ve teçhizat yardımıyla bulunmak suretiyle, bu aşiretler üzerinde hâkimiyetini kuvvetlendirmek istemişti. Bu amaçla da 1918'in Kasım ayında Şeyh Mahmut Berzenci ile bir antlaşma imzalamıştı. İlk etapta bu politika işe yaramamışsa da 1919 yılının bahar ayından itibaren, Paris'te Kürtler hakkında net bir kararın verilememiş olması, bölgedeki Kürt unsurların birbirleri ile çekişmeleri, İngiltere'nin gerçek niyetlerinin anlaşılması gibi nedenlerle İngiliz yönetimine karşı ayaklanma hareketleri görülmüştür. İngilizler bu ayaklanmaları bastırmak için askeri kuvvet de dâhil olmak üzere bütün politik unsurları devreye soksalar da isyanlar bir türlü bastırılmamış, 1920 yılına gelindiğinde Araplar arasında da isyan girişimlerinin görülmesi ile Mezopotamya'da bir türlü huzur ve barış sağlanamamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler; İngiltere, Kürt Aşiretleri, Irak, Mezopotamya, Binbaşı Noel.

Introduction

During the time from 19th century to 20th century, it was worthwhile to ensure the security of Indian shipping trade which was vital to British policy about Middle East. Britain maintained the policy of keeping the territorial integrity of Ottoman State as a necessity of interest. However, with the change of regional dynamics as a result of 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War, ensuring the territorial integrity of Ottoman State contradicted with the Britain's global interests. From this date on, England abandoned the traditional conservation policy and developed a policy based on preventing the attempts of the states like Russia and Germany to control the Indian sea route. Thereby, with this policy England began to search for ways to establish satellite states with the minorities that they could pull towards themselves in the region that Ottoman State was dominant¹.

In fact, in this period not only the British but also the Russian and the German as mentioned above took interest in the region. After the Berlin Congress, the Czarist Russia also had an increasing interest in the Middle East and tried to contact with the chiefs of Kurdish tribes and other minorities in the region. Indeed, this interest began to appear before the World War as sending diplomats, spies and missionaries to the region, founding schools, engaging in trades and making religious propagandas. The Russian wanted to expand their influence on Eastern Anatolia, the North of Iraq and Iran. The Czarist administration saw it a necessity to contact with Kurdish tribes and to give political support and to

¹ Mustafa Sarı- Haluk Selvi, "Mondros Mütarekesi sonrasında İngiltere'nin Kürt Politikası ve Van Valisi Haydar Bey", *Akademik İncelemeler*, V. 2, P. 2, Year 2007.

provide weapons. While the Russian continued their support by founding schools and sending officers as political representatives, the Ottoman State was aware of the incitement activities to the minorities in the region. Thereby, before the World War, the region became the focus attention of the Allies, this disturbed the Ottoman State of the period. Indeed, they were trying to break the activities of Russian and other Europeans in the region by some spying acts against such moves².

Germany that had established a great influence on Ottoman State with Baghdad Railway Project was seen as a serious competitor for Russia in Mesopotamia and Eastern Anatolia. However in this period, England that was intruding on Mesopotamia played politics against Russia in the regions where the Kurdish lived mostly. Although it did not have great effect, Britain started to examine the Mesopotamia and Kurdish geography by establishing consulates and representation offices³. For England these lands were vital for providing the security of India that was under surveillance. The decision of Germany to finance the railway linking Berlin to Baghdad and its growing interest in the Ottoman territory attracted the attention of Britain. In the meantime, the oil reserves in the South parts of Middle East and Iran increased the significance of Middle East for the great Powers⁴.

In the meantime, the presence of oil in the southern parts of Mesopotamia and Iran further increased the significance of the Middle East in the presence of great Powers.

During the years of World War 1, Britain and France had secret agreements with Russia that did not experienced the revolution for sharing the Ottoman lands. According to these agreements, the regions except Middle Anatolia and Black Sea coast would be shared among England, Italy and Czarist Russia. The regions where Kurdish and Arabic population lived would be under the dominance of Britain and France⁵. However, before the end of war, the withdrawal of Russia from the war as a result of Bolshevik Revolution interrupted the application of secret agreements and world public became aware of these agreements and this revealed how the the great powers wanted to see Middle East and Anatolia in post-war period. However, although the withdrawal of

²Michael A.Reynolds, **İmparatorlukların Çöküşü Osmanlı-Rus Çatışması 1908-1918**, Trans. Yücel Aşıkoglu, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Pbl., İstanbul, 2006, pp. 69-73.

³Boris Şahovskiy, "*İngiltere ve Rusya'nın Yakınoğu Politikalarında Kürdistan'ın Rolü ve Kürdistan'daki Gelişmelerin Akışı*" transferred by Mehmet Perinçek, **Sovyet Devlet Kaynaklarında Kürt İşyanları**, Kaynak Pbl, İstanbul, 2011, p. 199. (This report was sent to Moscow from Ankara in two parts on 10th January 1923 and 3rd February 1923. Sahovskiy who wrote the report, was the Damascus consulate of Czarist Russia just before the World War and had various duties as one of the leading Kurdish specialists in Russian Government.)

⁴Kemal Kirişçi-Gareth M. Windrow, **Kürt Sorunu Kökeni ve Gelişimi**, 2nd Edition, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Pbl, İstanbul, 1997, p. 70.

⁵*Ibid.*,p. 70.

Russia from the war interrupted these sharing agreements, specially the Sykes-Picot treaty between Britain and France and the revision process after the treaty, brought along the developments that would affect the fate of Middle East and Kurds.

After the World War, the collapse of Ottoman State and Germany, with the quaking of Russia's power, an environment for the policy of Britain over the region was established. England tended to spread over North, northwest and East parts of Mesopotamia after the war⁶. The English administration speeded up the espionage and political propaganda activities where the Kurdish lived before the conclusion of the World War. After the occupation of Baghdad, the British sent the most capable political intelligence officers, espically those that had been trained in India or remained in Kurdish regions after the war to make contact with the Kurds especially the tribal chiefs. The interest of the British towards Kurdish increased after the collapse of Czarist Russia⁷.

As it was mentioned in the Skyes Picot Teraty, considerable parts of the region where the Kurdish lived were left to the French administration. However, the progress of British forces beyond the boundaries that were determined after the war led Britain to become the occupier of a large part of the Kurdish lands that were supposed to be under the control of France. Although English did not have a specific policy for the Arabs, there was no certain position for the Kurds. At the beginning of the World War 1, London government ignored the the proposal of Sherif Pasha, Stockholm Ambassador of Ottoman Empire to gather "Kurdish nation for the Allied States' case". But towards the end of the war, another prominent Kurdish elite, Kamil Bedirhan vowed to provoke Kurdish against Ottoman Government if only English had supported. Many other tribal chiefs started to vow similar things. But English authorities had promised many representatives specially the Arabs. At this point English intelligence officers saw it as a necessity of their policy to create suspended situations not to give certain promises about the places where they lived⁸.

Towards the end of the war, influence of Britain on Mesopotamia was noticeable especially by propaganda activities and the Kurds had their share from those. From the January, 1 1918, the war of propaganda by British in Baghdad with publishing a newspaper called "*Tegehiştini Rasti*" revealed the future plans on Middle East. The officers of British occupation army showed a great interest to that newspaper whose editorial was Intelleigence Commander Soane. On July 4 1917, English launched a similar publication for Arabia in the name of "*El Arap*". The British Intelligence used this newspaper as an effective tool to show

⁶ Perinçek, *ibid.*, p. 199.

⁷Suat Parlar, *Türkler ve Kürtler, Ortadoğu'da İktidar ve İsyân Gelenekleri*, Bağdat Pbl, İstanbul, 2005, p. 612.

⁸Kirişçi-Winrow,*ibid.*, p. 72.

Britain's great power. In the newspaper, they defamed the Ottomans with the words such as *"It will help Iraqies to get rid of the evil Ottomans"* and continued with the wishes of *"the desconstruction of the evil Turks to turn the welfare into misery, fruitfulness into drought, cities into aridity but long live the Britain government"* On the 12th January 1919 volume of the *"Tegehiştini Rastiit"* was mentioned that Great Britain would *".....save not only the Arabs and Kurds but also their neighbourhood, would save all the nations in the World from unhappiness and give them the happiness of independence, freedom and unity"* and it was also emphasized that *"it was impossible to realize such holy requests without a fair and government like Great Britain"*⁹.

The British continued their intensive propaganda activities giving insights into opposition did not mean opposing Islamic values and emphasizing opposing the Unionist as "religious duty" in other issues of the journal. British intelligence officers who were responsible of publishing the journal paid attention to Kurdish tribal chiefs they visited the occupied regions and tried to influence them by giving various badges and titles¹⁰. Ottoman Government made some attempts through the officers in the provinces to tell people that the information in the newspapers and leaflets that British had distributed were lies by using the British methods against them¹¹.

With the occupation of Baghdad, while the British forces continued to move towards north they expedited their political activities in the region. In March, 1918 with the occupation of Kirkuk by British forces¹² the whole occupation of Iraq almost came to an end and British armies threatened Mosul. When the Mondros Armistice Treaty that ended the 1st World War was signed on 30th October 1919, the British armies were 60 kms close to Mosul. After the treaty, British threatened Sixth Military Commander Ali Ihsan Pasha who was in the region with the directives bearing ultimatum to evacuate Mosul immediately.

⁹Parlar, *ibid.*, p. 613.

¹⁰*İbid.*, p. 615; British gave importance to the newspaper, leaflets and brochure works for the propaganda towards not only the Kurds in the region but also the other elements. As a matter of fact after the occupation of Persian area, many typesetting machines and other equipments were brought from London in order to speed up the works. The occupation administration published newspaper in six different languages including Farsi, Arabic and Kurdish in Iraq. Two of them were daily and their daily circulation was about two thousand. Three of the newspapers were published twice a week and one was published bi-weekly. These were the newspapers: Al Arap (Arabic), Basra Avukatı (Farsi), Irak'ın Zaferi, Tegehiştini Rasti (Kurdish), Dar ul Salam, Gerçeğin Sesi. Besides these there were daily English newspapers like Baghdad Times and Persia Times. Despite all these publication and distribution activities British did not seem to satisfy and they requested more staff and material from Egypt and London to publish more magazines about actual politics, social, economic and scientific issues. For detailed information about this see Ali Satan (edt.), *Irak'ta İngiliz İşgal Yönetimi 1914-1918, İngiltere Devlet Arşivi Raporu*, Trans. Nilgün Engin, Tarihçi Kitapevi Pbl, 2016, pp. 250-261.

¹¹ Necati Fahri Taş, *Güneydoğu Anadolu 1919, İtilaf Devletlerinin Güneydoğu Anadolu Aşiretleriyle İlişkisi*, Tarihçi Kitapevi, İstanbul, 2014, p. 74.

¹²Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, C. I, MEB Pbl, İstanbul, 1991, p. 8.

Ali Ihsan Pasha could stand up against British threats until 8th November and delivered Mosul to British forces with the order from the Grand Vizier and moved back his forces into Anatolia. The evacuation of Mosul like this caused many criticism and it was seen as contrary to armistice and the government of the period that gave directives to Ali Pasha and British Commander General Marshall were subject to many criticism about the evacuation of Mosul¹³.

General Marshall announced that all Ottoman officers including Deputy Governor Nuri Bey would continue their duties under the command of British district governor and on November 8, 1918, Ottoman flag was removed from all official and military institutions in the city and British flag raised in all institutions including the government offices. Besides some Arab tribes acting with British started to loot some central villages in Mosul¹⁴.

After Mondros Armistice and the occupation of Mosul, both military and political activities of Britain increased at an incompatible rate. Arnold Wilson who was the general governor of the occupied regions in Iraq started to think over how to apply the British strategy in the occupied regions like Mosul along with the changes in administrative management. At this point, General Governor Wilson gave an importance to Mosul. Thus in the telegram that he sent to British administration in India on January 27, 1918 he pointed out that and stated that establishing a Kurdish Confederation in Mosul and other Kurdish regions was very important for keeping Mosul and other oil reserves at hand¹⁵. Wilson was not alone. Sir Percy Cox also pointed out that expansion of British occupation towards Mesopotamia to Kurdish region was necessary for the interest of British when oil fields were taken into account and this revealed the strategic plans of British administration in a period of post-war plans¹⁶. But in a stage where British and French authorities had not made any revisions on Sykes-Picot Treaty, French official Picot sent a telegram to Paris on January 12, 1918 warning that if British made such a formation in Mosul it would damage the French interests. But despite the insreasing anxieties of French, the region was entirely under the occupation British and British occupation administration was shaping the administration of Mesopotamia free from the allies. As soon as Basra was occupied and the British military troops moved inside, many political officers were sent to all important centres to mediate between the military authorities and local people. W. R. Hay who was a liaison officer in the Kurdish regions (Erbil, Suleymaniye, Ranya and Kirkuk) in Northern Iraq, took attention to that issue and talked about what awaited him after armistice:

“...After the armistice was carried out, while the military elements were more important; establishing administrative units and trying to preserve the law and

¹³Tansel, *ibid.*, pp. 32-36; Resul Yavuz, *İşgalin Sancılı Yılları*, Akis Pbl, İstanbul, 2011, pp. 39-43.

¹⁴Sinan Hakan, *Türkiye Kurulurken Kürtler (1916-1920)*, 2. Ed., İletişim Pbl, İstanbul, 2013, p. 84.

¹⁵Faik Bulut, *Tarih Boyunca Kürtlerde Diplomasi*, V. I, Evrensel Basım Yayın Pbl, 2015, p. 169.

¹⁶Kirişçi-Winrow, *ibid.*, p. 72.

order in Mesopotamia were our main goals. While the unit that was responsible for the political administration at first had subsidiary importance, it gained importance by including watering, mail and railway units"¹⁷

In fact, Britain went through drastic changes in civil administration in order to control Mesopotamia after the armistice. According to that, Iraq was divided into thirteen provinces that were under the administration of political officers that were responsible for the high commissioners. Each province was being administered by an assistant political commander that was responsible for political officer in the province. Division of provinces was equal to brigade and township systems in Turkish administration. In all brigades and townships, British officers were appointed to apply the tax orders and jurisdictions. The unit that they belonged was partly tax supervisorship and partly the political officers. In the regions where the Kurds lived mostly, the administration was connected to Baghdad, the civilian and military officers were spending hours among the Kurdish tribal chiefs. The main purpose of British attendants was to prevent any rebellion or conflict by applying implementations that would give trust. Ray, one of the political officers stated that they had great efforts to win the trust of the public in Erbil, Suleymaniye and Kirkuk and he also mentioned that the people had great expectations towards them at the first with these words:

"...People claimed that they had known that the British would come, the religious leaders claimed that there were prophecies in holy books about the British. Everybody believed that the golden age was about the start and expected great wellness. According to them, the agricultural production would grow tenfold; railways and canals would be built and the trade would develop rapidly. All existing opportunities were used in order to meet these expectations. But an eastern is always idealist; they don't think about the cost while drawing the plans of their magnificent castle. Therefore, the residents of Mesopotamia were not deeply disappointed when they saw that an age could not start with magical wand; they were in a great rage when they saw their individual freedom was lost. The robberies that were common in previous period became a crime that had death punishment. The corruption of the administrative income was prevented. The taxes that were lower than the Turkish administration had to be paid on time. Syria and Turkey's propagandas for these sanctions and the other reasons that we do not want to give details, the increasing reactions turned into rebellions"¹⁸

Besides, British occupation administration made intense efforts for mapping and cadastrating after the occupation of Basra in order to control the occupied Mesopotamia. In the reports that were sent to London, focused on how such a work would benefit for them while detailing the necessities. In the same way, the characteristics of the tribes and the relations of the tribes and their sects were determined during the reorganization process. In order to prevent possible

¹⁷W. R. Hay, *Kürdistan'da İki Yıl 1918-1920*, Avesta Pbl., İstanbul, 2005, p. 16.

¹⁸Ray, *ibid.*, s. 21.

incidents of race differences, taking precautions on education, security and social issues not only in the regions where the Kurds were living but also in Mesopotamia were reported. The British were looking ways for security by trying to understand the tribe system that was interwoven with different social relations in the unfamiliar region. Undoubtly, the most important source was their relation with tribal chiefs that was based on personal friendships and self-interests. Although The civilian and military officerrrs knew that none of the tribal chiefs was trustable, they saw them as the most important factor of maintaining the social ties and ensuring public order¹⁹.

1.Sheik Mahmut Berzenci Movementand His relations with the British

Sheik Mahmut Nerzenci whose grandfather and father were one of the Kadiri sect sheiks, was known as an influential figure in Suleymaniye and his family was hosted in the palace during the II. Abdulhamit. In the fights with the Russian during World War 1, the fame of Sheik Mahmut who served in the Ottoman army spread well in the regions where the Kurds lived, specially in Suleymaniye. During the fights with Russian, SheikMahmut who quitted fighting because of a problem with a Turkish commander felt closer to the British after the occupation of Kirkuk and sent a letter to Marshall and Iraq Governor Wilson about his requests. In his letter Sheik Mahmud requested a Kurdish government under the administration of British to be established and being the president of the government, he requested help forthis. But after a short time when the city was again under the dominance of Ottoman administration after the British had left Kirkuk, Turkish government thatwas aware of his relation with British condemned Sheik Mahmud to execution. But after Ali Ihsan Pasha was appointed for the 6th army commandership, he thoughtSheik Mahmud was an important figure so that he invited him to Mosul and chose reconciliation. The reasons why he chose this can be explained like this: While the Turkish army was busy with British, Sheik Mahmud and other forces of Kurdish tribes protected the Turkish army on the Eastern part, they tried to prevent Allies from occupying Suleymaniye. Ali Ihsan Pasha, appointedSheik Mahmud as the governor of Suleymaniye by giving him the title of "Nakip". But, when Kirkuk was invaded by Britihs after signing Peace Treaty, Sheik Mahmud who was the governor invited British to Suleymaniye to hand over his authority and talk about the requests he had mentioned in his letter²⁰. When Sheik Mahmud's request was delivered to British administration by the British liaison officers, Wilson sent Major Noel to

¹⁹The interest of British was not only towards the lands but also underground resources.In reports about that it was stated as "There is no better place for an archeologist" Satan, *ibid.*,pp. 250-261.

²⁰Refik Hilmi, Anılar, *Şeyh Mahmut Berzenci Hareketi*, 2ndEdition, Nüjen Pbl, İstanbul, 1995, pp. 18-20.

Suleymaniye for the meeting. Major Noel who came to Suleymaniye with a committee on November, 1 1918, he had meetings with tribal leaders, traders, religion men and notables in the presidency of Sheik Mahmud to learn the requests of Kurds. As a result of the meeting, Sheik Mahmud was appointed as a "Director of Kurds". Thus British occupation administration that wanted to take advantage of Sheik Mahmud aimed to establish a proper administration of British politics without the British forces. While Sheik Mahmud was given 15 thousand Rupy salary, his relatives were appointed to number of authorities. Noel who gave Sheik Mahmud the title of "Political Judge" speeded up his work on expanding the British dominance²¹. While Noel was making contacts in the region where he had been sent with a special mission, he wanted to go to Turkey and evaluate the Kurds there. Because Noel had many information about the stirs in many part of the Anatolia²².

The dispatch of Major Noel to Suleymaniye was an indicate of the political urgency of Britain. Although Sheik Mahmud was accepted as an political judge by the British administration, it had to be under the control of a British officer. Even though Arnold Wilson's assistant Gertrude Bell stated that the directive to Major Noel was organizing the regions that were outside the occupation of Britain by local presidents and organizing the British army, it was more extensive. In fact, according to the directives of Major Noel had authority over including extend Seyh Mahmud administration to Çemçemal and Halepçe when it was a necessity and get support from the tribes in the region and regulate the income²³.

Wilson who learnt the requests of Kurds after the negotiations with Sheik Mahmud visited Suleymaniye on 1st December 1918. In this visit he met sixty tribal chiefs including Senna, Chios and Avraman tribes²⁴. At the end of this meeting Wilson allowed the regulations of appointing Kurdish officers in the places of Arabs and Turks and accepting Kurdish as an official language. He also watched establishing mercenary unit under the supervision of British officers²⁵. After these works Wilson sent a long report to British political representative in India

²¹Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 20.

²² Mim Kemal Öke, *İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı E.W.C.Noel'in "Kürdistan Misyonu (1919)"*, Boğaziçi Pbl, İstanbul, 1989, p. 43.

²³Gertrude L. Bell, *Mezopotamya 1915-1920 Sivil Yönetimi*, Trans. Vedii İlmen, Yaba Pbl, İstanbul, 2004, p. 120.

²⁴Bell, *ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁵Sarı-Selvi, *ibid.*, p. 30; Already in notes of Major Noel, the political advisor of Sheik Mahmud, the requests of Kurdish were seen appropriate as this: The managers or vice-managers should be chosen among the Kurdish, the Kurdish toops should trained by British advisors. Bu they should be directed by Kurdish commanders, Kurdish language should be the official language of the government, the laws should be shaped according to the Kurdish traditions, annual taxation should be organized according to Kurdish, the distribution of the taxes should be done according to the needs of the people Cengiz Kartın, "Binbaşı Noel'in Hava Bakanlığı ve Dışişleri Bakanlığı Arşivlerindeki Gönderilerinde Kürt - Ermeni Münasebetleri", *Yeni Türkiye Dergisi*, V. 64, September-December 2014, İstanbul, p. 3888.

about the progression in the region and the requests of the Kurds from the British administration. This first report that was sent from Kurdish regions was evaluated by Indian Political Office and these were sent as notes about the requests of the Kurds and the detailed works of Kurdish region. In this report of December 14 which was about the effects of possible Kurdish State in the region, the impressions of Wilson and accompanying team's visits to the region where the Kurds were living. In the report, it was stated that the political environment was "perfect" for that time and it included that "...the new regime was accepted by the Kurds, independent Kurdish government or a federation under the mandate of Britain would satisfy the people..."²⁶. In addition to this information, in the report it was mentioned that if the help and protection of Kurds by British Government was improved, the people in the region would commitment to the majesty. Besides, in the report in which the agreement between Colonel Wilson and Sheik Mahmut was mentioned that the tribes from Big Zap to Diyala would confirm the leadership of Sheikh Mahmut with their own will. It was also stated that Sheik Mahmut had promised to control the region on behalf of Britain and the appointment of British officers to all administrative departments if only the lower officials were Kurdish. In addition, Indian Political Office pointed out the possible territories of Kurdish government with the following statements:

"...The territories of the South Kurdistan consists of Big Zap River in the North, Diale River in the South, Turkish-Iranian border in east, irregular regions that include regions from Big Zap to Diyala and leaves Erbil, Altinköprü, Kirkuk and Kifri Confederation regions outside..."²⁷

However, in a detailed report about Kurds, referred to France's growing interest in the region after the armistice, it was remarked that this would cause problems between France and England. With this warning Wilson emphasized that the parts about Mosul and its neighbourhood, upper Dicle valley in the Sykes-Picot Treaty had to be re-examined²⁸.

The region under the administration of Major Noel who was the political counselor of Sheik Mahmut became influenced by British. After a while, with the assignment of major Colonel to prepare a report about the Kurds in Turkey, Noel left the region and Major Soane became political counselor²⁹.

Although everything went smoothly at first, there were a lot of Turkish supporters that did not accept the leadership of Sheik Mahmut in Kirkük, Kifri. They began uncomfortable with the British influenced leaders' performances and the British mandate of the region. Sheik Mahmut and his relatives on duty

²⁶Mesut Yeğen, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Kürdistan 1918-1958*, DipnotPbl, İstanbul, 2011, pp. 30-34.

²⁷Yeğen, *ibid.*, pp. 30-34.

²⁸*İbid.*, pp. 30-34.

²⁹Ely Bannister Soane, *To Mesopotamia And Kurdistan in Disguise With Historical Notices Of The Kurdish Tribes And The Chaldeans of Kurdistan*, Weşanxaneyaya Azad Pbl., London, 2013, p. 6.

were dealing with illegal activities. In addition they started to manage according to fictitious practices, not according to the laws and they did not emphasize neither administrative organizations nor on the application that would provide legal basis. Especially with the separation of Noel from the region, many criticism about Sheik Mahmud and his men. In fact, British occupation administration in Baghdad was not satisfied with Sheik Mahmud's administration because of the complaints and illegality rumors³⁰. Major Soane was not consulting Sheik Mahmud, he was the person who gave reports to Baghdad³¹. Seyh Mahmud became unreliable for British. In the meanwhile, information about Paris Peace Conference that many important negotiations would begin to establish the new world order was delivered to Sheik Mahmud. The former Stockholm ambassador Serif pasha was selected as the representative of the Kurds in Paris negotiations. Serif Pasha had meetings with the presidents of great states in order to establish independent Kurdish State and prepared a memorandum to defend the Kurdish thesis in front of the council³². Sheik Mahmud intended to send a committee to Paris Conference in order to support the works in Paris, to establish a Kurdistan under his administration. Moreover, a letter was written to Serif Pasha in order to express the intentions of the Kurds and Zeki Resit and Ahmet Berzenci set out to deliver the letter to Serif Pasha³³. However the British who were aware of the efforts of Sheik Mahmud and kept the delegation waiting in Beirut by French authorities and prevented them to deliver the letter in Paris³⁴. The British delegation in Paris declared that they had blocked this request as they found it "*inadequate*" and "*untimely*" and wanted to smooth the anxieties of the Kurds by declaring that there would not be any decisions against the Kurds in peace conference³⁵. But both the preclusions in Beirut and British attitude against Sheik Mahmud in Kurdish regions led Sheik Mahmud to attempt against Britain in a very short time. Many secret associations were established and contacts with pro-Turkish tribes were set.

Members of the tribe who were pleased with the removal of Turkish from the region and saw British as saviors changed their minds with this new situation and the tribes as Hemevend, Pısdar and Dızı had pro-Turkish attitudes. Refik

³⁰Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 25.

³¹ Soane, *ibid.*, p. 11: According to Bell, Major Soane mentioned that Sheik Mahmud wanted to spread his personal power and authority in the regions from Hanikin to Samdınan, from Cebel Hamrin to Iran border through the British. Besides according to the information he got British would not be able to prevent such a rebellion. Bell, *ibid.*, p. 126.

³²Resul Yavuz, **Mondros Ateşkes Antlaşması'ndan Sevr Barış Antlaşması'na Giden Süreçte Türk Diplomasisi**, Atatürk İlke ve İnkılapları Enstitüsü, (Dokuz Eylül University unpublished Doctoral Thesis), İzmir 2016, p. 291.

³³Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁴Rohat Alakom, **Şerif Paşa, Bir Kürt Diplomatın Fırtınalı Yılları 1865-1951**, Avesta Pbl, İstanbul, 1995, p. 95.

³⁵ Mim Kemal Öke, **Belgelerle Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde Musul ve Kürdistan Sorunu 1918-1926**, Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Pbl, Ankara, 1992, p. 31.

Hilmi who knew Sheik Mahmud closely and had been the secretary of Sheik Mahmud expressed the situation of the region with the latest evolutions:

“...Many people who saw British as savers began to change their thoughts. In other words they became Turkish supporters and they started to make propaganda of the Turkish. Even they could not talk about Kurdish nationalism. Because Turkish supporters called Kurdish nationalists as British men”³⁶.

The authorities of Ottoman Government were anxious that the developments in Suleymaniye, Mosul and Kirkuk would spread in Ottoman lands. Ali Rıza Bey, former tenant of Suleymaniye drew attention to this and gave the following information about Berzenci movement:

“British declared that a Kurdish Government was established in order to control Suleymaniye and to include the eastern provinces like Erzurum, Van and Bitlis and appointed Suleymaniye chief of the prophet’s descendants Sheik Mahmud as the president on November, 17, 1918”³⁷

But the news about the revolt preparations of Sheik Mahmud was began to spread, he wanted Ottoman Government benefit from this situation which was revealed by a telegram to Internal Affairs on May, 6, 1919. Haydar Bey sent a letter to Sheik Mahmud according to the information from Internal Affairs and encouraged him to revolt against British³⁸. Many tribes around Sheik Mahmud had already declared that they would support him in case of a revolt. On May 21, Sheik Mahmud met Mahmud Han, Dızli tribe chief secretly and took action in order to capture Suleymaniye. British were not successful to suppress this movement that Major Soane was informed about at the very last minute. Moreover, some pro-British tribes passed on Mahmud Han’s side. After Mahmud Han troops had captured Suleymaniye, they confronted with British troops and took the possession of large amount of armory. They prevented the communication between Suleymaniye and British headquarters by cutting the telegram line between Kirkuk and Suleymaniye. After the news about the occupation of Suleymaniye was heard to days later, Colonel Wilson tried to analyze the situation by travelling over the city by a plane. Besides he invited Sheik Mahmud to Baghdad. Although Sheik Mahmud suggested some conditions in order not to accept the invitation, Colonel Wilson did not accept. As the situation became serious in Mesopotamia, Wilson came to Halepçe. But this city was captured by Sheik Mahmud’s men³⁹. When British in Kirkuk began to worry about the situation, the British forces in Kirkuk moved toward Çemçemal along with planes and tanks. Other British forces began to fight with Sheik Mahmud forces in Tasluca. The British were defeated in this fight. After a few days of fighting, as the news about the withdrawal of British from the region among the Kurds was

³⁶Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁷Hakan, *ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁸BOA. DH. KMS 50-3, Document No: 25.

³⁹Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 31.

heard, the British authority was shaken. Colonel Wilson sent 18th Division under the command of General Frayzer to Suleymaniye that was in Kirkuk in order to prevent the revolt expanding. On the other hand, he sent infantry division that was under the control of commander Bodi in order to prevent the rebellious Kurds in Kifri and Hanekin from meeting Sheik Mahmud forces. Meanwhile, a force that was formed with the infantries under the control of Commander Bridges arrived Taslica along with a force of Captain Longrik, the assistant of Kirkuk political director. These forces were encircled by Kurdish on May 25. As the entire forces of Longrik were Kurdish they changed their side and moved along with the rebellious. The British forces that were in Beji, near Baghdad were ambushed while trying to arrive at Çemçemal and they had many losses⁴⁰.

The British were faced with an unexpected, fast-growing revolt in Mosul, Suleymaniye and Kirkuk and the towns. Moreover the Kurdish who continued their daily life, showed their reaction against the British by supporting Sheik Mahmud movement. When the Kurdish tribes like Hemavend and Avroman in Iran-Iraq border, Simko Aga who was one of the important Kurdish tribe leaders supported the revolt at first⁴¹.

The British occupation administration Baghdad followed Sheik Mahmud movement which happened in North Mesopotamia and seemed as a Kurdish revolt and informed London about the developments along with some evaluations. A few days after the blaze of the revolt on May 25, Baghdad notified the developments to British Government and noted the suspicion that Turkish were at the back of the revolt. In a report to London Government, it was noted that there had been a serious disorder in Suleymaniye and the unions of rebellious Kurds were defeated by British forces and arrested the British officers and attendants. Besides it was emphasized that a supporting forces of 1500 people from Iranian Kurdistan came to support Sheik Mahmud and Turkish were at the back of this. In the report it was stated that all the movements were towards independent Kurdistan, it was emphasized that the British administration had to take some precautions such as occupation of Suleymaniye in order to prevent the growing revolts⁴²:

According to this, they warned about suppress of Sheik Mahmud movement by discussing in details, if not the Kurdish tribes that had not been in any kind of these activities would support this revolt and it could penetrate entire Mesopotamia including Iran and Mosul. It was pointed out that a serious military force could go to Suleymaniye in order to suppress the revolt and it was

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴¹M.S. Lazarev, *Emperyalizm ve Kürt Sorunu (1917-1923)*, Trans. Mehmet Demir, Özge Pbl, Ankara, 1989, p. 65.

⁴²FO.371/4191, No: E 90974, 27thMay 1919.

stated that it was important to make negotiations with Kurdish tribes in Iran and prevent them to support this formation⁴³.

When the above mentioned report that was full of warnings was sent to London, the revolt was expanded almost every Kurdish regions including Rewanduz. The absence of British military forces in Rewanduz was an important factor in increasing support of the Kurds. While the troops of General Sanders were trying to control the revolt from Erbil and Altinkopru to Kirkuk and Çemçemal, the other British forces took action to attack the Sheik Mahmud forces in Bazyan. Sheik Mahmud kept important passages in order to ambush British. When the British forces climbed mountain to surround Sheik Mahmud and other tribe forces, a few leading tribe forces left Sheik Mahmud and passed on British side. With this support, when the British artillery started bombarding, the British forces surrounded Sheik Mahmud and injured him and then he was captured. With the injury of Sheik Mahmud, the Kurdish tribes had no leader and they began to fall apart. Sheik Mahmud who was captured was sent to Baghdad along with a big British force⁴⁴.

After the capture of Sheik Mahmud, the Kurdish movement continued for a while. The British were trying to suppress the people by bombarding villages, towns and cities where the revolts were seen. As a result, 15 days following the capture of Sheik Mahmud, British troops got control of the revolt and announced that they had suppressed the revolt on August 3, 1919⁴⁵. Sheik Mahmud who was sent to Baghdad was in front of the judge with the accusation of *"rebel against Great Britain Government and cause to deaths, lower the British flag and hang the Kurdish flag"* and he was sentenced with death. But by the command from London, the British occupation administration decided to rule the execution with 10 year punishment than an exile -despite Colonel Wilson's objections -with the concern that it would cause new undesired movements in Iraq. As a result Sheik Mahmud was sent to exile in India with his son-in-law Hama Garip. However because the political developments would cause British to change their politics in Kurdish regions, the exile decisions of Sheik Mahmud would be cancelled and he would go back to Suleymaniye in 1921 and he would be allowed to carry out political struggle under the Iraq government authority⁴⁶. But after the revolt which lasted about three months, many Kurdish settlements were destroyed and The British understood that their authority in these regions were on a knife edge.

During the Sheik Mahmud movement while the British were trying to suppress it, Ottoman Government was trying to analyze the possible effects of

⁴³FO.371/4191, No: E 90974, 27th May 1919.

⁴⁴Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁵Lazarev. *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁶Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 98.

it in southeas. Because according to the information they got, some of the tribe chiefs in the region wanted to support he movement. Some of the notables who were connected to the government compressed Bab-ı Ali and applied to government and general staff to support Sheik Mahmud who acted against British.⁴⁷. Besides, internal affairs were trying to learn about the latest situation in Suleymaniye and the developments in the region through Erzurum governership. Erzurum governorship that collected the information from a captive officer after the occupation of Suleymaniye by British submitted a report about the destroy in the city and its effects on people to internal affairs⁴⁸.

Meanwhile, during the time Kurdish opposed British, Major Noel was trying to make connctions with Kurdish tribes in Diyarbakır, Mardin and Halap within the implicit knowledge and permission of Colonel Wilson. Ottoman Government was informed about it and by sending an encoded telegram to 6th army commandership tried to prevent Noel. But as it is known the government could not realize the the iportance of Noel's mission in Anatolia and he became ineffective with the efforts of Mustafa Kemal and entourages who understood the importance of it during Sivas Congress⁴⁹.

During the beginning of Sheik Mahmud movement, Mustafa Kemal moved to Samsun and started his works to organize the Anatolian movement which began with occupations. Mustafa Kemal realized whatkind of imperial danger the Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia was in through the information he got while he was in Istanbul and the impressions he had after passing through Anatolia. As soon as he went to Anatolia, in order to prevent Allies bringing the 24th article of Mondoros into force, he sent letters to the important tribe chiefs of the region warning them about British plans. For this purpose, by sending letters to Mutki tribe chief, Hacı Musa Bey, Bitlisli Kufrevizade Şeyh Abdülbaki Efendi, Şırnaklı Bey, Dervişli Ömer Bey, Muşaslı Resul Aga, Sadullah Efendi, Norşinli Şeyh Ziyaeddin Bey, Cemil Çeto from Garzan he warned them against the imperialist attempts in the region⁵⁰. However, during the warnings of Mustafa Kemal, Sheik Mahmud movement broke out in Suleymaniye. Mustafa Kemal did not remain insensitive and sent a letter to Sheik Mahmud and stating he was on his side. But it is not clear whether the letter was delivered to Sheikh Mahmud as the date which was written was same with the date that Sheik Mahmud was captured.

In the letter which began with "*Sheik Mahmut Efendi Highness...*" Mustafa Kemal stated that he resigned from his military duty for the indivisible integrity

⁴⁷Öke, *Belgelerle Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde...*, p. 32-33.

⁴⁸BOA. DH.KMS., Document No. 50-3/25, Doc. No. 78/1.

⁴⁹Öke, *Belgelerle Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde...*,p. 32-33.

⁵⁰ Öke, *İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı...*, p. 87.

of the homeland and decided to struggle with the nation till the full independence of the nation. As he continued the letter as followed "*There is no other solution for salvation and freedom for the nation except showing its power and vis to whole World,*" he wanted Sheik Mahmud to work with him. In the letter that included the decisions taken in Erzurum Congress, he pointed out that it was very important to preclude the fallacious suggestions of the British and he requested from Sheik Mahmud to support him about the expand and reinforcement in the region⁵¹.

The letter of Mustafa Kemal gives information about the struggle in Anatolia in May 1919 and also it is important that it emphasized the importance of struggling against occupations with Turkish and Kurdish together.

Meantime, while the events in Suleymaiye continued, London Government could not decide on a policy against Kurds in Northern Mesopotamia. Sheik Mahmud rebellion not only reversed everything suddenly but also damaged the authority of the British in the region seriously. Although they hardly suppressed the rebellion in three months, there was a possible danger of rebellion in the region. The situation like that disturbed London extremely. British Foreign Affairs supported the idea of making limited promises to Kurdish for the future of Mesopotamia.

Moreover in an environment where the establishment of Armenian Government on Anatoian lands was planning, it was wondered how Armenians that shared the same geography with the Kurds would react to that. Allied Powers, specially American Government that supported giving lands to Armenians maintained their ambivalency about territories of that state in peace conference. Therefore the British government had a tendency to give Iraq occupation administration limited initiatives with the condition of applying locally in order to establish peace in Mesopotamia⁵².

The British administration in Baghdad that was under pressure was trying to relieve the London government by seeking solutions to get out of existing situation. In a report on August 30, the civilian administration evaluated the events after the capture of Sheik Mahmud and stated that there was diturbance everywhere, but if they continued like that for one or two years, and if exisiting situation was stabile, there could be relaxation in the region, there were some warnings and suggestions about maintaining their administraion in the region⁵³. But in the report of Wilson the statement of "*...if they continued like this one or two more years...*" showed that the public order and domainance in the region

⁵¹ Atatürk'ün Bütün Eserleri, V.3, 3rdEd, Kaynak Pbl, İstanbul, 2003, p. 267.

⁵²IOR, L/PS/11/153, P.2906, May, 22 1919.

⁵³ Yeğen, *ibid.*, p. 92.

were on a knife-edge and it was in other words for necessity of being alert against possible rebellions like Sheik Mahmud rebellion⁵⁴.

2. The Kurdistan Mission of Major Noel

E.W.C. Noel's attempt towards Kurdish in the Northern Iraq, South and Eastern Anatolian parts during the the National Struggle has been the subject of many studies. Specially after the Mondoros Armistice, his meeting with almost sixty Kurdish tribe leaders, specially Sheik Mahmut and his activities towards provoking the Kurds in Anatolia has been attracted many researchers. Already when we look at the goals and strategies of Britain about Mesopotamia, the purpose of Noel's facilities can easily be understood.

Major Noel's adventures in aforementioned regions started in the years of war. In fact he was charged in the spring of 1915 in Suleymaniye and Ahvaz, Iran. After the war, in September 1919, he was appointed as a political officer in Egypt Expeditionary forces but worked in Britain administration staff in Baghdad⁵⁵.

After the withdrawal of Turkish Army from Suleymaniye, and the establishment of a Kurdish administration under the supervision of Sheik Mahmud, Major Noel involved in many initiatives to establish and shape the British policy towards the Kurds. Major Noel wanted to expand his works by going to Anatolia during his mission. But Noel was the mentor of Sheik Mahmud. After a while, according to the request from Baghdad, he handed over his duty to Major Soane and went to Anatolia through Mosul. Refik Hilmi, the secretary of Sheik Mahmud gave the following remark on the reasons why Major Noel wanted to goto Anatolia:

"...To know the Turkish Kurds, specially the well-known patriots and remind them the main goal of Britain was trying to rescue a nation from the oppression of great states. Besides the other duty of Major Noel was to make an agreement with these notable Kurds and prepare a program for establishing a Kurdish government."⁵⁶

London government had a supportive attitude towards the transfer of Major Noel to Anatolia despite the objections of Lord Balfour. The number of the people who supported the transfer of Noel in the government increased as he

⁵⁴In fact London government was trying to defuze by giving assurance to civil administration about not to retaliate to Kurdish after the suppression of Sheik Mahmud movement and by declaring that Mosul would be an autonomous region under the control of both British political advisoras and Kurdish chiefs. **FO. 371/4192, No: 126676**, "*Hindistan Siyasi Bürosu'ndan İngiliz Dışişleri Bakanlık Müsteşarı'na*", September 9 1919.

⁵⁵Kartın, *ibid.*, p. 3885.

⁵⁶Hilmi, *ibid.*, p. 23.

knew the region well⁵⁷, as he was experienced⁵⁸, and he knew French, Russian, Farsi and Kurdish besides English⁵⁹. But according to Balfour, the regions where Noel supposed to travel in Anatolia were under the influence of France. So sending a British agent in the region could cause the reaction of French. After Balfour was convinced that it could be done without alarming the French, it was allowed for Noel to be appointed for a duty to check the railway between Cereblus and Nusaybin. As a result, by informing Lord Curzon and after a couple of correspondences between the Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of India, he started his journey to Anatolia through Mosul road⁶⁰. During his visits aiming to travel the Kurdish regions in Southeastern Anatolia, Major Noel had an opportunity to learn the Kurds closely and their requests by meeting many different people. Noel who had information about the lifestyles and traditions of Kurds in every region he visited continued his work and prepared reports despite the many serious threats. Noel had opportunity to find out the tendency of Kurdish elites by making contacts with some Kurdish activists who established Kurdish Association in Istanbul and Northern Iraq. Noel collected his evaluations and advices for the administrators about the region in a diary. Noel also sent his reports that included his advice and opinions to British Foreign Affairs in order to enlighten the Kurdish and Armenian policy of the British Government. Noel gave information about the differences between the Turkish and Kurdish, politics of Kurdish and Turkish, the requests of Kurdish and ethnical territories of the region, Iran and Iraq Kurdistan besides the history of Kurdish⁶¹.

The works of Major Noel in Anatolia engaged the attention of Ottoman Government and Mustafa Kemal. Although Istanbul Government was late to notice how dangerous Noel's works were, the information Mustafa Kemal had

⁵⁷Öke, *İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı Noel...*, p. 27.

⁵⁸Öke, *İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı Noel...*, p. 27.

⁵⁹Kartın, *ibid.*, p. 3885.

⁶⁰Öke, *İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı Noel...*, p. 27.

⁶¹See detailed information. E.W. Charles Noel, *Kürdistan 1919, Binbaşı Noel'in Günlüğü*, Trans. Bülent Birer, 3. Ed. Avesta Pbl, İstanbul, 2014, pgs. 155-181; Noel who set out on April, 7 followed this route. April, 7 Nisan: travel from Mosul to Nusaybin (Meet with Kurdish chiefs in Mira), April: Travel from Nusaybin to Mardin (negotiations with Dakhori tribes, Amerikan missionaries and Keldanis), April 25: Travel from Mardin to Halep, May, 10: Travel from Halep to Mardin (meeting with V. Coprs Commander Colonel Kenan Bey), May, 12 Mayıs: Travel from Mardin to Midyat (meeting with Mahalmi tribe), May, 17: Travel from Midyat to Sur (meeting with Habashani tribe), May, 21: Travel from Sur to Avire (meeting with Sürgici and Şeykhan tribes), May, 23: Travel from Avire to Mardin, May, 28; Travel from Mardin to Diyarbakır (meeting with Şammar Arabians), May, 29: Travel from Dirik to Arbete (meeting with Milli tribe), June: Travel to Diyarbakır through Karacadağ (meeting with Mahalli tribe), June, 14: travel from Diyarbakır to Halep (meeting with Colonel Talbot Wilson), July, 23: Travel from Halep to Bağdat, then to İstanbul, August 19: Going from İstanbul to Halep (meeting with Cemilpaşazade Ekrem), August 21: Travel from Halep to Antep, August 25: Travel from Antep to Pazarcık (meeting with Atmili tribe), August 31: Travel from Pazarcık to Malatya (meeting with Kürecik tribe), September, 10: Escape from Malatya to Beydağ with the arrival of Turkish forces Beydağ, Semptember, 19: Travel from Samsat to Urfa, September, 21: Travel from Urfa to London through Mersin İstanbul. Kartın, *ibid.*, p. 3889.

revealed his real intention. After Sivas Congress, this threat was evaded from Anatolia by Mustafa Kemal's serious attitude about Major Noel⁶².

In these travels, many Kurdish leaders or tribe chiefs accompanied Major Noel. Major had many detailed information about the Kurds and Armenians during his visits in many regions, he felt closer to Kurdish rather than the Armenian. Moreover, Major Noel wanted these information to have important value about shaping the British policy and learning whether the Kurds and Armenian would live in the same region. Because while Noel was with Kurdish tribes, in a situation where the Kurdish rebellions towards the British administration in the North of the Iraq, the issue of administration of the Kurds and Armenians in the lands of Ottoman Government were discussed in London and Paris. Major Noel's reports from the region focused on changing the government's political views by synchronizing the Britain's point of view with the realities of the region. Despite Noel's efforts, British bureaucracy did not seem to have taken serious this kind of view. Thus Britain chose a way according to their political expectations and profits and did not consider the balances in the region which would be created after World War 1⁶³. As it is already known one of the main reasons of the adjournment of the peace treaty in August of 1920 was that Britain's expectations and benefits were not attuned with the Allies and the realities of the region could not be realized by the British.

After the echoes of the revealment of Noel facilities in Anatolia by Mustafa Kemal's efforts, on September 18, in a letter to the British commander in Baghdad, Admiral Webb stated that Noel's facilities in the region would not contribute for the peace environment ⁶⁴and that caused British to realize that Kurdish in Anatolia wanted to act together with the Turkish.

In the telegram, Robeck stated that the Kurds in Urfa and Diyarbakır were on the side of Mustafa Kemal and this put Noel in a dangerous position and it would be the best that Noel to go back in a safety place by ending his duty⁶⁵.

When Noel left the region towards the end of September to London, in the reports there were a lot of information and evaluations that would shape the British policy. When Noel arrived in London, he would offer a new proposal to enlighten the government about Kurdish and give new information. With this proposal, he offered leaving Southeastern Anatolia to Turkish administration and giving a chance of self governance to the people in the region by realizing some realities⁶⁶. These proposes of Noel were discussed in many councils

⁶²For detailed information see. Sina Akşin, **İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Milli Mücadele**, V.I, 2nd Edition, Cem Pbl, İstanbul, 1992, pgs. 534-554.

⁶³Kartın, **ibid.**, p. 3889.

⁶⁴ Öke, **İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı...**, p. 103.

⁶⁵ Öke, **İngiliz Ajanı Binbaşı...**, p. 103.

⁶⁶IOR, L/PS/10/781, P. 7328, September, 27 1919.

between Allies which came together to determine the articles of the peace treaty with Ottoman Government. Noel's detections, realities of the region and strategy to apply according to Britain's benefits were still unclear in 1920. Noel, in order to determine the situation, in the "*Iraq Kurdistan under the dominance of our Kingdom*" chapter of his report, stated those realities about the region that Britain was not sure, showed that government's foreign policy was in a dilemma:

"...Accepting this kind of problematic policy would not satisfy anybody and could not be accepted. A basic solution has to be found it should gain economic favor to Iraq and it should not hinder the national rights of Kurds."⁶⁷.

The best proof that British were not contented with Noel in the field work towards Kurds was sending Captain Woolley to Siverek and Viranşehir in May 1919. Captain Woolley was assigned to prepare reports about the demographic and political structure of the region in order to find basis for the decisions about the Armenians and Kurds. Woolley who had more limited works than Noel tried to evaluate the reactions of the Kurds when there was an Armenian government. At the Peace Conference, Woolley who prepared reports at the end of his works objected the idea of confederation with Kurds and Armenians with the words of " even the Kurds approve this at first, there won't be a chance to apply this."⁶⁸. In fact, Woolley's following evaluation about the Kurds made angry the ones who were in Paris and London for lobby activities:

"Kurdistan lies from Kars and Tiflis to Adana, Trabzon, Malatya and Revanduz. So it contains six so-called Armenian provinces some in Russia and some in Iran. It is claimed that there are 13 million Kurdish population in the area. Armenian province is a misattribution. The population of these six provinces is %90-95 Kurdish. The Turkish constitute only %1, and the rest are Armenians except some Jokobits. The majors do not accept these numbers. But if they do appropriate researches they will accept these numbers are about right"⁶⁹

In fact those findings in Woolley's report were intended to create a pro-Kurdish atmosphere. Thus Armenians could interpret their own demographic statistics as they wanted and put them in front of international committees. Both in reports that Noel and Woolley and British intelligence Officers prepared about the regions where Kurds were living had common consensus about giving Kurds' political rights or supporting these kind of formations. As it was thought the main goal was to influence the Allies who were the constituents of peace conference, those reports had considerable importance. However it should not be forgotten that the reports and observations were the local officials views that reflected the British views. And these opinions were to attract the attention of the

⁶⁷Noel, *ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶⁸Hakan, *ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶⁹*ibid.*, p. 139.

bureaucrats who were or not sympathetic to the Kurds. At that point, the British government authorities started to realize how severe their responsibility was.

In Anatolia, the Kurdish circles' support of the resistance movement under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal rather than sympathy and discord of the Allies about the peace treaty that would be signed with the Turkish, the Kurdish movement in their region put the decision maker authorities in London in a difficult position. As a matter of fact a clear decision about the Kurds could not be made, as mentioned before it was tried to prevent Kurdish tribes union against them by trying to convince them with limited support or oppression. Indeed, the basic policy that the British administration in Baghdad wanted to put into practice intended such a goal.

3. The relation of the British with Seyit Taha and other Kurdish tribes

While the British continued to fight with Sheik Mahmud movement in May 1919 on one side, they took some measures to suppress this movement and get the support of the other Kurdish tribes who were against Sheik Mahmut. For this purpose, in order to fill the lack of authority that emerged with the rebellion of Sheik Mahmud, the British administration made contacts with Seyit Taha who was the grandson of Seyh Ubeydullah, the most powerful Kurdish leader of 19th Century and the niece of Seyid Abdülkadir. Seyit Taha was well-known in Sulaymaniye and Mosul and he was known by British⁷⁰. Some Kurdish landlords he had seen in Erbil opposed to Seyit Taha who set out to Baghdad with the invitation of British political judge. As these landlords not only understood the intention of Britain but also believed that being with Turkish would be better. But despite those objections, Seyit Taha went to Baghdad and set down with the British⁷¹. In the meetings, Seyit Taha proposed to the British to establish a Kurdistan administration that included the regions where Kurds were living in Iraq and Iran under their rule and have the administration. However the British did not lean towards a Kurdistan administration that included Iranian Kurds. But despite this, Seyit Taha made an agreement on declaring general amnesty, dividing

⁷⁰Seyit Taha was born in Semdinli in 1878 and he was an educated chief. After the death of his father in 1903, he became the chief while he was 24. During the Sultan Reşat period he was invited to Istanbul and he escaped to Russia after he was kept in jail for a while. Seyit Taha who went to Iran, lived there for a while and exiled to Baku after the occupation of Iran by Russian during the World War. Seyit Taha who came to Mosul after the war, tried to get in contact with the governor Haydar Bey. After the occupation of Mosul by British he had good relations with them. While the British were struggling of dominance, they wanted to take advantage of the effect of Seyit Taha on Kurdish. Nazmi Sevgen, "Seyyid Taha", **Tarih Konuşuyor**, C. 7, S. 40, May 1967, p. 3166.

⁷¹Hakan, *ibid.*, p. 135.

the country into autonomous divisions preventing Christian superiority on Kurdish, financial aid from British⁷². The governorship of Neri, Revanduz and Semdinli were promised to Taha for the fulfillment of directives of British political officers. Also, Britain made promises that expanding dominance towards North could be welcomed⁷³. The British did not want to lose Taha while trying to get the support of another Kurdish tribe against Sheik Mahmud so they had positive attitudes. As a matter of fact during the talks with British governor Wilson in Baghdad tried to gain confidence of Taha by stating that he was sure that there would be decisions for the benefit of the Kurds at peace conference in Paris. According to Gertrude Bell, "*Keeping Seyit Taha on their side was very important for their policy at a time of possible effects of revolt in Suleymaniye....*" The guarantees that were given to him were the necessities of their policy⁷⁴. In fact the British were following a very sensitive politics. The information coming from London was examined, it was not clear what to offer to the Kurds in Paris. However the Baghdad administration with the disturbance of not being able to keep peace in Kurdish regions was trying to keep Seyit Taha on their side. At the same time the Ottoman Government was following the relation of British with Seyit Taha closely. Haydar Bey, the governor of Van, offered Internal Affairs to give the title of "colonelcy" to Seyit Muslih who was the brother of Seyit Taha in order to take him on their side. Besides the governor, wanted Ottoman Government to have some activities for the other tribes in case the British initiatives to obtain Kurdish tribes⁷⁵.

After the British had made an agreement with Seyit Taha they started to make pressure about an agreement with Nastru that had pro-British policy. But that attitude would draw the attention of many Kurdish tribes and make a ground for formation against Talha. Besides, the British had promised Talha the seignoiry in the region from Rumiye to Cezire in order to support these attempts. Meanwhile, as the British contacted with Taha, they wanted to make contact with Simko Aga who had an important position among the Kurds. Thus, the British administration wanted to control the region against rebellious Kurds by taking the advantage of these two important authorities. In a telegram that was sent from British Consulate to Baghdad on 23rd May, that point was mentioned and the necessity of ending Simko Aga's alliance with Turkish was stated⁷⁶. In fact Turkish sources gave information according to Kurdish tribes, it was stated that the British would combine their sources with Seyit Taha and Simko Aga for an attack in Rumiye and Hoy and plan to establish a Kurdish government that lay towards Van⁷⁷. With that information Ottoman Government

⁷²Lazarev, *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷³Lazarev, *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷⁴Bell, *ibid.*, p. 137.

⁷⁵Hakan, *ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷⁶Yeğen, *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁷BOA.DH.ŞFR, D. 637/83, July 15 1919.

got in contact with many Kurdish tribes such as Oromar and Deri and sent notifications to the governorships of Van and Erzurum in order to prevent such a movement⁷⁸. Therefore, Simko Agabecame powerful with the support of British in the regions in Rumiye and Iran where Kurds were living and that led Van governor to act on some attempts to obtain Simko Aga⁷⁹. In fact the British thought that making promises to Simko and Kurdish tribes would smooth them. They offered money and several titles in Iraq and other Kurdish regions on condition that they were under British dominance. Besides, British were involved in such activities they paid attention to have good relations with the Kurdish and Armenian national movement leaders. But that attention was depended on the plans of establishing Kurdish and Armenian satellite states in Near East which would have tampon role between Britain and France colonial and half colonial lands⁸⁰. British were dominant not only in the regions where Kurds lived in Iraq and Iran but also in the regions where Arabs lived. During the negotiations about division of those regions between Britain and France in Paris and London, this detail was never ignored.

The British attitude towards Kurds in order to dominate over Kurdish did not provide tranquility that British expected. Above all, Taha interfered in Kurds in Iran with the relation he established with Simko. Besides both Taha and Simko Aga were strongly opposed to Christian minorities in the region where Kurds lived to dominate Kurds. As a result, this made Kurds powerful against Christian minority but it also revealed the danger of new alliance that British could not control. Within all those accounts, British were trying to dominate the regions where Kurdish movement were seen specially in Suleymaniye with armed forces. According to Bell's statements, political relations were used on one hand but on the other hand military elements were in need.

While British liaison officers kept the pulse of the tribes they were careful about the relation of them with each other. But despite the precautions, in July, 1919 the British officers in Amediye were ambushed. In the movement of Guli and Barvar tribes, Kurdish attacked not only British soldiers but also Christian villages. British could suppress this rebellion in August 8 by sending reinforcements⁸¹. But after a while that situation in Amediya spreaded over Erbil and Kirkuk where the British dominance was in danger. People in Erbil were honed against British along with the confusion in Kirkuk. W. R. Hay who was a liaison officer in the region expressed about their desperation and despair with the following statements:

⁷⁸BOA.DH.ŞFR, D. 637/83, July15 1919.

⁷⁹Hakan, *ibid.*,p. 221.

⁸⁰Lazarev, *ibid.*,p. 72.

⁸¹Bell, *ibid.*,p. 142.

“The situation in Erbil is not satisfying. There are a lot of rumours about the confusion in Kirkuk and they were afraid of big rebellion. Agitators were making propagandas in cafes to encourage people rebel against the government...”⁸²

British officers used the relations they had with the tribe chiefs in order to prevent these kind of rebellions. But that method was based on mutual trust. British administration was unable to provide any kind of dominance in the Northern Iraq although they captured Sheik Mahmud and controlled the other effective Kurdish tribes. Despite all political and military precautions news about uneasiness were increasing day by day. As a result, in August British government chose to make an agreement with the Iran government in order to cut the Kurdish relation with Iranian Kurds. According to the first article of the agreement, British Government accepted to show respect independence and integrity of Iran. This meant the end of the “United Kurdistan” dream and it was the indicator of a process that would cause the ineffectiveness of Simko Aga⁸³. The reason of Britain’s such political attempt was uneasiness increasing in Northern Mesopotamia and a clear decision for the Kurdish could not be made in the peace conference in Paris. Britain was almost ready to downsize and change their Kurdish policy.

Despite these political attempts of British, the rebellions that started in Erbil, Amediye and Kirkuk in August spreaded over the other areas in Iraq where Kurds were living in September. With the join of Zibari and Barzan tribes into the rebellion that started in Akra region. Seyh Ahmet Barzani who was powerful over entire Kurdistan was the leader of these tribes. Rebellious captured many British officers in Akra. After a while Baberk Aga and Seyit Taha joined the rebellion. The movement that started in Akra spreaded over Revanduz and Bahdinan with the participation of Syurçi and Soran tribes⁸⁴.

At the end of the 1919, Britain managed to gain dominance hardly but that was on very thin ice. Despite the efforts of British administration in Baghdad, that uncertainty was the precursor that 1920 would be worse for the region. Meanwhile, as a result of diplomatic developments in the regions, 1920 would be very hard for British and French with the rebel of Arabs in Syria and Iraq. From this year onward, Arabians turned their swords of national movement towards the British and French, with the Kurdish rebellions that were flared out again in Kirkuk, Suleymaniye and Mosul turned Middle East into a fire circle for Allies.

⁸²Hay, *ibid.*, p.277.

⁸³Hakan, *ibid.*, p. 226.

⁸⁴Lazarev. *ibid.*, p. 74.

CONCLUSION

When British government occupied Mesopotamia, they began intensive attempts to establish political and military dominance in the region. Above all, they gave great importance to the relations with Kurdish tribes and Arabian tribes. Although such promises to Arabians were given in order to establish their own governments in the years of war, such a promise had not been given to Kurds during the war.

After the World War, withdrawal of Ottoman State from Mesopotamia, British made their connections with the Kurdish tribes stronger. This relation was improved by taking the chiefs on their side and giving limited initiatives and authorisations. Kurdish tribes believed that there would be great relief and tranquility with the arrival of British in an environment where the British liaisons had great influence.

When the Paris Peace Conference where the new World order would be discussed after the war gathered, Armenians, Arabians and Greeks wanted to influence the Allies committee about national rights and establishing a new state. Kurds could not be able to find exactly what they expected in Paris Conference because Britain and France had different ideas and priorities about the territories that the Kurds lived. Moreover they faced with some obstacles in Paris where they went to tell their case.

Although British tried to control the regions where Kurds were living and to satisfy them by commitments, they had the anxiety of possible uneasiness in the region. In fact, in the reports from the region, that anxiety was mentioned.

In the autumn of 1918, British administration in Iraq got in contact with the Kurds in the northern Iraq and invited them in a formation under their control. But the British in Baghdad began to toughen their policy towards Kurds who were opposed to British in the Kurdish regions. Although British that suppressed the revolt by military forces which began in May and increased in August and September, in 1920 it was seen that there were differences between the realities of the region and the information in the reports. Kurdish influenced the British with the tribal structures, their relation with each other, religious systems; but after the withdrawal of Turkish from the region they could not be in a position to fill in the organizational absence and this put British in a difficult position. According to British, Kurds could not understand the expectations of the British as expected. But uneasiness in the region became visible. Intelligence Officer W. R. Hay pointed out British administration dilemma about withdrawing from the region with the following statement:

“...If Britain withdraws from the region without Turkish administration or another power, I have to say that the country will face with a serious anarchy. Although the financial reasons were the reasons of withdrawal, it is difficult to think to give up public relief for the tyrants and justice with a focus on only our

own interests mean leaving a nation without a head in the fragmented situation..."⁸⁵

Along with all these plans, at the point of reorganizing the order in Middle East, Kurdish are the the main reasons forthe Allies. Moreover, with the revision of Sykes-Picot Treaty in September, 1919 between French and British changed the Arabic views on Allies. This change caused a serious uneasiness in Mesopotamia, specially in Syria and Lebanon. As a result, that revision and the negotiations between Allies in Paris and London disturbed the Arabians and Arab rebellions started in 1920. So there were not only Kurdish rebellions in Mesopotamia but also Arab rebellions that caused domination problems. Britain tried to come over those obstacles with the support of French and then chose to soothe Kurdish and Arab in Iraq and Syria for a short time.

⁸⁵Hay, *ibid.*,p. 335.

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