

# The Road to Sèvres: Kurdish Elites and Question of Self-Determination After the First World War

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# The Road to Sèvres: Kurdish Elites and Question of Self-Determination After the First World War

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This paper focuses on Kurdish elites and their quest for a Kurdish state during the Peace Conference that took place in Paris after the First World War. Cross-examining the British, French, Kurdish, and Ottoman sources, this paper shows that despite the failure to establish a Kurdish state in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire the Kurdish elites, with their diplomatic and political experience and networking had equal, sometimes better, capacity to the leaders of other delegations in the Peace Conference. To demonstrate this, I focus on Kurdish elites, who were experienced in the imperial statecraft, especially Şerif Pasha, Sheikh Abdulkadir, Emin Ali Bedirhan, and Süreyya Bedirhan, lay out the complex relations amongst them and describe their efforts to represent the Kurds from the beginning of the Peace Conference until ratification of Treaty of Sèvres on 10 August 1920. In spite of what the available literature suggests, Kurdish elites, using all the available tools at their disposal, negotiated effectively for a Kurdish state. The contribution shows that the Kurdish elites not only presented a series of arguments during the Peace Conference but also laid down the basis for the Kurdish nationalism of the decades to come, with a historical narrative and a cartographic imaginary.

Keywords: Paris Peace Conference, Treaty of Sèvres, self-determination, Kurds, Şerif Pasha, Sheikh Abdulkadir, Emin Ali Bedirhan

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“Is there a Kurdish nation in history? What region does it populate? Do the Kurds form a majority in the regions they inhabit to justify the principles of President Wilson? Do the Kurds deserve their independence?” These are “preliminary questions” that Şerif Pasha (also known as Chérif Pacha), the head of Kurdish delegate to the Paris Peace Conference (hereafter Peace Conference), posed to the British delegate in Paris at the beginning of his twenty-five-page letter, which he wrote in early October 1919 in protest against the Armenian claims on the Eastern Anatolian provinces. In this lengthy letter, accompanied by a map of Kurdistan, he first presents the history of the Kurds, starting from antiquity until the First World War. He underlines in his letter that the Kurds object

to the claims of Armenian delegation, led by Boghos Nubar Pasha, on the provinces of Erzurum, Muş, Bitlis, Van, and Harput, and demands they be included in a future Kurdish state. He ends his letter by stating that the Kurds ask for independence to progress, explore and use the natural resources in Kurdistan and to live in peace with the neighbouring countries. To accomplish this, he suggests the Peace Conference should “appoint an international commission responsible for drawing the borders of Kurdistan according to the principle of nationalities, which include all the regions where Kurds are in the majority.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Minute “Kurdistan,” memo by Chérif Pasha, 9 October 1919, The National Archive, the UK (TNA), FO 608/95.

This was not the first time the Kurdish delegation submitted such a long memo to the Peace Conference. From the end of 1918 until the Treaty of Sèvres was signed on 10 August 1920 Şerif Pasha made several attempts to argue the case for the establishment of a Kurdish state, either as an autonomous region or an independent state.<sup>2</sup>

One of the best-known documents he submitted to the Peace Conference was the *Memorandum on the Claims of the Kurd People* (6 February 1919), which was later elaborated with supporting arguments and published in French for a wider audience.<sup>3</sup> The document, which will be discussed below in more detail in comparison with the demands of other Kurdish leaders, was addressed to the Allied Powers, especially to Britain. It argued that a state for the Kurds would stabilize the region, secure the rights of the Kurds, and create a buffer zone against the threat of Bolshevik Russia.<sup>4</sup>

The declaration of the principle of national self-determination by Woodrow Wilson, the surrender of the Ottoman Empire after the Mudros Armistice (30 October 1918), and the arrival of Allied forces in Istanbul in November 1918 reflected a resurgence of nationalist activities among the traditional, intellectual and Westernized Kurdish leadership inside and outside the Ottoman Empire during the final year of the First World War. The emergence of several candidates for leadership among the Kurdish elites shows the growing interest in a Kurdish state during the war. It also created stiff competition for leadership positions, both for the delegation in Paris and for ruler of a future Kurdish state, and thus sharp divisions among the Kurdish nationalists on the way to the Peace Conference.

Once the Peace Conference started in Paris the British raised the question by who was to lead the

Kurdish delegation. While Şerif Pasha initiated the negotiations in Paris on behalf of the Kurds, two other Kurdish national leaders were in close communication with him: Sheikh Abdulkadir and Emin Ali Bedirhan, respectively president and vice-president of *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, SAK) based in Istanbul.<sup>5</sup> All of them were in constant communication with representatives of the Allied Powers, especially the British officials, while following developments in Kurdistan through their agents. This work focuses on these three leaders, which I call “imperial elites”, who were well educated, urbanized, experienced with imperial bureaucracy, resided most of their life outside of their homeland, and developed a comprehensive Kurdish national perspective. While focusing on them, I will also touch on the role of Kurdish local leaders, which I name as “provincial elites”, especially Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, Sayyid Taha II of Nehri, and Simko Agha of the Shikaki tribe, who were located in various parts of Kurdistan during the post-war period. I will compare their career from aspects of ideology, approach to the status of a Kurdish state, relations with the imperial centre, leadership experience, generational difference, education, and civil service experience.

Despite the strong presence of Kurdish leadership (although not always united), the British and French, as well as the Ottoman government in Istanbul and the Kemalists in Anatolia, dismissed their demands and claimed that the Kurds had no leader to represent them; instead they assumed the role to represent the interests of the Kurds. Similarly, British officials in Istanbul, Baghdad, and Paris missed no opportunity to denigrate the Kurdish leadership and national movement. Some studies on the representation of the Kurds in Peace Conference reflect these views presented by British diplomats. These studies portray the Kurdish leaders as passive, ready to be manipulated, and unaware of policies planned for the Kurds by the British (McDowall 2004, 115–50; O’Shea 2006, 108–22; Kaya 2020, 73–87; Eskander 1999, 92–162). By cross-

<sup>2</sup> As the Allied Powers revised their plans for the post-Ottoman territories in the Middle East, the Kurdish leaders also readjusted their position on their demands for autonomy and independence. Therefore, one may not see a clear statement by Kurdish leaders whether they wanted an autonomous or an independent state as Allied Powers kept changing their decisions.

<sup>3</sup> Minute “Notes on the claims of the Kurds,” 14 February 2019, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Chérif Pasha to Lord Derby, British Ambassador in Paris, 6 June 1918, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>5</sup> *Kürd Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress), which had been established in 1908 largely by educated and urban nationalists and led by Sheikh Abdulkadir, was reactivated in December 1918 as *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan) by a more diverse body of members, including tribal leaders (Olson 2010, 21).

referencing Ottoman, British, and French archival sources, and Kurdish journals this work closely analyses Kurdish leaders, especially Şerif Pasha, Sheikh Abdulkadir, Emin Ali Bedirhan and his son Süreyya Bedirhan. This study emphasizes that despite the failure to establish a Kurdish state in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire the Kurdish elites, with their diplomatic and political experience and networking, had equal capacity to the leaders of other delegations in the Peace Conference and used effectively all the available tools at their disposal in negotiation for a Kurdish state.

### 1 Leaders for a Kurdish State

In a letter written on 2 October 1919 to the Peace Conference Sheikh Abdulkadir makes a distinction between two types of Kurdish “nationalist.” He states “the Kurds animated by an impetuous nationalist ardour can defend themselves well, arms in hand and drive impostors from their country. But before we get there we want to exhaust all peaceful means and avoid disturbances that Unionist agents could create.”<sup>6</sup> Here Abdulkadir definitely sees himself as a “peaceful” Kurdish nationalist versus the ones with “arms in hand.” Although it is not easy to make a clear distinction between these two groups one may classify the first group (Sheikh Abdulkadir, Şerif Pasha, Emin Ali Bey, Süreyya Bedirhan) as “imperial elites” and the second group (Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, Sayyid Taha II, Simko Agha) as “provincial elites.”

Provincial elites had a more traditional education and never became part of the Ottoman bureaucracy. They had close ties with Kurdish tribes. Most importantly they represented a younger generation—all under forty at the end of the war—that sensed the need for radical change and had little patience for gradual transformation. They were born and socialized in empires (the Ottoman Empire ruled by Sultan Abdülhamid II in the case of Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji and Sayyid Taha II; and Naser al-Din Shah’s Iran in the case of Simko). This generation was also more rational and pragmatic, as they experienced day-to-day changes on the ground. All they wanted was to rule a

small part of Kurdistan where they were familiar with the geography, resources, and population. Each of these leaders was sole ruler of their region in Kurdistan—Simko in northern Iranian Kurdistan, Taha II in central, Mahmud Barzanji in southern and Mahmud Pasha of the Milli in western Kurdistan—and faced with no resistance from any other contender. The most prominent leader was Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, who sent an envoy to Paris—albeit with no success—and met with British representatives in Baghdad and Sulaimaniya. Other leaders of his generation in Kurdistan also contacted French and British officers in Kurdish regions to press for a Kurdish state.

The older generation, the imperial elites represented by Şerif, Abdulkadir and Emin Ali, were over fifty years of age (the latter two close to seventy) at the end of the First World War. They were more idealistic and sought a united Kurdistan. Their idealism was very much interwoven with their pragmatism and rationalism, shaped by their diplomatic, bureaucratic, and political experience. They were accustomed to an empire that was still functioning partially in a traditional way while it was gradually moving towards a modern state. These elites were born into a more diverse and tolerant milieu, where intermingling among the religious and ethnic groups was more common. That background prepared them for negotiations with other states and societies.

#### 1.1 Şerif Pasha

Among the imperial elites, Şerif Pasha possessed excellent negotiation skills because of his background in diplomacy and politics. He was born in Istanbul in 1865 to a noble Kurdish family that served under Baban dynasty in Sulaimaniya, and received a French-style education, first in the prestigious Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultani in Istanbul, and later at Saint-Cyr Military School in Paris. His father, Said Pasha, served as minister of foreign affairs under Sultan Abdülhamid II (ruled 1876–1909), and Şerif Pasha also chose to work in the bureaucracy, serving as an aide-de-camp in the palace, military attaché in Paris, and finally as the Ottoman ambassador to Sweden. He clandestinely supported the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which deposed Abdülhamid II in 1909. He was one of the founding members of *Kürd*

<sup>6</sup> Comité central de la ligue des Kurdes du Kurdistan 1919, Constantinoğlu, 2 October 1919 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 183).

*Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress, KSMP), but never participated actively in its work. A few months after the change of regime, Şerif decided not to participate in the CUP government because of its authoritarian leaning. After threats of imprisonment he departed for Paris, which was to be his permanent place of exile. He established the Ottoman Radical Reform Party (*Islahat-ı Esasiye-i Osmaniye Fırkası*) and financed the opposition groups in Europe. As part of his opposition, he established a monthly journal titled *Mècheroutiette* (The Constitutional) and had several political dissents write articles for it in French and Turkish (Atmaca 2018, 131–36).

When the First World War began in November 1914 Şerif Paşa was already in contact with the British officials seeking assurances about the future of Kurdistan. His offer of cooperation was rejected because the British did not envisage any operation in Kurdistan (Driver 1919, 77; Bell 1920, 60; Wilson 1936, 130).<sup>7</sup> Besides, until the capture of Baghdad in March 1917 the British had little interest in Kurdish affairs. Several months before the Ottomans accepted defeat and surrendered to the Allies the British government finally responded to Şerif Pasha. While he was in Monte Carlo, Lord Derby, British Ambassador to Paris, sent him an invitation in June 1918 for a talk with Sir Percy Cox, the temporary British Minister in Tehran, in Marseille.<sup>8</sup>

In his reply to Lord Derby Şerif Pasha portrays himself as the “ideal” leader for a future Kurdish state. The leader should not be someone with tribal ties, which would cause strife between rival tribes, but someone “belonging to the Kurdish race, having a political past, having occupied a preponderant position in the [Ottoman] Empire and above all having remained outside of rivalries and local intrigues.” People would have confidence and respect for the authority of such a leader with “impartiality.” Thus, he adds

with passionate desire: to “preserve my race from the danger of anarchy leading it to its complete destruction, I would willingly sacrifice myself to assume the heavy responsibility of such a task if the His Britannic Majesty’s Government would honour me with its entire confidence that I believe I fully deserve with my steadfast attachment to its traditional and secular policy.”<sup>9</sup>

As an experienced diplomat who had contact with many officials and politicians in Europe, Şerif was well aware of the need to obtain the consent and backing of the Allied Powers to represent the Kurds at the Peace Conference or become the leader of a future Kurdish state. So, from very early on he sought the support of the British and French governments. As Şerif states in his letter, he definitely had ambitions to become the leader of a newly created Kurdish state and repeated his desire for this several times. In a long despatch written on 20 May 1919 and addressed to A. J. Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, he reiterated his desire to lead Kurdistan, and he added that “if His Majesty’s Government could find another leader possessed of the necessary qualifications he would not be averse from being relieved of the responsibilities and sacrifices involved in the organization of a Kurdish state.”<sup>10</sup>

On 29 July of the same year Şerif Pasha sent another letter to British officials stating that he was elected as the “head of the future Kurdish state” and asked for the dispatch of a mixed commission of his own and British representatives to tour predominantly Kurdish areas.<sup>11</sup> The dispatches and reports prepared by British officials in Baghdad, Cairo, London and Paris clearly reveal that they did not see Şerif Pasha as a leader for a Kurdish state and for the time being they wanted to limit his position to the position

<sup>7</sup> In a letter sent on 6 June 1918 to Lord Derby, Şerif Pasha reminds him of a letter that he sent on 23 November 1914, offering his service to the British government. Letter from Chérif Pasha to Lord Derby, British Ambassador in Paris, 6 June 1918, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>8</sup> It seems that the French were aware of the meeting between Şerif Pasha and P. Cox and planned to involve in shaping the Kurdish delegation to the Peace Conference. Letter from French Consul in Baghdad, 19 April 1919 (Abdulla 2004, 116).

<sup>9</sup> It seems that Şerif Pasha kept an original copy of the letter to Lord Derby and accompanied it with a cover letter to L. Mallet. From Chérif Pasha to L. Mallet, 23 February 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>10</sup> Foreign Office to A.J. Balfour, “Situation in Kurdistan”, 12 September 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>11</sup> The report does not clearly state who Şerif Pasha was referring to for his election to lead a future Kurdish state though he might have been referring to SAK’s nomination to lead the Kurdish delegation. Foreign Office to A.J. Balfour, “Situation in Kurdistan”, 12 September 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

of Kurdish representation in the Peace Conference. They rejected his request on the grounds that his “age and long residence in Paris entirely unfit him for the role of Chief of Kurdistan.”<sup>12</sup> Above all, as the Peace Conference proceeded, he started to realize that the British did not want to work with him in Kurdistan, instead they preferred someone more local like Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji or Sayyid Taha II, who were already in the region. Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji or Sayyid Taha II were in close contact with British officials in Kurdistan. Both leaders repeatedly inserted their desire of becoming rulers of an independent state.<sup>13</sup> Compared to other local Kurdish leaders, Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji was probably the best candidate to lead an autonomous Kurdistan in the eyes of British occupiers. He had already proved himself by forcing the Ottoman army out of Sulaimaniya and had started to negotiate with the British in Baghdad asking them “not to exclude Kurdistan from the list of liberated peoples.”<sup>14</sup> In fact in November 1922, two years after the peace treaty was signed, he even declared himself as the king of Kurdistan (Jwaideh 2006, 193; Edmonds 1957, 301-2; *Roj-i Kurdistan*, no. 1, 15 November 1922).

Şerif Pasha announced his candidacy to be the head of the delegation before SAK initiated its search for a candidate to represent the Kurdish interest in Paris. After his candidacy was confirmed by SAK members Sheikh Abdulkadir sent a telegram to Paris stating: “I am honoured to inform that Şerif Pasha is the person in charge to claim the rights of Kurdish people on our behalf.”<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of 1919 SAK under the leadership of Abdulkadir was more united than ever and Emin Ali Bedirhan was still its vice-president. Thus, we can safely assume that the latter agreed to

<sup>12</sup> Foreign Office to A.J. Balfour, “Situation in Kurdistan”, minute no.111245, 12 September 1919, FO 608/95.

<sup>13</sup> In mid-May Sayyid Taha II, who was considered by British officers to have “greater influence with the Kurds in Central Kurdistan and North-Western Persia than any other individual,” went to Baghdad to press for a united Kurdistan, including the Kurds in Iran, under British protection. Letter from Chief Political Officer, Baghdad, 12 May 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>14</sup> Political, Baghdad, 1 November 1918, TNA, FO 371/3407.

<sup>15</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (MAE), La Courneuve, France, Correspondance Politique et Commerciale, Levant 1918-1919, Caucasse-Kurdistan, 47 CPCOM, Série: E, Fiches: 69, 6 March 1919.

have Şerif Pasha as the head of the Kurdish delegation in Paris. Indeed, Emin Ali co-signed several letters to Şerif Pasha (i.e., with Abdulkadir). Likewise, Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji prepared a petition signed by Kurdish notables authorising Şerif Pasha to speak on behalf of both southern and northern Kurdistan in the Peace Conference (Hilmi 1988, 19, 65–66). Barzanji also sent a delegation in support of Şerif Pasha, but its members were prevented by the British to depart for Paris (Hilmi 1988, 65-6).<sup>16</sup>

Compared with other Kurdish leaders in Istanbul, Kurdistan and Cairo, Şerif had little chance to be accepted as a leader among the Kurdish elites, tribal leaders, tribesmen and peasants. It seems that he had no contact with his compatriots in southern Kurdistan, and little awareness of how the war had transformed the political and social landscape in his native country. His comfortable life in France before and during the war had made him even more detached from the realities on the ground.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand the memorandums and letters he sent to the British and the Allies show that he quickly educated himself in the history and geography of Kurdistan and started to communicate with the leaders in Istanbul and Kurdistan.<sup>18</sup> Noel, the British civil commissioner in Baghdad, described Şerif Pasha as “very well spoken of in Southern Kurdistan,” and thus a suitable candidate to represent the Kurds at the Peace Conference.<sup>19</sup> Arnold Wilson called him “intelligent” because of his proposal for a mandate system in Kurdistan (Wilson 1936, 130).

<sup>16</sup> Kutschera (2001, 38) claims that the British wanted Şerif Pasha to be the only representative for the Kurds, therefore they did not allow any other Kurdish delegation to be present in Paris, including the delegation from Cairo.

<sup>17</sup> Arfa, who led military campaigns against the Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan in 1921, writes that Şerif Pasha spent the years of the First World War in his residence “Mon Keif” (my joy) in Monte Carlo as a “typical old Turkish grandee, easy going”, “fond of champagne, night clubs and good life” and with “plenty of money”. Arfa adds that he learned much later that Şerif was a Kurd when he went to Paris after the war as the head of the Kurdish delegation. He also states that Şerif was “clever enough not to antagonize Iran by claims on the Iranian Kurds.” Arfa (1966, 31).

<sup>18</sup> Şerif Pasha, in preparation of his memorandum and reports, probably received help from members of delegate such as Fahri Abdi Bey, who was sent from Istanbul.

<sup>19</sup> Political, Baghdad, 12 November 1918, TNA, AIR 20/512.

## 1.2 Sheikh Abdulkadir

Şerif Pasha may have had the diplomatic experience, financial means, education and fame among the Allied Powers and dissident Ottomans. But all these meant little compared to the fame that Sheikh Abdulkadir, who was born in the town of Nehri in Hakkari Sancak in 1856, had among his brethren in Istanbul and Kurdistan. Among the Kurds he was regarded as a religious leader because of his Khalidi-Naqshbandi lineage which he inherited from his father Sheikh Ubeydullah, a Naqshbandi-Khalidi sheikh who led the Kurdish rebellion in late 1880 and briefly captured part of Iranian Kurdistan. After the Ottomans suppressed the rebellion, they exiled Ubeydullah and Abdulkadir to Istanbul. After a year there they managed to escape and return to their homeland. The Ottomans recaptured and exiled them again, this time to Mecca. After a year of exile there Ubeydullah passed away in 1883. Shortly afterwards Abdulkadir was allowed to travel to Istanbul (Ateş 2014, 775–83). To keep the young Abdulkadir busy and away from his homeland Abdülhamid II appointed him first as a clerk to Beirut and later as a judge to head the penal court in Damascus and Bitlis (Güneş 1997, 149; Yalçın 2016, 41).<sup>20</sup> He became a supporter of the CUP and was exiled yet again, this time to Medina, after he was involved in a failed putsch against Abdülhamid II in August 1896. He was able to return to Nehri only after the Young Turks revolution in 1908.<sup>21</sup> After three months in his hometown he left for Istanbul to establish the KSMP. His return to Istanbul was a cause for huge celebration among the Kurdish population (Malmisanij 1999, 16; Alakom 1998, 100). In 1908 he was appointed to the Ottoman senate (*Meclis-i Âyan*) and remained in the post until 1920.<sup>22</sup>

He established the SAK in late 1918 while keeping his position in the Ottoman senate and became a member of the *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Liberal Entente), an oppositional party to the CUP. In March

1919 Abdulkadir was promoted to chairman of a sub-committee (*Şûra-yı Devlet*) in the Ottoman senate. Abdulkadir was well respected by the Kurds in northern Kurdistan.<sup>23</sup> Though he was more influential among the Kurds in Istanbul, a population of 15,000-20,000 people, whose majority was made of working class. He supported Şerif Pasha's candidacy to lead the Kurdish delegation to the Peace Conference. He defended almost all actions taken by Şerif Pasha, including his cooperation with the Armenian delegation in Paris (İkdâm 1920).

In fact, looking at Abdulkadir's career one can see the parallels with Şerif Pasha's political life, which enabled the two leaders to work well together. Both had served in various positions within the bureaucracy of the Ottoman Empire. Both had experienced long periods of exile, and had to remain away from Kurdistan and the centre of the empire. While exile interrupted their connection with their clansmen and locals, it led them to develop a national perspective. Although their educational backgrounds differed (Şerif Pasha received a mostly secular and Western education while Abdulkadir was educated in religious madrasas), both were well educated and spoke various languages, especially French, which was vital for delivering their message to the Allied Powers. Like all the other nationalists in the post-Ottoman Middle East, both actively began espousing Kurdish nationalism only when Ottoman Empire was nearing collapse. Politically they both leant towards a more liberal ideology and supported working with the Liberal Entente. Both also defended the idea of Kurdish autonomy under a confederate Ottoman empire headed by the caliph. Above everything else, both hoped for a leadership position in a future Kurdish state. Unlike Şerif Pasha, however, Abdulkadir was less open about his desire for the job, probably because he was surrounded by other contenders like Emin Ali Bey in Istanbul and his nephew, Sayyid Taha II in Kurdistan.

When the war ended, Abdulkadir proposed a Kurdish state that he would lead under the protection of the British mandate. Once he realized that the British had no plan for northern Kurdistan but were focused on its southern part, he decided to negotiate the terms for an autonomous Kurdistan with the Ottoman

<sup>20</sup> Meclis-i Ayan Üyeleri Özlük Dosyaları, 42 Sicil No'lu Seyyid Abdülkadir Efendiye ait Özlük Dosyası, TBMM Arşivi.

<sup>21</sup> A letter from Baghdad states that he left Medina with his family. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı/ Directorate of Presidential State Archive of Turkey, Istanbul (BOA) Y.PRK.UM. 65/71 (14.R. 1321/ 15 July, 1903).

<sup>22</sup> BOA, İ.DUİT, 11/1 (20.Za.1326/ 14 December 1908).

<sup>23</sup> BOA, İ. DUİT, 9/56 (01.C.1337/ 4 March 1919).

government in Istanbul. From his experience with the CUP he knew that the Kemalists in Anatolia would bitterly oppose Kurdish secession and would give little chance of a Kurdish autonomous state under their regime. His position was challenged by the vice-president of the SAK, Emin Ali Bey, another prominent notable with roots in the princely family of Bedirhan. Abdulkadir declared in late February 1920 that he was for an autonomous and united Kurdistan under the protection of the Ottoman government.<sup>24</sup> He was opposed by Emin Ali and his supporters, who wanted an independent state. This caused a split in the SAK, but his position in the organization was solidified thanks to the support from the Kurds in Istanbul.

### 1.3 Emin Ali Bedirhan

Emin Ali Bey was probably the most ardent nationalist among the three Kurdish leaders. The son of Bedirhan, the last emir of the Bohtan emirate, Emin Ali was born in 1851/52 in Kandiye (Heraklion) on the island of Crete, where his family lived in exile. After completing his secondary education, he embarked on a bureaucratic career first as a clerk in the Ottoman administration in Syria and Istanbul and later as judicial inspector in courts in Ankara, Adana, and Sivas in the 1880s. After his family was involved in the killing of Rıdvan Pasha, mayor of Istanbul, his career was put on hold in March 1906. Later Emin Ali and his household were sent to exile respectively Isparta, Acre and finally Hama until 1908.<sup>25</sup> Like Şerif and Abdulkadir, Emin Ali also remained far from his native land for almost all his life, though he kept his cultural ties alive. He was well versed in the Kurdish language, in which he was an accomplished poet.<sup>26</sup> It is not clear if he spoke Kurdish with his children, but he certainly influenced them to be true to their roots. We see this coming fruition in his sons Celadet, Kamuran and Süreyya, who were forerunners of Kurdish nationalism in the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup>

Emin Ali became politically active after the revolution of 1908 as one of the founders of the KSMP and worked closely with Sheikh Abdulkadir. Like all the other Kurdish elites he started to support the idea of a Kurdish state only after the end of the war. The KSMP's activities stopped sometime before the First World War. After the war Emin Ali became the vice-president of the SAK and worked with Abdulkadir for a second time. His involvement in the SAK brought him the opportunity to become the vali of Diyarbekir, thus becoming the ruler of his ancestors' land, and the aspirant ruler of all Kurdistan, after seventy years of exile, thanks to a deal with the Ottoman government that decided to install governors of Kurdish descent in Kurdistan (Noel 1919, 54). However, nothing came of the appointment once the Ottoman government realized that the SAK was negotiating with British representatives for a possible autonomous Kurdish state. Sheikh Abdulkadir lost his position as the president of Council of State (*Şûra-yı Devlet*) and the offer made to Emin Ali was retracted (Özoğlu 2004, 98; Henning 2018, 353). Emin Ali was the leader of the secessionist camp in the SAK. Emin Ali did not openly express his desire for an independent state because of Abdulkadir's position in the SAK and subsequently fell out with him because of the latter's support for an autonomous Kurdish state.<sup>28</sup> After he left the society, he established *Kürd Teşkilat-ı İctimaiye Cemiyeti* (Fr. Ligue Sociale Kurde; Society for Kurdish Social Organization).<sup>29</sup> Shortly afterwards he left Is-

<sup>24</sup> De Robeck, Constantinople, 27 February 1920, TNA, FO 371/5067.

<sup>25</sup> Emin Ali Bey's official biography until 1908 is available in *sicill-i ahval defters*, BOA, DH.SAİD. 173.83. For a short biography of him and his family see Henning (2018, 343-78).

<sup>26</sup> One of his poems was published posthumously (Bedir-Xan 1932, 4).

<sup>27</sup> Noel (1919, 55) states that when he travelled with Celadet and Kamuran in Kurdistan he witnessed that they were not fluent enough in Kurdish. It was the first time either had visited the Kurdish regions, so this might have been a cultural shock. On the other hand, both later improved their Kurdish and published works in Kurdish, including Kurdish grammar books and dictionaries.

<sup>28</sup> In a meeting on 10 July 1919 between the members of SAK and the Ottoman government, Emin Ali brings up the autonomy with the government representatives: "Can the Ottoman Government assure from now the existence of Kurdistan? Can it give an autonomous government to it?" Dispatch from A. Calthorpe, British High Commission, to Lord Curzon, Constantinople, 23 July 1919, TNA, FO 608/96.

<sup>29</sup> Signed by Memduh Selim Bey, the letter announcing the new association labelled the SAK as a "half measure ... old league which seems to deny its past." Lettre de Secrétaire général de la Ligue Sociale Kurde au Haut Commissaire de la République Française, 16 March 1920 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 201).



tanbul with his family for Cairo, where his son Süreyya was awaiting him (Henning 2018, 354).

Emin Ali's son Süreyya left for Egypt in fear of persecution in 1912 when he was forced by Talat Pasha, one of leaders of the CUP, to sever his ties with the Liberal Entente. After Süreyya settled in Cairo he began to publish, pursue his political activities, build a network with other Ottoman exiles and maintain contact with the British representative in the city. As the eldest son of Emin Ali he claimed the leadership of his family, and thus the territories of his ancestors in Botan region of Kurdistan.<sup>30</sup> He founded the *Kürd İstiklâl Komitesi* (The Committee for Kurdish Independence) in 1918 and restarted the journal *Kurdistan*. He established contact with Şerif Pasha through the latter's son-in-law residing in Egypt. Süreyya, with some other Kurds, attempted to join Şerif Pasha as part of Kurdish delegation in the Peace Conference but was prevented from travelling to Paris by the British authorities.<sup>31</sup> He also sent memorandums to the British representative in Cairo and the Peace Conference.

## 2 Memories, Maps, Boundaries, and Territories

In their memos to Allied Powers the Kurdish leaders felt that it was necessary to establish the historical background of the Kurds. They strived to demonstrate that a population named "Kurds" had existed in large numbers since ancient times in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Anatolia, northern Iraq and western Iran and that the Kurds have had the long standing historical capacity to rule themselves since centuries. One such letter was written on 7 December 1918 by Süreyya Bedirhan to the British representative in Cairo. He wrote that the Kurds had lived in the region for thousands of years under various names and started to be referred as Kurds after the advent of Islam. They had lived in independent principalities until they voluntarily submitted to Ottoman rule during the

<sup>30</sup> "Personalities in Kurdistan, additions and corrections," July 1919, TNA, FO 252/93.

<sup>31</sup> The SAK agreed on delegates from Cairo and informed Şerif Pasha about this ("İkinci Bir Kürd Hey'et-i Mahsûsası", *Serbestî*, 8 May 1919). Even though the members could not reach Paris Şerif Pasha welcomed the news about new members of the delegation (*Kürdistan*, no. 9, 11 June 1919). After all the efforts in 1919, Osman Paşazade Fahri Bey was finally able to join Şerif Pasha as part of Kurdish delegation (*Jin*, no. 33, 9 March 1920).

reign of Sultan Selim I (ruled 1508–20).<sup>32</sup> Similarly, a short memo presented to the British High Commissioner in Istanbul and signed by several SAK members stated that the Kurds were "the genuine and undisputed descendants of the Old Medes" and "form one of the most ancient nations surviving." They also argued that the Ottomans and Persian empires by "taking advantage of this benevolent attitude of the Kurds, have mostly unjustly partitioned Kurdistan between themselves."<sup>33</sup> Şerif Pasha refers to the recent history of the Kurds, listing Kurdish rebellions led by Sheikh Ubeydullah, Bedirhan, Abdurrezzak Bedirhan, Sheikh Selim of Bitlis and others.<sup>34</sup> This is interesting since the Kurdish elites rarely referred to the Kurdish rebellions as part of their national struggle.

To strengthen the claim to an ethnically-defined territory, the Kurdish elites, who acted as forefathers of Kurdish nationalism, built their claim on the close relation between the territory and the people living on it. Süreyya drew the boundaries of Kurdistan as follows:

"For us the frontiers of Kurdistan proper begin in the north at Ziven, on the Caucasian frontier, and continue westwards to Erzéroum, Erzingian, Kemah, Arabkir, Behisni and Diwrik; in the south Haran, the Sindjihar Hills, Tel Asfar, Erbil, Kerkuk, Suleimanie, Akkelman, Sina; in the east, Revandus, Bah Kalé, Bézir-Kale, that is to say the frontier of Persia as far as Mount Ararat."<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly Şerif Pasha's memorandum published on 22 March 1919 quotes exactly the same borders, which shows that Süreyya and Şerif were in close contact and that Süreyya succeeded in having some of his demands included (Chérif Pacha 1919). However, Şerif Pasha's map, which excluded Lake Van from Kurdistan, did not reflect the boundaries described by Süreyya. Süreyya's father Emin Ali decided to submit his own map, which included Lake Van and

<sup>32</sup> From Comité de l'Indépendance Kurde in Cairo to R. Wintage, High Commissioner in Egypt, 7 December 1918, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>33</sup> Memo from SAK members to A. Calthorpe, British High Commissioner, Constantinople, 2 January 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>34</sup> Minute "Kurdistan," memo by Chérif Pasha, 9 October 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>35</sup> Just ten days later, Süreyya presented his views in another letter, this time focusing only on the Kurds. Letter from R. Wintage, High Commissioner in Egypt, to A.J. Balfour, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 16 December 1918, TNA, FO 608/95.

extended the boundaries of Kurdistan to the shores of the Mediterranean, to the British high commissioner in Istanbul on 20 March 1920.<sup>36</sup> Even Abdulkadir disputed Şerif Pasha's map, calling it "misinformed" as it omitted the northern areas that contained "70% Kurdish population," and sent his own new map.<sup>37</sup> Emin Ali, in his letter to the president of the Peace Conference, insisted that the Kurdish lands consisted of the Ottoman vilayets of Diyarbekir, Harput, Bitlis, Van, Mosul and Urfa, where the Kurds made up the majority of the population.<sup>38</sup> Şerif Pasha also came up with the same provinces except Van. He stated that in order to have a Kurdish state that was economically strong, viable, adopted modern civilization and left nomadic life behind, it was necessary to include the provinces of Diyarbekir and Mosul.<sup>39</sup>

Şerif Pasha referred not only to towns and provinces but also to tribes such as Heyderanlı, Cibranlı, and Milan, with their geographical location, to show the "Kurdishness" of these lands. He even listed the tribes which comprised the Hamidian Light Cavalry Regiments and their leaders. He also asked if there was "a frontier so natural as river or even a water course and mountains" and listed rivers like the Murat and the Euphrates. For him the river basins and the mountains surrounding Kurdistan enabled the Kurds to "constitute a nationality powerful enough to have the ambition in the face of Turks and Persians of forming a distinct state" (Pacha 1919, 9–10). By the beginning of 1920 Şerif Pasha was emphasizing more strategic boundaries than "natural" or "national" ones. In a memo he prepared on 1 March 1920 he advised the establishment of a Kurdish state whose boundaries extended from the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea in order to secure oil and natural resources.<sup>40</sup> The

change was the result of the insistence of Kurdish leaders in Istanbul and the irridentist policies of the Armenian delegation in Paris.

### 3 The Road to Sèvres

A variety of evidence was offered by the Kurdish elites when they made their case for a Kurdish state. The Kurdish elites presented their case for a Kurdish state at every opportunity based on the principle of "self-determination" formulated by Woodrow Wilson in his "Fourteen Points." Members of SAK believed the Kurds had a right to form an independent state because they possessed all the "constitutional elements". They had a considerable number of men who had been "educated in all branches of knowledge". They possessed more than "five million souls in the Eastern Provinces, and on the borders of Persia." The members of the SAK considered "the territories inhabited by the Kurdish people from the earliest ages in the history" to be "lawful and uncontested inheritances" of the Kurds. They also emphasized that Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Harput, Diyarbekir and Mosul were provinces populated overwhelmingly by the Kurds. Taking all these reasons into account the Kurds "justify their struggle for existence and self-government." In their letter to the British High Commissioner in Istanbul the members asked following points to be taken in consideration in their demand for a Kurdish state:

"1- A specified and geographically defined territorial area to be assigned for the Kurds, 2-The Kurds would be grateful to enjoy the same privileges and to receive the same treatment at the hands of the Allied Powers of the Entente, as those granted to the Arabs, Armenians, Chaldeans, Assyrians and other small nationalities without distinction of race and religion, 3-The Kurds should be granted self-government, 4-The Kurds particularly ask the British Government to undertake the protection of their rights and interests, and help them in their path to civilization and progress."<sup>41</sup>

At the beginning of the 1919 the Kurdish leaders were much more united. However within a year they had become divided into several camps. One of the main reasons for this division was a dispute over the boundaries of a future state. Şerif Pasha came up with

l'étranger, Série: E, Dossier: 2, C-D 120, 52 CPCOM, 1 March 1920.

<sup>41</sup> Memo from SAK members to A. Calthorpe, British High Commissioner, Constantinople, 2 January 1919, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>36</sup> Emin Ali's map was included in a memo prepared by the Central Club of Kurdistan and submitted to acting British High Commissioner in Istanbul Richard Webb. 20 March 1920, TNA FO 371/5068/4396.

<sup>37</sup> Lettre du Sénateur Seyd Abdulkader au Général Chérif Paşa, no date, doc. 99, (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 180).

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Amin Ali Badirkhan to the president of the Paris Peace Conference, 18 March 1920, TNA, FO 371/5068.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Chérif Pasha to Lord Derby, British Ambassador in Paris, 6 June 1918, TNA, FO 608/95.

<sup>40</sup> "Mémoire présenté par le Général Chérif Pacha, Président de la Délégation Kurde à Monsieur le Président du Conseil Suprême de la Conférence de la Paix", MAE, Ottomans a

a map that excluded regions around Lake Van, whereas Abdulkadir, Emin Ali and his son Süreyya presented a larger map to the Peace Conference. The second issue concerned the status of a future Kurdish state. Even though all the leaders were for an independent state at the beginning of 1919, changing position of Allied Powers on Kurdistan, the rise of the Kemalists in Anatolia, the occupation of western Anatolia by the Greeks and its instrumentalization as a propaganda tool to rally the Kurds and Turks around the Kemalists, and finally American hesitancy to support a mandate for an Armenian state forced Şerif Pasha and Abdulkadir to alter their plans for both the status and the boundaries of a future Kurdish state.

Moreover, Şerif Pasha, decided on 20 November 1919 to make an agreement with the head of the Armenian delegation, Boghos Nubar Pasha, and to work together for the establishment of a Kurdish and Armenian state.<sup>42</sup> Although at the beginning all the principal Kurdish leaders recognized the agreement, later it created controversy among the Kurdish elites in Istanbul because of propaganda by Kemalists, who tried to discredit Şerif Pasha in the eyes of the Kurdish public. In fact, the Kemalists encouraged many tribes to send telegrams of protest to the Peace Conference and Allied Powers, stating that Şerif Pasha did not represent them and they never wanted to be separated from Turkey.<sup>43</sup> Since most of the telegraph network in Anatolia was in the hands of supporters of Kemalists, they effectively manipulated and intercepted the communication between the Kurdish leaders in Istanbul and Kurdistan.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to the French government Abdulkadir protested that such “fabricated” telegrams had been produced by Kemalists

(“officier unionistes appartenant à cette fameuse force-nationaliste”) who “occupied all the offices of telegraph.”<sup>45</sup> Even Seyid Rıza and Alişer of Koçgiri, who would later lead large rebellions in Dersim and Sivas, sent letters to contest the telegrams sent by the Kemalists and their supporters (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 191–94). By the end of 1919, the Kemalists had become so powerful that the Istanbul government felt that it was necessary to close the SAK branches in the Kurdish provinces of Diyarbakir and Siirt and to arrest the leaders of the movement there.<sup>46</sup> As the date for signing the peace treaty approached, the Ottoman government in Istanbul also became less tolerant towards the Kurdish nationalists. In early March 1920 the Ottoman parliament discussed revoking Abdulkadir’s membership (of the parliament) and he was forced to explain his opinion on a Kurdish state (Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi 1982, 201).

Before the Peace Treaty was signed in Sèvres, the Allied Powers, the Ottoman Empire and interest groups gathered in San Remo in north-western Italy in April 1920 to decide on future of Istanbul, the Straits, Kurdistan, Greater Syria and Armenia. The Kurdish delegate was not allowed to represent the Kurdish people.<sup>47</sup> Şerif Pasha resigned in protest right after the conference in San Remo ended. During the conference Kurdish territory was one of the main topics under discussion as the British, French, Turks, Armenians, Arabs and Persians attempted to acquire as much of it as possible. Above all, the main player was Great Britain, which wanted to secure its interest in southern Kurdistan, particularly in Mosul because of the oil fields. Eventually the French agreed to leave Mosul to the British in exchange for a 25 percent share of oil revenues (Eskander 1999, 140–41). This agreement and the League of Nations mandate solidi-

<sup>42</sup> MAE, Correspondance Politique et Commercial, Levant 1918-1919, Caucasse-Kurdistan, 47 CPCOM, Série: E, Fiches: 36-37, 20 November 1919.

<sup>43</sup> Just before the news of Şerif-Nubar agreement the Kemalists sent an order to the military and government officials in Kurdish provinces to organize the Kurdish tribal leaders and elites to send telegrams of protest to Istanbul and Paris (Baykal 1974, 47). For a list of tribes that sent telegrams to Paris see MAE, Correspondance Politique et Commercial, Levant 1918-1919, Caucasse-Kurdistan, 47 CPCOM, Série: E, Fiches: 61-63, 1 March 1920.

<sup>44</sup> Comité central de la ligue des Kurdes du Kurdistan-1919, Constantinople, 2 October 1919 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 183).

<sup>45</sup> Ligue Kurde, Constantinople, 26 December 1919 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 188).

<sup>46</sup> A deciphered message from the governor of Diyarbakir shows that members of the SAK were under surveillance. BOA, DH. ŞFR. 637/60/1-2-3-4, 13 July 1919. Also see Comité central de la ligue des Kurdes du Kurdistan 1919, Constantinople, 29 July 1919 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 181).

<sup>47</sup> Abdulkadir sent a letter of protest stating that the Kurds “reserve the right to protest against any decision which would be taken contrary to the principles of nationalities by taking advantage of the rules of justice and equity.” (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 199).

fied the British occupation of southern Kurdistan and granted the western portion to France as part of its Syrian mandate. As for northern Kurdistan, in February 1920, Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, stated that both France and Britain agreed to grant independence to it, either as a single state or as a federation of autonomous states. Nevertheless, Britain eventually decided to grant provisional local autonomy within Turkey.<sup>48</sup> The reason behind this sudden change of heart was that Britain was afraid of unwanted military and political involvement in northern Kurdistan. For the British it was more ideal to leave that part of Kurdistan to Turkish protection instead of letting French attempt to extend their political control there (“British Secretary’s Notes” 1958, 43).

When the Treaty of Sèvres was signed by the Ottomans on 10 August 1920 it contained articles 62 and 64 granting autonomy to the Kurds in the province of Diyarbekir and in part of Bitlis and Van provinces. Article 62 specified the boundaries of “Kurdish areas” as “lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia.” Article 64 detailed how the Kurds could claim their state within these boundaries:

“If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.”

Interestingly article 64 referred to possible partial reunification of northern Kurdistan with British-controlled southern Kurdistan:

“no objection will be raised by the Principal Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such an independ-

ent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has hitherto been included in the Mosul vilayet” (Martin 1924, 808).

The British never believed that articles 62 and 64 could be implemented given the growing strength of the Kemalist forces (Olson 2010, 54). That the British were not committed to implementing the articles was clear from their attitude toward the Kurdish delegation in San Remo. In the conference they opposed any role in Kurdish affairs for the League of Nations and made sure that no Kurdish representative could speak on behalf of the Kurds (“British Secretary’s Notes” 1958, 43). Southern Kurdistan was strategically too important to the British for them to willingly let it go its own way. By inserting the articles on a future Kurdish state into the treaty the British attempted to prevent the expansion of French political influence deeper into Kurdistan. Moreover the British did not want to alienate the Kurdish nationalists in northern Kurdistan at a time of turmoil when Turkish and Iranian nationalists were on the rise and Bolsheviks were advancing towards Caucasus (Eskander 1999, 149–50).

Close examination of articles 62 and 64 also reveals that the Kurdish state that the treaty referred to represented no more than 20 percent of the actual size of Ottoman Kurdistan, even less if Iranian Kurdistan was taken into consideration. The Treaty of Sèvres “symbolised, in practice, the pre-war partition and the post-war partition of Kurdistan between Anatolia, French Syria, British Mesopotamia, Persia and the proposed Armenian state” (Eskander 1999, 150). Thus, clauses on the Kurdish state, which were made public in August 1920, caused a huge disappointment among the Kurdish nationalists both in Kurdistan and in exile, although they did not give up their hopes. In fact, considering the strong anti-Kurdish bias among the representatives of the victorious Allies because of Armenian massacres Şerif Pasha appeared to be successful because he “pleaded the cause of his people so well and conducted himself with so much dignity and tact that he succeeded in gaining the sympathy of the Western powers and friendship of the Armenians” (Jwaideh 2006, 130). He also succeeded in voicing the plea of the Kurds for a state and had this included for the first time in an international treaty. That continues to inspire the Kurdish nationalist movement to this day.

<sup>48</sup> The decision to leave northern Kurdistan under Turkey was taken at the meeting of Interdepartmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs on 13 April 1920. The meeting was chaired by Curzon. In addition to Edwin S. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, high-level representatives of all concerned British circles, including Foreign, India, War Offices, the Treasury and the Air ministry, attended the meeting. Interdepartmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, Minute No.37, TNA, FO 371/5068, 13 April 1920.

#### 4 Conclusion

From very early on the Kurdish leaders planned for a united Kurdistan even if it was an autonomous state under Turkish administration. Even British officials admitted that the Kurds had no option but to turn to the Kemalists if they did not want a Kurdistan with a “permanent division” under the Allies.<sup>49</sup> It was the fear of dismemberment of Kurdistan more than religious loyalty to the caliph that forced some Kurdish nationalists like Şerif Pasha and Abdulkadir to moderate their attitude towards “autonomy for the whole of Kurdistan under Turkish sovereignty.”<sup>50</sup> Before the treaty was signed both leaders came to the point of accepting that if they wanted a united Kurdistan, this would entail restricting Kurdish political ambitions to local autonomy within Turkey. This caused dissatisfaction among the secessionists like Emin Ali. He sent letters to the Peace Conference stating that Abdulkadir was discharged from presidency of SAK and Şerif Pasha was no longer representing the Society as a delegate.<sup>51</sup> Abdulkadir was easily re-elected to the presidency of the Society thanks to the support of the Kurds in Istanbul and Emin Ali and his supporters were forced out of the SAK. Abdulkadir kept pressing the Allied Powers for a Kurdish state even after the conference in San Remo. In late June 1920 he thanked the Peace Conference for accepting an autonomous Kurdistan and at the same time insisted that the territories left out (Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Malatya, Cizre, Midyat, Urfa, Mardin, Suruç, Birecik, Rumkale, Islahiye, Kurd-dagh, Alexandretta) be included in the projected Kurdish state.<sup>52</sup>

While Abdulkadir continued to press for better terms in the Treaty of Sèvres, Emin Ali, asked the Al-

lied Powers to rectify the terms of the treaty despite months after it was signed. On 16 February 1921 in his letter to the British Prime Minister during the Conference of London that renegotiated the terms of the Sèvres Treaty with Ankara government, Emin Ali asked to “kindly take into consideration our national demands, which were formulated by ex-delegate Chérif Pacha and by us in particular in memo on 17 June 1920, about awarding the Port of Ayas (Adana) to Kurdistan as an outlet and reintegrating the Kurdish territories left outside ethnographic borders of Kurdistan whose autonomy and eventual independence was recognized by the Treaty of Sèvres.”<sup>53</sup> As Emin Ali’s letter shows, despite the division of Kurdistan among the Allied Powers and Turkey and the latter’s rejection of the Sèvres Treaty the Kurdish nationalists did not give up their hope for a united Kurdish entity, either autonomous or independent. While Emin Ali, Şerif and Abdulkadir continued to send letters laying out their case to the Allied Powers and the League of Nations for the rest of their lives, a new generation of Kurdish nationalists picked up their cause where they left off and turned to new forms of resistance in Kurdistan, which was now divided among the newly established Arab, Turkish and Persian states.

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- <sup>49</sup> C. Garbett, Memorandum on Kurdistan, 29 January 1920, TNA, FO 371/4193.
- <sup>50</sup> De Robeck, Constantinople, 27 February 1920, TNA, FO 371/5067. Even before 1920 Abdulkadir sent letters to the president of the Peace Conference stating that for a peaceful and stable Middle East it was necessary to “recognize Kurdistan as one and undivided.” Comité central de la ligue des Kurdes du Kurdistan-1919, Constantinople, 28 September 1919 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 182).
- <sup>51</sup> Lettre de Emin Aali Badir-Khan au Haut Commissaire du Gouvernement italien, 14 April 1920 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 197–8).
- <sup>52</sup> Lettre S. Abdulkadir au Haut Commissaire de la République Française, Constantinople, 25 June 1920 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 205–6).
- <sup>53</sup> Ligue sociale kurde au Président de la Conférence de Londres, Constantinople, 16 February 1921 (Cigerli and Le Saout 2019, 208).

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