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## Making Borders from Behind the Scenes: Turkish Opposition Efforts over Mosul during the Lausanne Conference (1922–1923)

### Abstract

The current Paper is focused on the Turkish-Iraqi border, specifically on Mosul, which was under Ottoman administration until just before the end of World War I (11<sup>th</sup> November 1918) and is now within the borders of Iraq. The so-called ‘Mosul Question’ has long attracted the attention of researchers, who have in particular studied the role played by the international actors – Turkey, Britain, and the latter’s allies in the war. Their studies have followed the events and developments of the subject, particularly during the Lausanne Conference, and even afterwards, when the Mosul issue was referred to the League of Nations, resulting in Mosul being placed under British mandate in 1926. The ‘main actors’ negotiated the fate of this region amidst intense competition that had far-reaching effects on the process of drawing the borders between the newly established Turkish state and Iraq, which was under British mandate at the time. Jordi Tejel’s study represents a significant contribution to these studies, as he goes beyond an analytical examination of the roles of the ‘main actors’ and undertakes an analytical examination at a different level: the local actor, in this context, the Kurds, especially the inhabitants of the border regions. This paper follows in Tejel’s footsteps and seeks to deepen research on the micro-historical level. It seeks to trace a ‘behind-the-scenes actor,’ namely the Turkish opposition, and study its role and impact on the Mosul issue and the process of shaping the ‘southern Turkish borders’ (*Cenup hudutları*) during the Lausanne negotiations.

**Keywords:** Mosul, borders, Lausanne Conference, Turkish opposition

### 1. Introduction

Border and Borderland Studies have gained significant momentum in recent years. In this context, Turkey’s various territorial borders – whether in the northwest with Greece and Bulgaria (in the region of Thrace); in the northeast with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; in the east with Iran; or in the south with Syria and Iraq – represent a fertile field that these studies have recently discovered, leading to the production of several important works.<sup>1</sup> Also, studies on the maritime border began to gain dynamic, in a context where Turkish nationalist discourse is theorizing the concept of the ‘Blue Homeland’ (*Mavi Vatan*).<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The most important of these studies are: Boyar and Fleet 2023; Öztan and Yenen 2023; Tejel 2023, and also a specific edition of the journal *Dişâr* (4.2, 2023), with an important introduction by the publishers, Balistreri and Pekşen, entitled ‘Borders.’
- 2 Balistreri and Pekşen 2023, 201.

This current study is focused on the Turkish-Iraqi border, specifically on Mosul, which was under Ottoman administration until just before the end of World War I (11<sup>th</sup> November 1918) and is now within the borders of Iraq. The so-called ‘Mosul Question’ has long attracted the attention of researchers, who have followed the events and developments of the subject, particularly during the Lausanne Conference,<sup>3</sup> and even afterwards, when the Mosul issue was referred to the League of Nations, resulting in Mosul being placed under British mandate in 1926.<sup>4</sup> They in particular studied the role played by the international actors – Turkey, Britain, and the latter’s allies in the war in negotiating the fate of this region.

Jordi Tejel’s study represents a significant contribution to these studies, as he goes beyond an analytical examination of the roles of the ‘main actors’ and undertakes an analytical examination at a different level: the local actor, in this context, the Kurds, especially the inhabitants of the border regions. He shows how, and to what extent, this actor participated in the process of shaping the Turkish-Iraqi border in the interwar period.<sup>5</sup>

The current study follows in Tejel’s footsteps and seeks to deepen research on the micro-historical level, while being aware of the dynamic interaction between that and the macro-historical level. It seeks to trace a ‘behind-the-scenes actor,’ namely the Turkish opposition, and study its role in the negotiations regarding the attribution of Mosul during the Lausanne Conference.<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 1921, opposition voices within the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, *TBMM*) grew increasingly vocal, particularly in response to the growing concentration of power in the hands of the President, Mustafa Kemal. These critics strongly opposed the transfer of extraordinary powers to the ‘*Başkomutan*’ (Commander-in-Chief), which they viewed as a potential precursor to the establishment of a dictatorship.

Already in May 1921, Mustafa Kemal had formed a group of loyal supporters within the Assembly to secure a reliable majority in upcoming votes. This faction came to be known as the ‘First Group’ (*Birinci Grup*). In response, dissident deputies began to coor-

3 The first session was from 20<sup>th</sup> November 1922 to 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, and the second was from 24<sup>th</sup> April 1923 to 24<sup>th</sup> July 1923. Between the two, there was a period during which the conference was suspended, from 5<sup>th</sup> February to 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1923.

4 The most important of these studies are: Armaoğlu et al. 1998; Aydın 1995; Coşar and Demirci 2006; Demirci 2010; Keleş 2002; Öke 1991; Özcan 1991; Pursley 2015; Shields 2009; Şimşir 2005; Tejel 2018. Fâdil Hısayn’s book is his doctoral thesis that he submitted to Indiana University. It was not published in English but was subsequently translated into Arabic and published as: Hısayn 1952.

5 Tejel 2018.

6 The position of the Turkish opposition on this issue has not received the attention it deserves. The Turkish researcher Armaoğlu, in his study ‘Lozan Konferansı ve Musul Sorunu,’ presented some of the opposition voices in the Grand National Assembly regarding Mosul. However, his presentation ‘avoided’ certain sensitive points, as we will show in various parts of this article.

dinate their efforts. Under the leadership of Hüseyin Avni Bey (Ulaş, 1877–1948)<sup>7</sup>, the deputy from Erzurum, these efforts culminated by the summer of 1922, in the formation of a more structured and visible opposition group within the Assembly, known in Turkish historiography as the ‘Second Group’ (*İkinci Grup*). In his seminal work *Birinci Meclis’te Muhalefet*, Ahmet Demirel characterizes the Second Group as a heterogeneous and ideologically diverse political movement that firmly opposed the authoritarian tendencies of the First Group led by Mustafa Kemal. The Second Group represented a coherent political force with clearly articulated goals and an organized structure. Its members acted as an active parliamentary opposition and sought to influence the political trajectory of the nascent Turkish Republic.<sup>8</sup>

During the Lausanne Conference, the Second Group expressed pointed criticism of the government. In particular, it accused the delegation of making territorial concessions during the negotiations that, in the group’s view, contradicted the National Pact (*Misak-ı Milli*). The conflict between the Turkish opposition and the Government in Ankara reached its peak when the Lausanne Conference was suspended and the Turkish negotiating delegation returned to Ankara without having achieved the desired conditions and hopes. What were the positions of the Turkish opposition in Ankara regarding the Mosul issue? What arguments did they use in their discourse? And what impact did the opposition’s stance have on the Mosul issue and the process of shaping the ‘southern Turkish borders’ (*Cenup hudutları*) during the Lausanne negotiations?

## 2. The Mosul Question in the Period Before the Lausanne Conference

The Turkish-British dispute over the province of Mosul<sup>9</sup> arose in the early 20th century in the context of World War I, which broke out on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914. The Ottoman Empire entered the war alongside the Central Powers (Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria), who all lost the war against the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, with Italy, Japan the United States and others, joining later). As the war neared its end, the Allies forced the

- 7 He was one of the most important opposition leaders in the National Assembly, who publicly and harshly criticized the Government and Mustafa Kemal Pasha from the platform of the National Assembly. For more information, see the conclusion of this article and the online Atatürk Encyclopaedia. URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/huseyin-avni-ulas-1877-1948/?pdf=3599>.
- 8 For further details, see the detailed reference work on the history of the opposition during this early period of modern Turkish history: Demirel 1994, 511–31 as well as the article: Finefrock 1979, 3–4, which, despite its age, is notable due to its reliance on numerous important sources.
- 9 The Ottomans annexed Mosul to their empire in 1517. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Mosul Governorate (*vilayet*) consisted of four districts (*livâ*): the Mosul district, the Erbil district, the Kirkuk district, and the Sulaymaniyah district. Its inhabitants were a mix of Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Jews, and Armenians. See: Hısayn 1967, 3–5; Shields 2009, 218; Tejel 2018, 4–5. Regarding the Ottoman history of Mosul, see: Bayât 2007, 376–92.

Ottoman Empire to sign the Armistice of Mudros on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918, and imposed their terms, which included the surrender of all Ottoman garrisons in the Hejaz, Asir, Yemen, Syria, and Mesopotamia to the nearest Allied military unit. At the time of signing the armistice, the British were the de facto controllers of Iraq and were close to Mosul. British General Sir William Raine Marshall (1865–1939) therefore demanded that the Ottoman garrison withdraw and surrender Mosul in accordance with the Armistice of Mudros. However, Turkish General Ali İhsan Pasha (Sâbis) (1882–1957) refused to withdraw, arguing that Mosul was under Turkish control when the armistice was signed.<sup>10</sup> However, after consulting his Government in Istanbul, he received instructions to evacuate Mosul and hand it over to the British, while leaving the civil administration to continue functioning in the name of the Ottoman state until the two countries could reach a resolution.<sup>11</sup>

In the meanwhile, a Turkish resistance movement had formed in Anatolia (1919–1923) and established the ‘National Pact’ during the Erzurum Congress (27<sup>th</sup> July 1919) and Sivas Congress (13<sup>th</sup> September 1919). This stipulated complete independence and absolute sovereignty for Turkey over its territories. The first article of the National Pact stated the following:

The fate of the parts of the Ottoman Empire inhabited by an Arab majority, which were under the occupation of enemy forces at the time of the signing of the Armistice on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918 [i.e. the Armistice of Mudros], shall be determined in accordance with the opinions freely expressed by their inhabitants. As for those parts, whether inside the aforementioned armistice line, or outside but which are inhabited by a majority of Ottoman Muslims, who are united in religion, sentiment, and hope, who hold mutual respect for one another, are infused with a love of sac-

- 10 Historians agree that the British took control of Mosul several days after the signing of the armistice, but they differ on the exact date of the occupation. Fâdil Hısayn mentions that a messenger from British General Marshall arrived in Mosul on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1918, with a message requesting that the Turkish general meet his British counterpart south of Mosul. The meeting took place, and the British demanded that he hand over Mosul, but he refused. He mentions that the British entered Mosul and raised the British flag on 8<sup>th</sup> November. (Hısayn 1967, 1–3, 23). Al-Daiwahji recounts the same events as Fâdil Hısayn, adding that Ali İhsan Pasha left Mosul on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1918, heading to Nusaybin under the protection of several armoured vehicles, and entrusted the administration of Mosul to Nuri Bey, the deputy governor (al-Daiwahji 1982, vol. 2, 103). Pursley mentions 3<sup>rd</sup> November (Pursley 2015, Part 2), while Şimşir claims the British occupied Mosul on 15<sup>th</sup> November (Şimşir 2005, 859–860). See also: Demirci 2010, 60; Shields 2009, 217. For more on the history of Mosul between the British and Turks before the Mudros Armistice, see Keleş 2002, 1104–7.
- 11 Fâdil Hısayn substantiates this by referencing the text of a statement delivered by the Deputy Governor on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1918, shortly before he, too, left Mosul (Hısayn 1967, 2–3). Al-Daiwahji mentions that the Deputy Governor Nuri Bey was also not willing to govern Mosul under the British flag, so he resigned and handed over the administration to Shakir Effendi (al-Daiwahji 1982, vol. 2, 103). Ali İhsan Sâbis also mentions this in his memoirs (Sâbis 1991, vol. 4, 317–8). See also: Göyünç 1998, 48.

rifice [for the common homeland], and fully observe the ethnic and social rights within their surroundings, they form, both in reality and politically, a totality that shall not be divided for whatever reason.<sup>12</sup>

Under this first article of the National Pact, the Turks acknowledged that regions with an Arab majority should determine their own fates according to the will of their people. However, the subsequent section of the same article excluded those areas ‘inhabited by a majority of Ottoman Muslims, who are united in religion,’ and affirmed their affiliation to Turkey. While the article did not specify these regions by name, various historical documents indicate that what was intended was the Mosul Vilayet.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, Mosul became a disputed area between the Turks and the British. The Turks considered the British seizure of Mosul to have occurred after the signing of the Armistice of Mudros on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918 and thus viewed it as a violation of Turkish sovereignty. As for the British, they considered Mosul to be under their de facto control and did not accept the Turkish objections.<sup>14</sup>

After the World War I ended (11<sup>th</sup> November 1918), the Ottoman Empire was forced to sign the Treaty of Sèvres (10<sup>th</sup> August 1920), which, amongst other things, required it to cede its Arab territories, including Iraq.<sup>15</sup> However, it is important to note that although Sultan Mehmed VI Vahîdeddîn (reigned 1918–1922) signed the Treaty of Sèvres, the newly formed alternative government in Ankara, which achieved historic victories over both the Greeks and the Allies, refused to ratify this treaty, forced negotiations and came up with a new treaty – that would be known as the Treaty of Lausanne –, resulting in momentous repercussions for the entire history of Turkey, including the issue of Mosul.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. The Mosul Question at the First Lausanne Conference

In November 1922, Turkish newspapers reported that the Turkish negotiating delegation had moved to the Swiss city of Lausanne.<sup>17</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1922, the victorious parties in World War I (at the head of which were Britain, France, Russia, and Italy), along with Greece, met with the Turks at the Montbenon Casino in Lausanne to

12 ATASE, Atatürk Collection, Box 23, Folder 50, Document 50–6,7 (Misak-ı Milli Beyannamesi, 28 Kanunusani 1336 (28/1/1920) §1). The translations from Ottoman, Turkish and Arabic are by the author.

13 One of these, for example, is a statement delivered by Mustafa Kemal before the National Assembly on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1920. In it he mentioned that the Mosul district, the Sulaymaniyah district, and the Kirkuk district fall within the borders of the National Pact. Refer to the text of his speech in: Göyünç 1998, 48; Sonyel 1986, vol. 2, 296.

14 Hısayn 1958, 39; Hısayn 1967, 25; al-Najjār 1953, vol. 1, 398; Shields 2009, 218–9.

15 Hısayn 1958, 39–40; Hısayn 1967, 10; al-Najjār 1953, vol. 1, 393–4 and 421–2.

16 Demirci 2010, 58; Hısayn 1967, 12.

17 *Hakimiyet-i Milliye Gazetesi* (Hereafter: HM), 3/11/1922; 6/11/1922; 21/11/1922; 23/11/1922.

negotiate a peace treaty.<sup>18</sup> Leading the British delegation was Foreign Secretary George Curzon (1859–1925) and the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, Horace Rumbold (1869–1941). The Turkish delegation, consisting of over forty members, was headed by Foreign Minister İsmet Pasha (İnönü) (1884–1973) and Rıza Nur (1879–1942). They were in constant communication with the Government, the National Assembly, and Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) (1881–1938) himself, coordinating the negotiation process with them.<sup>19</sup>

The complexity of the Mosul issue became apparent from the outset of the conference. Curzon and İsmet Pasha agreed to discuss the matter in bilateral sessions and to resolve the core points between themselves before presenting them to the conference's delegations. This was intended to ease the negotiations and facilitate in bringing about a peace solution within just a few weeks.<sup>20</sup> However, the two sides disagreed from the start, even regarding the nature of the dispute over Mosul. The British envoy and Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon viewed the issue as a border dispute concerning the demarcation between the mandated Iraq and Turkey. However, the head of the Turkish delegation and then Foreign Minister İsmet Pasha, made it explicit that the matter was not a border issue but rather concerned the legal status of the Mosul Vilayet, since it was only occupied after the signing of the Armistice of Mudros on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918, i.e. in violation of Turkish sovereignty and of the National Pact to which the Turks adhered.<sup>21</sup>

Both parties sought to convince each other of their rightful claim to Mosul based on ethnic, economic, political, and geographical arguments.<sup>22</sup> Oil also played an impor-

18 The Turkish researcher Demirci mentions that Russia was invited to attend the conference at the request of the Turks in order to garner Russian support against the Allies. (Demirci 2010, 58).

19 A picture of the members of the delegation along with their names are in the *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* newspaper, dated 27/11/1922. Also in: Özel et al. 1993, 1.

20 The Turkish researcher Demirci suggests that this proposal came from Curzon, who was seeking to ensure British interests without engaging in open competition with the other Allies or causing a rift with them. See: Demirci 2010, 58.

21 Demirci 2010, 60; Hısayn 1967, 3 and 25; Shields 2009, 217.

22 *Gizli Celse Zabıtları* (Thereafter: GCZ), 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1946. Among other sources, this study relies on meticulously recorded minutes of closed sessions of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Gizli Celse Zabıtları*). The Assembly held the first of these closed sessions during the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923), and this tradition has continued to this day. In these closed sessions, the Assembly discussed the most important political, military, security, economic, and financial issues in the history of the Turkish nation, including, for example, the organization and coordination of the War of Independence, the issue of the caliphate and sultanate, the National Pact (Misâk-i Milli), and many other issues. The issue of the southern borders, i.e. the 'Mosul Question,' occupies several hundred pages of these minutes. The content of these sessions and the statements of the members of the Turkish delegation sent to the Lausanne Conference remained secret and were not revealed at the time. However, they were preserved in the state's archives and were later compiled and published in a five-volume collection. In this study, I rely on the fol-



tant role in the negotiations, with both the Turkish and British sides trying to use it as leverage. But the attempts by both sides did not yield any results, and the negotiations became marked by tension and hostility, threatening to collapse the conference on multiple occasions.<sup>23</sup> It appeared that the signing of the Lausanne Treaty and the achievement of global peace were dependent upon the resolution of the Mosul issue.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the negotiating parties began to discuss alternative options, one of which was the idea of excluding Mosul from the Lausanne discussions and attempting to resolving it through direct negotiations between Britain and Turkey.<sup>25</sup> The British – supported by the Allies – also threatened to refer the issue to the League of Nations if the Turkish side did not cooperate,<sup>26</sup> and this is indeed what happened. When the Turkish side refused to respond to the repeated warnings and pressure,<sup>27</sup> Curzon took the decisive step and, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1923, wrote to the League of Nations, requesting that the Mosul issue be transferred to its jurisdiction on the grounds that the matter was threatening global peace and affecting international relations.<sup>28</sup> Curzon's letter to the League of Nations came at a time when the British were monitoring suspicious preparations and movements by the Turks and feared that the Turks might launch an attack on the borders to resolve the issue by military means.<sup>29</sup> The other Allied countries supported Curzon's move and assured the Turks that they would face the combined Allied forces if they attempted to seize Mosul.<sup>30</sup>

The Allies subsequently presented a draft treaty to the Turks, the full text of which was later published by the *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* newspaper in its issues dated 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> February 1923. Among the conditions imposed by the Allies regarding borders was the ceding of Karaağaç to the Greeks.<sup>31</sup> As for Iraq, the draft treaty referred the Mosul issue to the League of Nations.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, there were other stringent clauses concerning the judicial, financial, and economic systems.<sup>33</sup>

Under the serious pressure and threats to halt the negotiations, the Turkish position underwent a pivotal shift. Various archival documents confirm that a meeting took place on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, between the Turks and the Allies, just hours before

lowing publication: Büyük Millet Meclisi (ed.), *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*. 5 vols. Ömer Ali Keskin wrote an introductory article on the circumstances surrounding the creation of these documents and the most important topics they cover: Keskin 2015.

23 HM, 28/1/1923; 29/1/1923.

24 HM, 5/1/1923.

25 Hısayn 1958, 15; Hısayn 1967, 38–9; GCZ, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 203. For further details on the various proposals and attempts made during the negotiations, see: Armaoğlu 1998, 121–32.

26 HM, 29/11/1922.

27 HM, 1/1/1923, 2; 26/1/1923; GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1496.

28 Hısayn 1967, 33; HM, 28/1/1923, 28.

29 HM, 26/1/1923.

30 GCZ, 4 Mart 1339 (4/3/1923), vol. IV, 98; HM, 31/1/1923.

31 HM, 26/1/1923; 8/2/1923, 2; 9/2/1923, 2.

32 HM, 8/2/1923, 2.

33 HM, 31/1/1923.

Curzon's departure from Lausanne and that, on that day, the Turks were forced to make concessions.<sup>34</sup> However, the Turks did not actually sign the draft treaty presented by the Allies – details of the crucial day of 4<sup>th</sup> February and the shifts in the Turkish positions will be discussed further below.

The British delegation left Lausanne on the evening of the same day, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, followed by the remaining delegations, including the Turkish one. The *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* newspaper announced in its issue dated 6<sup>th</sup> February 1923, that the Lausanne Conference remained fruitless.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. The Mosul Question and the Role of the Opposition during the Suspension of the Lausanne Conference (5<sup>th</sup> February 1923–24<sup>th</sup> April 1923)<sup>36</sup>

Upon arriving in Ankara on the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> February 1923, İsmet Pasha immediately attended a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then went to the National Assembly, where a closed and extended session was held. During this session, İsmet Pasha presented a detailed report on the Lausanne Conference and then had a prolonged private meeting with Mustafa Kemal Pasha.<sup>37</sup> This was the first session of the National Assembly, which was followed by several more sessions. However, as was reported in the *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* newspaper, the statements and clarifications made by İsmet Pasha and the rest of the Lausanne delegation to the Assembly were at the time surrounded by strict confidentiality and secrecy, and reporters were unable to obtain any information about them.<sup>38</sup>

34 Among these archival documents are the minutes of the secret session of the National Assembly, especially İsmet Pasha's statement to the Assembly after his return to Ankara on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1923. GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1510.

35 HM, 6 Şubat 1923 (6/2/1923). Some have debated whether the Lausanne Conference ended or was merely suspended. In reality, there was no official notification that the conference had stopped, so from a theoretical, legal perspective, the conference did not come to an end but rather was suspended. Banken 2014, 422, fn. 29. In fact, all the Allied delegations, as well as the Turkish delegation, left their secretaries in Lausanne. GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1502.

36 I should point out here that the discussions in the National Assembly were extensive and complex, covering many other points of great importance and sensitivity. This study examining the Assembly's reports, spanning thousands of pages, in search of those pertaining specifically to Mosul, and it aims to show solely what is related to this issue. In fact, it limits itself to only the most significant sessions and opinions on this matter. However, it should not be understood that the Mosul issue was the only topic discussed by the Assembly, even though it occupied a considerable portion of the discussions.

37 HM, 20/2/1923; 21/2/1923; 22/2/1923; GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1493–506.

38 HM, 23/2/1923.



#### 4.1. Facing the Opposition: The Closed Session of 21<sup>st</sup> February 1923

In his extended statement before the Assembly on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1923, İsmet Pasha gave details of the negotiations of the Lausanne Conference and confirmed that, despite the Allies' pressures, the Turkish delegation had refused to sign the draft treaty presented by the Allies and had not committed to any of its terms.<sup>39</sup> İsmet Pasha then explained that upon returning to Ankara, the Lausanne delegation had met with the Government, and together they had analysed the text of the proposed treaty thoroughly and developed a strategy to follow, should the conference resume. He emphasized that both the delegation and the Government were in agreement that the proposed treaty was unacceptable in terms of economic, financial, and territorial matters, and thus they rejected the draft treaty as a whole. However, at the same time, they both acknowledged that rejecting the treaty in its entirety would result in the conference being terminated permanently, thereby ending the peace process and leading to war breaking out again. Therefore, the proposed strategy involved identifying issues where it was difficult to find agreement with the Allies and seeking to exclude these from the negotiations, while focusing on achieving more important matters. He clarified that both the delegation and the Government had decided to pursue this approach, aiming for maximum alignment between the Allies' interests and the National Pact, particularly concerning border issue, while at the same time seeking to secure the greatest possible benefits in other areas, such as finance, the economy, and administration. He added that he personally believed that no matter how extensive the national territory and borders were, this alone would not ensure security and a good quality of life for the Turkish people. Therefore, the core issue was for the Turkish nation to live, as every other free nation does, in an independent Turkish homeland.<sup>40</sup>

During İsmet Pasha's explanations, there were questions in the Assembly about the true state of the Mosul issue. İsmet Pasha responded that the Mosul issue would be suspended, with attempts being made to settle it through bilateral negotiations with Britain within a year. If no agreement was reached, the delegation wanted to move closer the Allies' viewpoint and by some means find a resolution, such as by referring the matter to the League of Nations.<sup>41</sup> İsmet Pasha then added that the delegation awaited the Assembly's opinion on this strategy. If the Assembly approved it, the delegation would exclude the border issues and focus on other vital matters. He drew the Assembly's attention to the fact that the delegation did not recommend halting negotiations and calling for war. Instead, he advocated for discussing border and other critical issues according to the outlined plan and working sincerely to ensure the country's internal and external security. The delegation believed that following this plan would fulfil all the Turkish demands related to finance, economy, and administration.<sup>42</sup>

39 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1497.

40 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1509–10.

41 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1510.

42 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1510.

Following this, many opposition voices rose in the Assembly, the first being that of Hüseyin Avni, the deputy for Erzurum, who organised and became one of the key leaders of the opposition group. He objected to the proceedings, deeming them a 'belittling of the Assembly,' and stated that while the delegation had the right to think, it was obligated to present matters to the Assembly and not make decisions without consulting it. He also demanded that all members of the negotiation delegation be present and take turns in presenting their statements, and that the Assembly hear from the Minister of Finance, as the proposals brought by the delegation would utterly destroy the state's finances, leaving the Turkish state unable to develop thereafter. Amidst loud chanting and applause in the Assembly, Hüseyin Avni added that dividing the issues under negotiation into primary issues related to finance, the economy, and administration, and secondary ones related to borders, was a European negotiating trick; for the Turks there were no financial issues and border issues etc; rather, the issue was one of independence as a whole, and the Assembly would not discuss independence based on these classifications.<sup>43</sup>

After this, İhsan Bey (Eryavuz, 1877–1947), the deputy for Cebelibereket – a city in Turkey still known by this name – intervened and emphasized the consequence of this decision on Mosul, since losing Mosul would allow the British to create a Kurdish issue there and incite unrest in the region however they wished. He therefore saw two possible solutions: either make peace with the condition that Mosul remains Turkish or go to war over it.<sup>44</sup>

Hüseyin Sırrı (Bellioğlu, 1876–1958), the deputy from İzmit,<sup>45</sup> focused on the importance and significance of the National Pact to the Turkish people, stating that the principles of the pact were engraved on the heart of every Turk; the Turks would not accept the draft proposed by the Foreign Minister, İsmet Pasha, as it ceded Mosul and thus violated the National Pact. He demanded that the delegation members resign from their positions or else the Assembly would dismiss them forcibly.<sup>46</sup>

Faced with the rising voices of opposition, Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay, 1881–1964),<sup>47</sup> – the Chairman of the National Assembly and Prime Minister at the time – intervened. He explained that the commission had analysed the financial, economic, and military issues in the draft treaty, as well as the matters related to the straits and borders, weigh-

43 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1511–2.

44 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1525.

45 He was particularly opposed to state control over economic institutions and advocated privatization. He was excluded from the elections for the second term of the National Assembly, but he continued his opposition and was arrested in 1940 while distributing opposition leaflets. He was given a 9-year prison sentence for incitement against the Government, being released in 1949. He passed away on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1958 in Istanbul. Akkurt et al. 2013, 152–3.

46 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1514–5.

47 Hüseyin Rauf Bey was the Prime Minister (12/7/1922–4/8/1923) and the Chairman of the National Assembly (*İcra Vekilleri Heyeti Reisi*) during the period of the War of Independence. For more information about him, see the conclusion of this article and the online Atatürk Encyclopaedia, URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/huseyin-rauf-orbay-1880-1964/>.

ing the resulting losses and benefits. As a result, it had then prepared a plan of action. Hüseyin Rauf warned that this plan was based on important considerations: despite all the efforts of the Lausanne delegation, the Allies still refused to grant the Turks economic independence, and in addition, the Turks faced significant resistance on the issue of borders. He added that the commission knew it was impossible to achieve a peace settlement that met all Turkish hopes, and stated that, to avoid the negotiations being fruitless, the commission saw the need to make some concessions to the Allies, in particular in relation to Karaağaç,<sup>48</sup> which was primarily an economic issue. As for Mosul, this would be deferred for a year and would be resolved by gaining the support of the inhabitants (Arabs, Kurds, and Turks) and distancing them from the British. Hüseyin Rauf further mentioned that the Government had also considered the possibility of declaring war and that the army was ready, but the question remained open about the duration of the war and whether it would yield any result. He noted that after considering all these points, the commission had agreed on a plan of action based on these concessions. In return, such a settlement would mean the withdrawal of Allied forces from Istanbul and the achievement of national independence for the Turks, including financial independence, judicial independence, and economic independence.<sup>49</sup>

The discussion became heated, turning into mutual accusations, so Mustafa Kemal Pasha asked the Assembly for permission to explain his viewpoint. He emphasized that the delegation had, in no way, accepted the draft treaty proposed by the Allies. They had merely come to discuss the matter with the Government, and both the delegation and the Government had agreed on this plan of action and on finding a conciliatory basis to ask the Allies for peace. He continued that the only reason the delegation was standing in front of the Assembly today was because of the issue of borders. The delegation and the Government had decided to accept certain border issues with modifications, to exclude others entirely from the text, to sign the treaty with these changes, and to enter into a peace process. The intended amendments were: firstly, to concede Karaağaç, and secondly, to leave the Mosul issue to be settled between the British and the Turks within one year. A decision had to be made on those two fundamental issues. In return, all financial and even economic issues that were unacceptable will be removed from the proposed treaty. Mustafa Kemal made clear that, in reality, he saw no harm in this approach; rather, he saw it as being beneficial, because everyone knew that refusing this option and insisting on Mosul meant going to war. Hence, the question to consider was whether there was any benefit in postponing the Mosul issue for a year to be negotiated with the British bilaterally, while entering into a peace treaty and avoiding war. Mustafa Kemal added that what the Government and the delegation needed today was a single decision: to resolve the Mosul issue by either accepting or rejecting it, as the national interest required this decision.<sup>50</sup>

48 This is the Edirne/Adrianople train station, located today on the border where the three countries, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece, meet.

49 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1517–9.

50 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1522–3.

Mustafa Kemal also opposed those who had accused the delegation and the Government of abandoning the National Pact. He clarified that the issue of borders and territories was addressed by the National Pact in Article 1, but that the National Pact did not, in any way, mark out the borders in this way or that. Rather, the delineation of the borders should only happen according to the benefit of the nation and the Government's sound perspective. Therefore, there was no conflict with, or infringement of the National Pact; on the contrary, all the Pact's provisions had been respected.<sup>51</sup>

Several deputies then objected to Mustafa Kemal's statement. Ahmet Nebil Effendi (Yurter, 1876–1943), the representative of Karahisar, recalled that at the last session of the Lausanne Conference the Turkish delegation had already announced that the settlement of Mosul would be postponed for a year, and the newspapers had confirmed this. Mustafa Kemal replied that the newspapers could write what they wanted, but what he was now hearing came from the Lausanne delegation itself. Hüseyin Sırrı Bey objected to Mustafa Kemal's criticism of those who talked about the incompatibility of the proposals regarding Mosul with the National Pact, saying that he was sure of what he was saying and that he himself was one of those who helped to write the Pact, to which Mustafa Kemal replied: 'I wish you hadn't written. You have caused us a lot of trouble. Today you have done nothing but say something that is contrary to certainty.'<sup>52</sup>

Zeynel Abidin (Atak, 1879–1939) the deputy for Lazistan, commented with some degree of derision that it seemed that the Pasha and the negotiating delegation had disregarded the mandate given to them by the Assembly and believed they could redraw the map of the homeland as they pleased. He added that if the delegation had neglected their consciences and their minds were sleeping, they would not have achieved any less than the peace proposal they had presented. He further stated that Mosul was a part of the homeland and must be reclaimed by the sword and not left under occupation.<sup>53</sup>

The session continued with rising opposition voices and ended with the signing of formal demands calling for the provision of sufficient information to the deputies of the Assembly, as well as the printing and distribution to the members of the draft treaty presented by the Allies.<sup>54</sup>

51 Here, Mustafa Kemal was going against his earlier statements on the matter made to the National Assembly on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1920. He then mentioned that Mosul, Sulaymaniyah, and Kirkuk were within the borders of the National Pact. See the text of his speech in: Göyünç 1998, 48; Sonyel 1986, vol. 2, 296. Compare this with the citation provided by Armaoğlu, which only presents a brief portion of Mustafa Kemal's words. Armaoğlu does not include what Mustafa Kemal said about the National Pact not defining specific borders nor that the demarcation of borders should happen according to the nation's interests. Nor does he include Mustafa Kemal's statements about exchanging Mosul for financial and economic matters. Instead, Armaoğlu notes in the conclusion of his study, that the Government and Mustafa Kemal focused on achieving full independence in political, economic, financial, administrative, and judicial matters. This is not shown in relation to the issue of suspending the Mosul question. Armaoğlu 1998, 139, 152.

52 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1524.

53 *Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1526–7.

54 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1528–32.

#### 4.2. Facing the Opposition: The Closed Session of 4<sup>th</sup> March 1923

Following this first session, there were further closed sessions of the Assembly, with İsmet Pasha and the other members of the Turkish delegation to Lausanne presenting their statements and discussing with the Assembly all the military, economic, border, and other issues from the Lausanne negotiations.<sup>55</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1923, the topic of Mosul was again raised, sparking debate in the Assembly. İsmet Pasha mentioned that the Lausanne Conference had started on 20<sup>th</sup> November, a week later than the initially planned 13<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>56</sup> He said that during this period, the British had worked to unify the Allies' position before the negotiations began and had sought to settle the issue of the islands, the Syrian borders, and the Mosul issue by way of consensus among themselves. He noted that they were keen not to provoke any rivalry among themselves. As a result, the Turks were not facing only the British on the Mosul issue; rather, the other Allies also considered themselves closely involved with the Mosul issue.<sup>57</sup>

İsmet Pasha's dramatic portrayal of the delegation's struggles, did not stop opposition voices again rising, so Hüseyin Rauf took the floor and tried to convince the Assembly of the validity of the decision to suspend the Mosul issue. He emphasized that Mosul belonged to the Turks, but the purpose of suspending the matter now was to follow a course of action that would allow for negotiations to resume in order to bring about changes in vital issues for the Turkish homeland and to lead to a peace settlement without war.<sup>58</sup>

Hüseyin Rauf also pointed out another crucial point: as long as the negotiations remained suspended, the Armistice of Mudanya (11<sup>th</sup> October 1922) would remain in effect with all its provisions, including foreign troops remaining in Istanbul and the surrounding area. However, if a peace treaty was concluded, this would mean that the Armistice of Mudanya would be cancelled and foreign troops would withdraw from Istanbul, the Greek army would be disbanded, and the Turkish position would be much stronger than today. Then the Government and the Assembly would be in a better position to reclaim Mosul. Therefore, the best option was to temporarily remove the Mosul issue from the peace negotiations and address it with the British within a year. Hüseyin Rauf added that extending the suspension of the conference was not in the

55 HM, 4/3/1923.

56 The Allies had agreed to delay the conference for a week, but İsmet Pasha was not informed of this postponement. As a result, he and his delegation found themselves standing before closed doors in Lausanne. Later, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November the *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* newspaper published İsmet Pasha's protest, in which he stated that he had left his army and come to Lausanne for the peace conference, only to find no one there! The matter did not stop at this, as the same newspaper confirmed that the conference had actually begun on 20<sup>th</sup> November, but until that moment, the Turkish Government had not received any official or unofficial information regarding the start of the conference. HM, 22/11/1922; 23/11/1923.

57 GCZ, 4 Mart 1339 (4/3/1923), vol. IV, 93–95.

58 GCZ, 4 Mart 1339 (4/3/1923), vol. IV, 104–6.

Turks' interest at all, as at any moment there could be an incident in Istanbul or on the borders, and the state's security and the nation's safety would compel the Government to respond with military action. This posed a very serious danger with unforeseeable consequences. Thus, the Government did not support prolonging this suspended situation and proposed returning to the negotiating table to try to achieve success through the conference. If these efforts failed, then the Government and the Assembly could discuss going to war.<sup>59</sup>

Despite his lengthy arguments, Hüseyin Rauf could not convince the opposition voices, and once again, Hüseyin Avni's voice was the loudest. He was astonished that the delegation and the Turkish army, at the peak of its capabilities and victories, should settle for 'half a peace,' and he urged the delegation to avoid this trap and not deceive itself with the hope that Mosul could be reclaimed after a year. He questioned disparagingly what would make the British give up Mosul tomorrow when they are clinging to it today. He added that if the Turks could not recover Mosul, it would be a disgrace to give it away for free. He warned that the Turks were unwittingly giving the British time to gather their forces and attempt to establish a Kurdish state on those lands, fragmenting the land of the Turks. He warned that the danger would become greater and would threaten all of Anatolia, especially if the British worked towards establishing an Armenian state, reviving the Armenians' dreams of their great state. Hüseyin Avni then declared his categorical rejection of what he called the 'false peace,' which he saw as 'a humiliation for the nation.' He directly addressed İsmet Pasha, demanding that he lead his army, raise his spear, and march with his banner to protect Turkey's borders. Following this, the Assembly erupted in cheers and voices of support, calling on İsmet Pasha to go to Lausanne and take his army and cannons with him.<sup>60</sup>

#### *4.3. Facing the Opposition: The Closed Session of 5th March 1923*

Discussions in the Assembly continued the following day – 5<sup>th</sup> March 1923 – with the members of the Assembly offering their opinions on the Mosul issue. Hüseyin Sırrı Bey, the deputy for İzmit, raised his voice in opposition to the Government's plan. He then gave a detailed account of Mosul's history and presented various arguments to confirm the affiliation of Mosul, part of which was inhabited by Turks and a larger part by Kurds. As such, it fell outside the area occupied by an Arab majority. Thus, the Turkish claim was legitimate, and Mosul and its surrounding areas were an indivisible part of the Turkish homeland. Acting otherwise, even by just delaying the issue for a year, would mean failing to adhere to the National Pact, and anyone daring to do so should be punished. Hüseyin Sırrı Bey concluded by endorsing Hüseyin Avni's views expressed on the previous day and warning of the danger of British control over Mosul, as they would then work to establish a puppet government that they could direct as they wished, thereby creating a source of conflict and unrest throughout the region.

59 GCZ, 4 Mart 1339 (4/3/1923), vol. IV, 106–7.

60 GCZ, 4 Mart 1339 (4/3/1923), vol. IV, 112–4.



Simply by forming this fake government in Mosul, they would encourage the Kurds in Iran to join that artificial state, and the same would happen with the Kurds of Turkey. This is despite the fact that they worked alongside the Turks and sacrificed their lives and their children alongside them.<sup>61</sup>

In fact, the Kurds of Mosul represented a card that various parties sought to exploit. The British, in particular, used them as a means of pressure on both Iraq and Turkey, repeatedly reminding each side during negotiations that the question of the region's final status had not yet been definitively resolved. For their part, the Turks conducted an active propaganda campaign linking the Turks and the Kurds – both of whom were Sunnis – under the banner of Pan-Islam. Their aim was to prevent the spread of Kurdish nationalism, which was being supported by Britain. The Turks also had a party in Mosul that was loyal to them, and they would send secret messages to their supporters, offering rewards for distributing pamphlets, organising protests, and raising Turkish flags.<sup>62</sup> Several Turkish military officers were active in the area, among them an Ottoman officer of Circassian origin named Ali Şefik Bey, better known as Özdemir Bey (1885–1934). Then, from October 1922, the Turks amassed their forces on Iraq's northern border. Several military divisions even reached Jazirat Ibn 'Umar in January 1923, launching attacks on the British camps there, thereby forcing them to evacuate most of southern Kurdistan and make major changes to their policy in the region.<sup>63</sup>

Ali Şükrü Bey (1884–1923)<sup>64</sup> then delivered an extended address on the Mosul question, adding another strong voice to the opposition in the Assembly. He unequivocally rejected the notion that the British would wage war over Mosul. He argued that if the British were able to do so, they would have gone to war when they had the Greeks on Turkish soil, with a force of two to three hundred thousand soldiers who had not yet been defeated. However, Britain would not withdraw troops from Australia or

61 GCZ, 5 Mart 1339 (5/3/1923), vol. IV, 131–3.

See how the Kurds were instrumentalized as a bargaining chip by both the British and the Turkish sides – including both the government and the opposition – to gain leverage in the Lausanne negotiations, in: Ali 1997, 521–34; Ali 2001, 31–48; Kieser 2023a, 180–4.

62 On this, see: al-Wardi 1979, vol. 6, 211–2, and also what the governor of Mosul recorded: al-Qaṣṣāb 2007, 292, in addition to appendices with secret letters that came into his possession, 293–6.

63 Ali 2017, 970–2; Hıusayn 1967, 231.

64 He was a Turkish military officer, journalist, and politician. He founded and served as the editor-in-chief of the *Tan* newspaper in Ankara, which became a powerful voice of opposition during this period of Turkey's history. He participated in the War of Independence through various activities, including translation, mobilising public opinion, and transporting supplies. He subsequently moved to Ankara and was elected as a member of the National Assembly. He was one of the most vehement opposition voices, delivering 183 speeches in the Assembly, 37 of which were during closed sessions. He was the strongest voice against the Lausanne Treaty proposal, advocating the continuation of the war, if necessary. For more information about his assassination, see the conclusion of this study. URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/ali-sukru-bey-1884-1923> (last accessed 13 August 2025).

elsewhere to open a new front in Mosul. Furthermore, the British Government faced strong domestic opposition that insisted that they withdraw from Mosul and suffice with the lands up to Basra. He noted that the issue of withdrawing from Mosul was debated in the British House of Commons and put to a vote, with the margin of votes not being significant. Ali Şükrü Bey believed that the only reason that those calling for withdrawal failed to win was the hesitation of the Turks, which gave the British hope of annexing Mosul.

Ali Şükrü Bey added that he had heard many questions about whether the National Pact delineates clear and specific borders or not. He clarified that the Government needs a lesson on this matter, as the National Pact did indeed define these borders; every place that was under Turkish control before the signing of the Armistice was within the boundaries specified by the National Pact, amongst them Mosul. He mentioned that the British had demanded the surrender of Mosul.<sup>65</sup> But these demands were not heeded by the Turks, so the British occupied Mosul by force. However, they were forced to withdraw thanks to the efforts of the Turkish garrison. Unfortunately, the Government of Damad Mehmed Adil Ferid Pasha (1853–1923) issued an order to withdraw, and the British reoccupied Mosul. Nevertheless, in reality, Mosul fell within the borders defined by the National Pact, just like Ankara or Sivas, because the Turkish army was present there and had not withdrawn when the Armistice was signed.<sup>66</sup>

The discussion about Mosul in this session became highly tense and was interspersed with shouts such as ‘They are selling Mosul’ and ‘They must renounce this.’ The Assembly became completely divided, with the opposition members exchanging insults with the government representatives and the members of the negotiating committee. Words like ‘vile,’ ‘despicable,’ ‘immoral,’ and ‘scoundrel’ were heard.<sup>67</sup> This prompted the session’s chairman, Ali Fuat Pasha (Cebesoy, 1882–1968),<sup>68</sup> to temporarily adjourn the meeting until later that afternoon. At that time, having regained his composure, Hüseyin Rauf Bey attempted to make a decisive statement. He urged the Assembly to look carefully at the option proposed by the Government and the delegation regarding

65 Ali Şükrü Bey does not mention the name of the armistice, but it is clear that he is referring to the Armistice of Mudros. However, the dates he mentions in this context seem inaccurate; the Armistice of Mudros was signed on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918, and not on 21st October, like he mentions. Nevertheless, what he states about the demands made on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> November aligns with what Fâdil Hıusayn mentions about a demand being made on 8<sup>th</sup> November, after which the British entered Mosul and raised the British flag there. See Hıusayn 1958, 39; Hıusayn 1967, 2–5.

66 Armaoğlu does not present Şükrü Bey’s statements regarding the inclusion of Mosul within the National Pact, as they directly contradict Mustafa Kemal’s statements on the matter. C.f. Armaoğlu 1998, 144–5.

67 GCZ, 5 Mart 1339 (5/3/1923), vol. IV, 131–3.

68 We have seen above that Hüseyin Rauf Bey was the chairman of the previous sessions of the National Assembly, but this session and the final one on 6<sup>th</sup> March were chaired by Ali Fuat Pasha. He was a childhood friend of Mustafa Kemal and his comrade during the war. For more information about him, see the online Atatürk Encyclopaedia, URL: <https://atat-urkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/ali-fuat-cebesoy-1882-1968/> (last accessed 13 August 2025).

Mosul. He then reminded them that the Assembly could not completely disregard the proposed treaty, as rejecting it would mean maintaining the Armistice of Mudanya, with all the associated risks.<sup>69</sup>

#### *4.4. Facing the Opposition: The Closed Session of 6<sup>th</sup> March 1923*

The final closed session of the Assembly, on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1923, surpassed all previous sessions in terms of the level of its hostility, with the dispute reaching its peak and the opposition voices not settling on the Mosul issue. Mustafa Durak Bey (1876–1942), the deputy from Erzurum,<sup>70</sup> returned and emphasized the danger of a Kurdish state established by the British.<sup>71</sup> Yusuf Ziya Bey (Koçoğlu, 1882–1925), the deputy from Bitlis,<sup>72</sup> who was a Kurd, emphasised that he knew the Kurdish spirit, belief, and faith. In an emotionally charged speech, he pleaded for the Turkish Government to take his words seriously and not allow Mosul to be lost. He argued that, given its geography, ethnic composition, and political and social structure, Mosul should not remain in British hands. He stressed that if Turks and Kurds could not live together in brotherhood, there would be no future for either of them.<sup>73</sup>

Mustafa Kemal, who had previously limited himself to just a few interventions and brief remarks, requested to speak. He noted that the Assembly was in fact unanimously agreed that the treaty proposal presented by the Allies should be categorically rejected, as it completely undermined Turkish independence. If the Allies insisted on enforcing acceptance of the proposal as it stood, the Government, Assembly, and the entire nation were agreed that war would become necessary. However, war should be the last option. Before resorting to war, efforts should be made to achieve peace. Mustafa Kemal clarified that he believed that the Assembly should provide the delegation with a new approach for looking at the peace proposal, and that they should avoid discussing the issue of postponing Mosul, despite its importance, and focus the discussion on administrative, political, financial, and economic issues, and that they should provide appropriate guidance to the members of the delegation so that they could try to achieve the withdrawal of foreign troops and the complete independence of the Turkish nation.

Mustafa Kemal affirmed his complete conviction that the delegation had fulfilled its duty excellently in the negotiations. He urged the Assembly to give instructions to the

69 GCZ, 5 Mart 1339 (5/3/1923), vol. IV, 139–44.

70 Since the opposition did not participate in the second assembly elections in 1923, he left politics and moved into business. For more information, see the online Atatürk Encyclopaedia, URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/mustafa-durak-bey-sakarya-1876-1942/> (last accessed 13 August 2025).

71 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 179–80.

72 He joined the opposition in the assembly and was among those demanding that Mosul remain part of Turkey. He was later accused of participating in Kurdish uprisings, brought to trial, and executed by firing squad. See URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/yusuf-ziya-bey-kocoglu-1882-1925/> (last accessed 13 August 2025).

73 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 189–90.

delegation as soon as possible. If the outcome was to be peace, that would be ideal, but if it was war, there was no room for delay, and the necessary military measures must be taken immediately. Mustafa Kemal then referred to a petition signed by some members of the Assembly, explaining that in essence it aligned with his stated observations. He strongly warned against continuing unproductive discussions, and urged the members to accept his proposal and close the debate.<sup>74</sup>

However, Mustafa Kemal himself could not even quell the criticisms. Ali Şükrü Bey strongly challenged him, accusing him of providing false information. He asserted that the Lausanne delegation had accepted the draft treaty presented by the Allies before consulting the Assembly on the disputed points, and that this draft included suspending the Mosul issue and ceding Karaağaç, although the Turkish delegation had not yet signed it. Thus, the issues of Mosul and Karaağaç had already been settled and the only remaining points the Assembly could object to were judicial, financial, and economic matters. He added that he would reveal another important secret, which was that one of the delegation members, whose name he knew, acting on his own behalf, had informed Lord Curzon, shortly before he left Lausanne, that the Turks also accepted the judicial terms. Ali Şükrü Bey reiterated that the Assembly faced a *fait accompli* and that the delegation only needed its formal approval, as it could not return to the negotiating table and sign without it. He added that the delegation had in fact accepted the proposal even before consulting with the Assembly and had thus deviated from the Government's instructions and the Assembly's procedures.<sup>75</sup>

Mustafa Kemal responded sharply to these accusations, stating that they were the figment of Ali Şükrü Bey's imagination. He gave an evasive response to what had been said,<sup>76</sup> and then addressed Ali Şükrü Bey directly, warning him sharply that it was not for him to say whether the Assembly's instructions had been bypassed and that only the Assembly had the authority to review whether the delegation had acted against instructions. He added that, although he was not personally present, he knew that the head of the Government had appeared before the Assembly and discussed the matter with it, and that the Assembly had made the only reasonable and correct decision, which was to recall the delegation from Lausanne, believing that they should continue the war. He added that by the time the council had discussed the matter and issued its decision, several days had passed, during which many things had changed. In light of

74 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 200–2.

75 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 203. See the words of İsmet Pasha in his address to the council, as mentioned earlier in this article, where he portrays the suspension of the Mosul issue and the ceding of Karaağaç as a plan of action developed jointly by the delegation and the government, and that he came to present it to the council for consultation.

76 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 203. Armaoğlu cites numerous interventions by the opposition, but he does not present the direct clashes and disputes with Mustafa Kemal. For example, see his presentation of Şükrü Bey's statements, which omit the quarrels with Mustafa Kemal: Armaoğlu 1998, 144–5.

these changes, the head of the delegation requested new instructions. However, there was no time to send that request to the Assembly and await its directives.<sup>77</sup>

A letter from İsmet Pasha to the heads of the British, French, and Italian delegations, dated 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, found by Fāḍil Ḥusayn<sup>78</sup> in the British archives, confirms Ali Şükrü Bey's statements. The letter contains the following paragraph concerning Mosul:

Regarding Mosul, we find it appropriate – and our sole aim is to confirm that this issue will not be an obstacle to concluding a peace treaty – to exclude it from the agenda of the conference so that it can be resolved through an agreement between Great Britain and Turkey within one year.<sup>79</sup>

Fāḍil Ḥusayn states that the attempt of Lord Curzon and İsmet Pasha to reach a mutual solution, occurred on the last day of the first Lausanne Conference. Fāḍil Ḥusayn writes:

A final attempt to reach an agreement was made by holding an informal meeting in Lord Curzon's room at the Beau Rivage Hotel in Lausanne on Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, at 5:40 pm. Representatives from Britain, France, Italy, and Turkey attended the meeting. Curzon, driven by a spirit of friendship and reconciliation, declared that he was prepared to postpone the outcome of his appeal to the League of Nations for one year, so that the British and Turkish governments had sufficient time to study the matter in direct and friendly negotiations. He added that he could do this under two conditions: 1) If the two governments failed to reach a direct understanding, the intervention of the League of Nations would be requested; and 2) The current situation in that region must be maintained during the year of negotiations. Curzon

77 This indicates that Mustafa Kemal and the delegation were unable to refer back to the Assembly and most likely acted without consulting it. It seems evident that the Assembly had issued orders for military movements (HM, 1/1923, 26). However, it appears that Mustafa Kemal bypassed the Assembly in this instance, as many things had changed and the delegation had requested swift instructions, making it impossible to refer back to the council. Yet, we do not know the content of the instructions issued without the Assembly's input. Was an order given to halt military movements? It seems that the act of bypassing the Assembly intensified further during the second Lausanne Conference, where Mustafa Kemal directly controlled the decisions through secret telegrams exchanged with İsmet Pasha. For examples of these telegrams, see: No. 643, 18/7/1923; No. 644, 19/7/1923; No. 647, 20/7/1923 in: Şimşir 1994, vol. II, 582–4; 586.

78 Fāḍil Ḥusayn Kāzım Ḥusayn Al-Anşārī was an Iraqi historian (1914–1989). He studied at the American University of Beirut where he obtained a bachelor's degree in history in 1943. He later travelled to the United States, where he studied at Indiana University and earned a PhD in 1952 for a dissertation on the Mosul Governorate. Fāḍil Ḥusayn then returned to Iraq, where he held several positions, most notably serving as the President of Al-Hikma University in Baghdad in 1968. Among his most important works, in addition to his two aforementioned books on the Lausanne Conference and the Mosul issue, are *Suqūt al-Nizām al-Malaki fī al-'Irāq* (1974) and *Mushkilat Shaṭṭ al-'Arab* (1975).

79 The text of the letter is from: Ḥusayn 1967, 35.

also said that he had prepared the following draft statement, which he had given to İsmet, and declared his readiness to sign it:

Regarding the second paragraph of Article 3 of the peace treaty, His Majesty's Government announces its intention not to invite the League of Nations to commence in determining the boundaries between Iraq and Turkey until the end of a twelve-month period from the date of the signing of this treaty. This decision has been made in the hope of a possible resolution of the problem during the aforementioned period through an agreement between the British and Turkish governments, on condition that it is understood by both parties that during this period there will be no change in the current situation in the territories under discussion, whether through military movements or otherwise.

İsmet Pasha announced his acceptance of Lord Curzon's proposal regarding Mosul.<sup>80</sup>

The British diplomat and writer Harold Nicolson (1886–1968), who accompanied the British delegation and was present in Lord Curzon's room during the meeting between the Allies and İsmet Pasha on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, confirms what Fāḍil Ḥusayn has written. Nicolson mentions in his memoirs that İsmet Pasha 'accepts practically all the British claims, but holds out over economics and capitulations.'<sup>81</sup> He also stated that Lord Curzon overlooked the request to refer the issue to the League of Nations, which he had sent.<sup>82</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923, was a particularly pivotal day vis-à-vis the Turkish stance on the Mosul issue. At the beginning of the Lausanne Conference, the Turks insisted that Mosul belonged to the Turkish nation, and they emphasised, on a number of occasions, that the province and its oil belonged to the Turks and that they would not accept any alternatives.<sup>83</sup> They even rejected Curzon's offers to concede a share of the oil to them in exchange for Mosul.<sup>84</sup> However, in the final days of the conference, under intense pressure from the Allies and the threat of the conference failing, the Turks focused their efforts on accepting less and on the goal of achieving some form of gain. Hence, on this notable day – 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923 – they ended up offering to cede Mosul to the British in exchange for a share of the oil, as confirmed by İsmet Pasha himself in his statement before the National Assembly. However, in the words of İsmet Pasha, they

80 Husayn 1967, 35–6. See also the following bibliographic data regarding the letter: Foreign Office, *Turkey No. 1 (1923) Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs 1922–1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace, Cmd. 1814* (London, 1923).

81 Nicolson, Harald G., *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919–1925: A Study in Post-War Diplomacy*. London: Constable, 1934. Quoted in: Kieser 2023a, 196–7. See also further details from Nicolson's memoirs of the difficult meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February in Kieser 2023b, 212–13.

82 'The Marquess [Curzon] throws in...the appeal to the League over Mosul', Nicolson, Harald G., *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919–1925: A Study in Post-War Diplomacy*. London: Constable, 1934. Quoted in: Kieser 2023a, 197.

83 HM, 29/11/1922.

84 HM, 21/12/1922; 26/1/1923.



were compelled to agree to suspend the Mosul issue.<sup>85</sup> A report by Zülfü Bey (Tiğrel, 1877–1940), the deputy from Diyarbakır and one of the advisors in the Lausanne delegation, presented to the National Assembly on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1923, after the delegation's return to Ankara, confirmed that the Turks were willing to accept a share of the oil, but, the British preferred to suspend the issue, hoping to keep thus both Mosul and its oil.<sup>86</sup>

The meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February between the two parties, mediated by the Allies, ended with Curzon withdrawing his letter to the League of Nations and agreement that attempts would be made to resolve the Mosul issue between Turkey and Britain within a year. If it was not resolved during this period, it would be referred to the League of Nations.<sup>87</sup> However, the Turks did not sign this proposal, as Zülfü Pasha later stated in the Assembly, and as Ali Şükrü Bey also confirmed in his aforementioned statement. Nicolson's account also confirms that the signing did not take place.<sup>88</sup>

The dispute between Mustafa Kemal and Ali Şükrü Bey in the Assembly intensified. Ziya Hurşit (1890–1926), the deputy of Lazistan (now Rize), gave support to Ali Şükrü Bey, as did many other voices, and there was so much chaos in the Assembly that some called for intervention to ensure the security.<sup>89</sup> The Chairman of the session, Ali Fuat Pasha then moved on to reading the petitions submitted to the Assembly. Some were signed by individuals, while others were signed by groups of varying sizes. The petition by Kara Vâsıf Bey (1880–1931), the deputy for Sivas, which opposed the resumption

85 This is as İsmet Pasha later recounted before the National Assembly. He stated: 'We could not resolve the issue between us [i.e. in his private bilateral sessions with Curzon]. So they said, 'Let's present the issue to the committee again'. So we agreed and stood before the delegation once more. We said to ourselves, 'Let's reach an agreement with them regarding Mosul and find some solution.' Of course, we could reclaim Mosul by military means, but we said to ourselves, 'If they have certain interests, such as economic development [of the province] or the exploitation of its oil resources, or if they fear that we might incite certain elements against them, let's reassure them and find some solution.' They, too, were seeking a solution so that they could keep the city of Mosul in their hands. 'And since we don't want to hand it over to them for economic benefits or its oil, let them [at least] give us a share [of its oil], as they give to others.' The issue stalled at this point during the discussions of the general session [in Lausanne]. In the end, the Allies stood united against us and firmly and definitively threatened us that they would halt the conference. They forced us to agree on the Mosul issue [i.e. agree to postpone the issue].' GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1496. Regarding the Turks being forced to accept postponing the Mosul issue, see also: GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1501.

86 GCZ, 4 Mart 1339 (4/3/1923), vol. IV, 108.

87 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 203.

88 Regarding this, see also what the Swiss historian Hans-Lukas Kieser reported about the memoirs of Harold Nicolson. Nicolson depicted İsmet Pasha's difficult position, mentioning that Pasha refused to sign the proposed treaty draft and left the hotel. The Allies expected him to return with a positive response, so much so that they delayed their train's departure. However, this was in vain, and the British delegation left Lausanne without İsmet Pasha's agreeing to sign. See: Kieser 2023a, 200.

89 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 204, 208–9.

of negotiations, was signed by sixty deputies and the second in order.<sup>90</sup> As for the petition mentioned by Mustafa Kemal, this was presented by Reşat Bey, the deputy for Saruhan (the old name for Manisa). This was the first in order, having more than 130 signatures.<sup>91</sup>

The votes were then counted and Ali Fuat Pasha stated that 65 percent of the votes were in favour of resuming peace negotiations. He further announced that the Mosul issue would be postponed for one year and would be settled with the British. Then, if no agreement was reached, the proposal previously made by the British would be implemented and the matter would be referred to the League of Nations for settlement. Ali Fuat Pasha then called for the petition to be approved, and announced that 170 out of 190 had approved it, to which Ziya Hurşit remarked, 'Conversely, there were 130 people who abstained from voting.'<sup>92</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The minutes of the closed sessions of the National Assembly reveal that a strong opposition had emerged, voicing criticism on various aspects of the Lausanne negotiations – most notably the suspension of the Mosul issue. The opposition included prominent figures such as Hüseyin Avni Bey, Ali Şükrü Bey, and Ziya Hurşit.<sup>93</sup> Yet, despite its strong presence and firm stance on Mosul, the Turkish opposition ultimately failed to assert its position regarding the 'southern Turkish borders' and the incorporation of Mosul into the nascent Turkish state. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the opposition was entirely unsuccessful.

Through sustained political pressure, the opposition managed to restrain the Ankara Government and its delegation in Lausanne from yielding easily to Allied demands and prevented the swift concession of Mosul. It can even be argued that the pressure exerted by the opposition rivalled, if not exceeded, that of the British and their Allies, compelling the Government to seek an alternative to unconditional surrender. The Ankara Government came to believe that deferring the Mosul issue was a strategic solution – one that could persuade both the opposition and the broader public that Mosul had not been abandoned. Mustafa Kemal himself sought to convey this notion, declar-

90 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 211–2.

91 For the text of the petition with all the signatures, see: GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 209–11.

92 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 218–21; HM, 7/3/1923. The second Lausanne Conference began thereafter on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1923, and the peace treaty was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1923. The British and the Turks were unable to resolve the Mosul issue through mutual agreement, so it was referred to the League of Nations, resulting in it being ultimately placed under the British mandate. For details on all of this, see: Hüsain 1967, 40 to the end of the book. GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1524.

93 These are primarily the individuals associated with the Mosul issue. But there were other opposition figures, some of whom were assassinated. See on the assassination of Mehmet Cavit Pasha: Kieser 2023b, 247–52.

ing: 'Postponing the Mosul issue for a year and avoiding war does not mean neglecting it. Perhaps we can wait until we are stronger to achieve this goal. So let us sign a peace treaty today, and in a month or two, we can resume efforts to resolve the Mosul issue.'<sup>94</sup> The scene described in Nicolson's memoirs vividly illustrates the pressure experienced by the Turkish side: 'İsmet dabs his handkerchief against his lips... 'I can't,' he mumbles wretchedly, 'I can't.' Nicolson remarked, 'It is very painful.'<sup>95</sup>

The Government's response to this mounting internal pressure was strategic and far-reaching. Confronted by growing criticism, particularly over İsmet İnönü's willingness to postpone the Mosul issue in coordination with Britain, the Ankara Government began portraying dissent as a threat to national unity. To counter both domestic opposition and British diplomatic leverage, the Turkish delegation adopted a rigid nationalist discourse, incorporating Kurds into what it termed the 'Turanian race,' in an attempt to construct a unified ethnic identity that would justify Turkey's claim to Mosul. While this framing lacked historical and scholarly credibility, it served as a deliberate political strategy to delay resolution of the Mosul issue and strengthen Turkey's position in negotiations.<sup>96</sup>

As negotiations grew increasingly tense and threatened to collapse altogether – with Britain warning of the failure of the Lausanne Conference and the possible resumption of war – Ankara gradually began to retreat from its initial claim. In a bid to placate internal opposition, the government sought to reframe the issue by asserting that Mosul did not, in fact, fall within the boundaries of the 'Turkish homeland,' and that it had never been explicitly included in the National Pact. Mustafa Kemal emphasized that borders should be drawn solely according to the interests of the nation and the sound judgment of the government. This argument, however, stood in stark contrast to earlier official narratives that had invoked the National Pact to justify territorial claims, thereby exposing a degree of inconsistency in Ankara's position.

Facing a deadlock and with no viable diplomatic or political escape, İsmet Pasha and Mustafa Kemal ultimately bypassed the Assembly altogether. As the Lausanne talks progressed, they increasingly sidelined the legislative body, which prompted further accusations from the opposition of authoritarian conduct. İsmet, often unable – or perhaps unwilling – to obtain instructions from the Assembly, turned directly to Mustafa Kemal for guidance. This centralization of decision-making was exemplified not only in the Karaağaç negotiations with Greece – where İsmet agreed, in consultation with Mustafa Kemal, to accept territorial compensation in lieu of reparations – but also in the informal agreement with Lord Curzon to suspend the Mosul question, reached just hours before the British delegation departed Lausanne on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1923.

During the Suspension of the Lausanne Conference, the government endeavoured to silence the opposition and succeeded in sidelining it from the 1923 parliamentary

94 GCZ, 21 Şubat 1338 (21/2/1923), vol. III, 1524.

95 Nicolson 1934. Quoted in: Kieser 2023a, 198.

96 Kieser 2023a, 179–84.

elections. This ensured minimal resistance to the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne following the conclusion of the second round of negotiations on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1923.<sup>97</sup>

The fierce conflict between the opposition and the Government within the Turkish National Assembly cast a long shadow over the country's political landscape, generating deep tensions and internal divisions. Over time, these tensions escalated into outright repression, including the prosecution and even execution of political opponents. One prominent case was that of Ziya Hurşit, who was later accused of orchestrating a failed assassination attempt against Mustafa Kemal on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1926 in İzmir. He was sentenced to death but managed to escape.<sup>98</sup> Hüseyin Avni Bey was likewise arrested and tried before the Independence Tribunal for alleged involvement in the same plot but was unexpectedly acquitted.

As for Hüseyin Rauf Bey, who had resigned as Prime Minister just days after the signing of the Lausanne Peace Treaty and had since aligned himself with the opposition,<sup>99</sup> he was also implicated in the assassination attempt despite being abroad – on a convalescent trip to Austria and Britain – at the time it took place. The court nevertheless convicted him in absentia, sentencing him to ten years in prison, stripping him of his civil rights, and confiscating his property.<sup>100</sup>

An especially dramatic episode was the public confrontation between Mustafa Kemal and Ali Şükrü Bey – an unprecedented event in the history of the National Assembly. The session became so charged that even the Assembly's chairman was unable to restore order and had to suspend the meeting temporarily.<sup>101</sup> Ali Fuat Pasha, who presided over the final session of the Assembly, later recounted in his memoirs that some of Ali Şükrü Bey's remarks were so provocative and sensitive that they were omitted from the official minutes.<sup>102</sup> Ali Şükrü Bey's fate was tragic: after attending the Assembly on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1923, he disappeared without a trace. His colleague, Hüseyin Avni Pasha, submitted a report to the Government, suspecting political foul play and thereby drawing suspicion toward the authorities.

Following multiple requests by Assembly members and mounting pressure from opposition newspapers, Hüseyin Rauf Bey presented a detailed report in a session on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1923, revealing that Ali Şükrü Bey had been murdered by Topal Osman, the commander of Mustafa Kemal's personal protection unit. The Government ordered Osman's arrest, and Mustafa Kemal personally oversaw the operation. Topal Osman was killed in the ensuing clashes, and his entire unit was swiftly disbanded.<sup>103</sup>

97 Kieser 2023b, 245–6.

98 Kreiser 2008, 174, 212–3; URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/ataturke-duzenlenen-suikastler/>.

99 *ibid.*, 128, 176. Regarding a sharp conflict between Hüseyin Rauf Bey and İsmet Pasha, see: Mango 1999, 357; Uğurlu 2005.

100 URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/huseyin-rauf-orbay-1880-1964/>.

101 GCZ, 6 Mart 1339 (6/3/1923), vol. IV, 204, 208–9.

102 See the online Atatürk Encyclopaedia, URL: <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/ali-sukru-bey-1884-1923/>.

103 Akyol 2014, 255–6, 272–4; Demirci 2010, 172, Kreiser 2008, 192; Mango 1999, 379–87.

Despite criticisms that the Government had attempted to obscure the full details of the assassination and lacked transparency, the case was closed. Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding Ali Şükrü Bey's murder remain unclear to this day. His assassination is regarded as a pivotal event in modern Turkish political history. In the aftermath, the weakening of the opposition enabled the emergence of a single-party regime that would come to define the next era of the Turkish Republic.<sup>104</sup>

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104 See: Demirel 1994, especially 598–606; Kieser characterizes this development as laying the foundation for a ‘model dictatorship.’ Kieser 2023a, 222–3.

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