

**Nüzhet Sabit and his Views:
A Critical Approach to the Foreign Policy of the Committee of Union and Progress**

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ABSTRACT

Nüzhet Sabit was a typical Ottoman intellectual of the Second Constitutional Period(1908-1918). He distinguished foreign politics from domestic politics, and discussed them separately in his articles. When the Constitution was restored in 1908, the Young Turks intended to establish friendly relations with both France and England. Towards Germany, which had supported Abdülhamid II, on the other hand, they had a more distanced attitude. In time this preference changed, and Germany was once more seen as an ally. The break-out of World War I, however, forced the heads of the Ottoman State to take sides. Eventually, it joined the alliance led by Germany and stayed in this group until the end of the war, which it would conclude in defeat for them. In this article as an opponent intellectual and journalist Nüzhet Sabit's views are explained about the foreign policy of Committee of Union and Progress.

Keywords: Committee of Union and Progress, Nüzhet Sabit, Foreign Policy

Nüzhet Sabit distinguished foreign politics from domestic politics, and discussed them separately in his articles. Therefore, foreign politics has not been included in Nüzhet Sabit's political activities in this paper. Another reason is that he was not involved in foreign politics as actively as in domestic politics, and that his views remained within a broader framework. When the Constitution was restored in 1908, the Young Turks intended to establish friendly relations with both France and England.¹ Towards Germany, which had supported Abdülhamid II, on the other hand, they had a more distanced attitude. In time this

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preference changed, and Germany was once more seen as an ally. After 1908, Ottoman foreign policy was based on ensuring land unity and the continuance of autonomy against big states. With the Tripoli War, which broke out in 1911, the necessity to tend towards England in foreign politics arose. In the meantime, Germany, which was at that time an ally of Italy, stayed reserved. However, when the Balkan War began, the Ottoman State was left alone in terms of diplomacy. The break-out of World War I, however, forced the heads of the Ottoman State to take sides. Eventually, it joined the alliance led by Germany and stayed in this group until the end of the war, which it would conclude in defeat for them. As a result, foreign politics were shaped according to these events,² as were Nüzhet Sabit's views on foreign politics.

In the first issue of *Vazife*, Nüzhet Sabit declared three main principles, of which one was “a specific program in foreign politics”. The author stated in a footnote that he was going to write in detail about this topic when convenient.³ He later clarified these details in the book *Siyaset Yolları* (Ways of politics). According to Nüzhet Sabit, there were some “principles” to overcome the difficulties the country was facing, the most important of which was foreign politics. He believed that foreign politics could only be practised together with domestic politics.⁴

Stating that two groups of alliance, one led by Germany and the other by England, had emerged in Europe which were a result of the economic competition of the two countries all over the world, that this competition reached its peak with regard to Turkey, he said that therefore, the foreign policies Turkey would determine regarding Germany and England played a vital role. He even pointed out the necessity for Turkey to join one of the alliances led by the respective countries in order to gain a supporting power for its foreign and domestic politics. Staying impartial in response to these two alliances, leaving the problem to be solved in time and waiting for the developments to make use of both would be a big

mistake. If Turkey remained reserved, both of the groups would abandon Turkey in the case of crisis. The most apparent example was the situation that had arisen during the Tripoli War. According to him, England would not allow Turkey to stay reserved in any case, because one day this reservation would create a situation to the disadvantage of England. Therefore, the Ottoman State had to determine its foreign policy, join either the Entente states or the Allied states, and declare this frequently.⁵

The date on which Nüzhet Sabit wrote these lines was 8 October 1911. This opinion could also be regarded as an indicator of his clairvoyance in foreign politics. First providing information about the current situation of Austria, Germany, Italy, England, France and Russia and their policies in his book, he stated that some of these countries had contributed to the economic underdevelopment of Turkey by forcing it to allocate most of its revenues to military expenses to be used in fighting the riots in Hijaz, Albania, Macedonia and the Eastern provinces supported by these countries themselves.⁶ The continuance of the Ottoman State's land unity depended on the balance to be established in Europe. Therefore, defining its foreign policies, the state first of all had to know which countries had supported the riots within the country. Italy and Austria were directly interfering in the north-west of Rumelia, Russia in Rumelia, and England in Arabia and the Basra Gulf in order to cause uneasiness among the people living in these regions. Germany had the issue of the Anatolian railways and the aim of establishing a German colony in Palestine. In other words, all of the big countries in Europe had a region of influence in Turkey.⁷

According to Nüzhet Sabit, the biggest mistake Turkey could make in foreign politics in this situation was to establish a "Union of Islam". This policy had to be forgotten completely.⁸ He then went on to explain the way that should be followed in foreign politics: First of all, the economic privileges given to Germany also had to be given to England and France. In the regions of uneasiness, particularly Yemen and Albania, urgent improvement

had to be ensured. If this were realised, England, which would no longer be behind Germany in their economic competition, would receive the economic privileges it had been expecting from Turkey, and would give up provoking the people living in specific regions and its aim of occupying the land. Thereby, the Ottoman State would seize the opportunity to move more freely in these regions.

France was dependent on England, and this would become more obvious in time. As a result, France would soon start to act in favour of the Ottoman State. Consequently, because Russia would have to act in harmony with its allies, the most important obstacle in the way of Turkey's land unity would be removed. As to the allied countries, in the foreign policy of Austria and Italy about Turkey, nothing but "words" would change. The only difference on the German part would be fewer privileges, and the reduced authority of its ambassador to İstanbul.⁹

Finally, he wrote that a change in European politics in favour of Turkey could only be possible with a "policy based on England". According to Nüzhet Sabit, Turkey's brightest times had been when it had followed a policy in favour of England. Described by Nüzhet Sabit as "the most intelligent and real diplomat of Turkey" Reşid Pasha, and the statesmen he had trained had always followed a policy in favour of England. At the times when the Sublime Port followed this policy, Europe had had to accept the land unity of the Ottoman State "most of the time". What had to be done was to return to the same policy. To see "such an experienced 'wolf in politics' that had a rooted tradition against Turkey" was an apparent indicator of the destruction of Turkey.¹⁰

Additionally, if a country like Turkey, which had thousands of kilometres of coastal lands, had a country like England, which was a "sea government", as its enemy, the result would be very tragic. The general balance sheet of the policies followed in the last years first in favour of Germany¹¹ and then staying reserved was to the disadvantage of Turkey.¹² Finally,

the conclusion Nüzhet Sabit reached was a “return to the policy of Reşid Pasha”, that is, a policy in favour of England.

From the points explained above, it can be seen that with regard to foreign politics Nüzhet Sabit was a person who observed and thought about developments, and proposed solutions to problems expressing his opinions on these developments. Moreover, the developments then experienced showed that Nüzhet Sabit had been right. The Ottoman State, which had followed a policy in favour of Germany, rapidly approached its collapse. After seven years, towards the end of World War I, when the outcome was already clear, Nüzhet Sabit wrote the following lines: “We were mistaken in our foreign politics. We were the ally of our real and merciless enemies, the Germans.”¹³ He wrote that the only thing to be done was unilateral peace.¹⁴ The civilised world, he said, had to take the fact into account, that Turkey had not entered World War I on its own initiative but by the will of Germany, and because of the people who had followed a policy in favour of Germany.¹⁵ In short, it can be argued that Nüzhet Sabit followed Europe-Turkey relations closely, that he used foreign references in his work and that he had a sufficient background to make analyses and suggest solutions. Also that he was brave enough to express these views freely under the political circumstances of the period.

¹ Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın talks about the Marseillaise songs heard frequently in the first days of the Constitutional period. He states his amazement by the closeness of the Young Turks, who had formerly believed in the superiority of the English and the Anglo-Saxon race, with the Germans. Writing that England did not accept one defence agreement, Yalçın describes the Germans' accepting the Turkish friendship as "a last minute desperate gesture". Yalçın, **Siyasal Anılar**, p.161.

² For general information about the foreign politics of the Constitutional period, see Feroz Ahmad, "İttihad ve Terakki'nin Dış Politikası (1908-1919)", **Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi**, vol.2, pp.293-303.

³ N. Sabit, "Vazifenin Mesleği", **Vazife**, N:1, 26 October 1327 / 9 December 1911, p.1.

⁴ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, İstanbul: Araks Matbaası, 1327/1911, p.3.

⁵ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, p.7.

⁶ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, p.15.

⁷ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, pp.17-18.

⁸ Nüzhet Sabit writes that he was going to publish a booklet about why the Union of Islam policy would be a big mistake (p.19), however, such a booklet was not published.

⁹ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, p.20.

¹⁰ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, p.23.

¹¹ Here, the foreign policy in favour of Germany in the period of Abdülhamid II is meant. For detailed information on this topic, see Selim Deringil, "II.Abdülhamid'in Dış Politikası", **Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi**, vol.2, pp.304-307.

¹² Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, p.24.

¹³ Nüzhet Sabit, **Bugünün Vazifesi**, p.1. In a footnote of this book, the author also states that seven years earlier he had written that a policy in favour of England had to be followed. Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, p.2.

¹⁴ Nüzhet Sabit, **Siyaset Yolları**, passim.

¹⁵ Nüzhet Sabit, **Vazife-i İsyân**, p.5.

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