

THE OTTOMAN SPECIAL ORGANIZATION - *TEŞKİLAT-I MAHSUSA*: AN
INQUIRY INTO ITS OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE
CHARACTERISTICS

A Ph.D. Dissertation

by
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İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University
Ankara
September 2012

To my father and late uncle

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CHARACTERISTICS

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

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İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

September 2012

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ABSTRACT

THE OTTOMAN SPECIAL ORGANIZATION - *TEŞKİLAT-I MAHSUSA*: AN INQUIRY INTO ITS OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

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September 2012

The usage or misuse of the terms, “intelligence” and “band”, has culminated in the production of a number of irreconcilable Special Organization (hereafter SO) definitions in literature, thereby leading to complications in the limitation of the scope of the subject matter. This thesis argues that the most effective way to understand and grasp the SO is closely related to the conceptualization of the term, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”. In this way, a simple definitional model of the SO is produced, thus eliminating some ambiguities about the subject from the outset. This definition emphasizing the nature of the SO is also expected to act as an epistemic guide for the clarification of the operational and administrative characteristics of the SO.

Keywords: The Ottoman Special Organization, the Office for Eastern Affairs, the Second Branch, intelligence, band.

ÖZET

TEŞKİLAT-I MAHSUSA: OPERASYONEL VE İDARİ ÖZELLİKLERİYLE İLGİLİ BİR SORUŞTURMA

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“İstihbarat” ve “çete” terimlerinin kullanımı yahut yanlış kullanımı literatürde birbiriyle uzlaşmayan bir dizi Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa tanımının üretilmesine ve dolayısıyla konunun kapsamının sınırlandırılmasında problemler ortaya çıkmasına sebep olmaktadır. Bu tez, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’yı anlama ve anlamlandırmanın en yararlı yolunun “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” teriminin kavramsallaştırılmasıyla yakın ilişkili olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Böylelikle, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa hakkında basit bir tanımsal model üretilebilir ve böylelikle konuyla ilgili bir dizi belirsizlik en başından ortadan kaldırılabilir. Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’nın doğasına vurgu yapan bu tanımın aynı zamanda örgütün operasyonel ve idari özelliklerinin berraklaştırılmasında epistemik bir yol gösterici vazifesi görmesi beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, Umur-i Şarkiye Dairesi, 2. Şube, istihbarat, çete.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: GENERAL SCOPE OF INQUIRY

The Ottoman Special Organization (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, SO) has preserved its place in literature for many years as scarcely a scientific and ambiguous phrase. At times, it even takes the form of a term through which fierce debates are conducted. Treatment of the subject, often with moral, aesthetic, and ideological motivations, if not with rumors, is the most evident proof of this. It can even be said that the phrase “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” has become almost meaningless without anachronisms. The blame not only rests on researchers; the course followed by the phrase seems to be equally responsible.

Occupying no place in historical dictionaries, this phrase can trace its crude beginnings to 1913, when about 2000 volunteers assembled by the National Defense Society (*Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*, NDS), were enlisted in the SO during the Second Balkan War.¹ Documents pertaining to previous periods have yet to be encountered. The usage of the SO in a summary of an archival document from 1901, which was originally written in French, is

¹ *Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti Mecmuasıdır: Müdâfaa-i Milliye Cem'iyeti'nin bidâyet-i teşkîli olan 1328 senesi Kânûn-i sânisinin ondokuzundan 1329 sene-i Kânûn-i sânişi ondokuzuna kadar bir senelik muâmelât-ı umûmiyesiyle cem'iyet nâmına vârid olan iânât ve teberrüât ve sarfiyyât ve müressilâtı muhtevîdir* (İstanbul: 1329/1913-1914), 19-20.

indeed merely a translation error of the archive expert charged with abstracting the document.²

From its very emergence, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” expressed a sort of military organization, yet only for a short period of time. In due course, it acquired a political meaning as the key element of the relations among the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, CUP), the Ministry of War (*Harbiye Nezareti*), and the Ministry of Interior (*Dahiliye Nezareti*), the precise limits of which have yet to be determined. During the post-war court-martials in 1919, on the other hand, the SO acquired, in addition to its poor reputation, a third level of meaning, namely a juridical meaning.³ Under these circumstances, the phrase “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” inevitably took the shape of a motley word, extended gradually to cover a variety of issues, regardless of their relevance to the subject.⁴

² The original document talks about two malignant articles published by the “Local Anzeiger” of 11 and 12 July 1901, one of them being about *société* “mahsousse”, which can be best translated into English as the Special Society, or Cemiyet-i Mahsusa in its Ottoman Turkish form, not the Special Organization. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministry General Directorate of State Archives - Ottoman Archive, BOA): HR. SYS.; telegram from Ahmed Tevfik Paşa to E. Tevfik Paşa (12 July 1901); G: 23, D: 41.

³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, the first official Ottoman newspaper and one of the most important source for the study of the SO, published on its special supplements the proceedings of the Turkish military tribunal, dated from 1919 to 1922, investigating the wartime crimes of the members of the Ottoman government, leaders of the CUP and their provincial representatives, including the Armenian question. In the study, documents as they become available in the *Takvim-i Vekayi* are used. For the latest and the most precise transcription of the minutes of the Turkish military tribunal, see Taner Akçam and Vahakn N. Dadrian, *Tehcir ve Taktik, Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Zabıtları, İttihat ve Terakki'nin Yargılanması 1919-1922* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2008).

⁴ This somehow distorted conception of the SO seems to have contributed to the popularity of the subject, thereby rapidly increasing the journalistic publications. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the first half of 2012 that witnessed a massive number of articles on the SO published in newspapers and popular magazines. For a few examples see, Tarık Işık, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Kurucusu da Af İstemiş,” *Radikal*, June 18, 2012; Bülent Erandaç, “İRA'nın Kuruluşu ve Türkler...,” *Takvim*, March 11, 2012; Selçuk Silsüpür, “Osmanlı Casusluk Örgütü Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa,” *Ankara İl Gazetesi*, August 16, 2012; Taha Akyol, “Tarih Savaşı,” *Hürriyet*, December 21, 2011; Alper Çeker, “Yabancı Gizli Servisler ve Türkiye Uzantıları,” *Mostar*, April 1, 2012, 55-57; Aziz Üstel, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Karakol ve Hamza Teşkilatlarına,” *Star*, June 6, 2012; idem, “Kontrgerilla'nın atası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa,” *Star*, February 2, 2012; “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ve Cihad-ı Mukaddes,” *Star*, March

Under these circumstances, the subject brought heated debates and discussions that have preserved their actuality until now. It is simply not valuable to delete such troublesome disputes from history, as history is as relevant to understanding the past as it is to understanding today. There is, however, no need to repeat such a tedious assessment.⁵ This study seeks neither to terminate the debate, nor to confine the subject merely to a reading of political revenge. Its intent is to provide future studies on the subject with a reliable basis and multi-dimensional context through which more sound

12, 2012; "Son yüzyılın en büyük casusu Kuşçubaşı Eşref Bey," *Star*, February 16, 2012; "Eğer mesele vatansa, gerisi teferruattır!," *Star*, June 11, 2012; "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ve 'İpek Mendil Harekatı'," *Star*, August 13, 2012; Şaban İba, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan MİT'e Devletin Gizli Hafızası", *Özgür Gündem*, February 16, 2012; Taylan Sorgun, "Hayati Teşkilatımız MİT ve Soruşturma – Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Zamanı...", *Ortadoğu*, February 2, 2012; Muhiddin Nalbantoğlu, "MİT'in Tarihi Misyonu," *Yeni Çağ*, February 18, 2012; Altemur Kılıç, "Organize İşler," *Yeni Çağ*, February 2, 2012; İlber Ortaylı, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa var mıydı?," *Milliyet Pazar*, February 26, 2012; idem, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa," *Milliyet*, June 10, 2012; Selahattin Duman, "Yağmur yağmazsa çiftçi, yağarsa çömlekçi ağlar...", *Vatan*, February 12, 2012; Orhan Koloğlu, "24 Nisan 2015'e kim hazırlanıyor?," *Aydınlık Gazetesi*, March 22, 2012; Arslan Bulut, "Asil kandan kim rahatsız olur?," *Yeni Çağ*, February 2, 2012; Ergun Hiçyılmaz, "Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı," *Posta*, February 12, 2012; idem, "Muhafızlara Elveda," *Posta*, January 1, 2012; "Polisi kim koruyacak?," *Posta*, March 25, 2012; Cemil Koçak, "İzmir Suikastının Karanlık Noktaları," *Star*, March 10, 2012; Ayşe Hür, "Ali Şükrü Bey ve Topal Osman," *Taraf*, April 1, 2012; "Hamza Grubu'ndan MAH ve MİT'e," *Taraf*, January 8, 2012; Ahmet Kahraman, "Darbelerin soy kütüğü: İttihat ve Terakki," *Özgür Gündem*, May 27, 2012; Doğu Perinçek, "'Talat Paşa'nın vicdansız komitacıları' kimlerdi?," *Aydınlık Gazetesi*, December 30, 2012; Murat Bardakçı, "İşte, 'MİT'in atası' denen Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa hakkında eldeki tek belge," *Haber Türk*, February 12, 2012; Mehmet Güler, "Çanakkale Savaşı'nın Sudanlı Kahramanı: Zenci Musa," *Zaman*, March 18, 2012; "Mehmet Akif Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'da çalışmış," *Ekonomi Gazetesi*, March 14, 2012; "İlk istihbaratçı Kuşçubaşı Eşref Kuşadası'nda anıldı," *Yeni Gazetem Ege*, April 8, 2012; "Ah şu olmayan örgütler", *Agos*, June 26, 2012; Atilla Akar, "19 Mayıs ve Mustafa Kemal'in gerçek "Miyon"u!...", *Yurt Gazetesi*, May 20, 2012; Bülent Erandaç, "Ortadoğu-MİT fırtınası ve büyük resim," *Takvim*, February 15, 2012; Eren Keskin, "Örgüt yok, devlet var," *Özgür Gündem*, February 28, 2012; Metin Sertbaş, "46 yıl önce İngiliz Kemal vefat etti," *E Haber*, February 16, 2012; Melih Altınok, "Neo Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın kastından size ne," *Taraf*, March 1, 2012; Erdoğan Aydın, "Osmanlı'yı savaşa derin devlet soktu," interview by Müjgan Halis, *Yeni Aktüel*, vol. 271 (2012): 20-23; Murat Çıtak, "Ömer Naci," *Balkan Günlüğü*, July 12, 2012; İbrahim Kiras, "Zenci Musa," *Star*, April 19, 2012; Can Dünder, "Hrant olsaydı!," *Milliyet*, December 24, 2012; Rukn Adalı, "Sermaye Ermenilerin birikimine konu," *Özgür Gündem*, March 4, 2012; "Modern Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa," *Agos*, June 29, 2012.

⁵ For a detailed examination of the literature on the SO which was written essentially to both better understand the difficulties inherent to research in the field and invite experts to approach the subject from a perspective free of the baggage that has so long weighed it down see, Polat Safi, "History in the Trench: The Ottoman Special Organization – Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Literature," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48 (2012): 89-106.

evaluations will hopefully be possible, and thereby to help place the SO above the debates revolving around the subject itself.

In doing so, the SO will be neither evaluated solely in light of its political repercussions, nor approached rigorously from a judiciary perspective, leaving aside all of its other qualifications. Explanations made only on such bases are dubious in nature. In fact, such an extensive and different emphasis has been laid on the political-judiciary meaning of the SO subsequent to its annulment, that the military meaning conveyed by the phrase has become almost invisible amidst a mess of hypotheses. Surpassing this military meaning, the basic connotation of the phrase, on which the present information is very limited, on the other hand, might easily invalidate the political and judiciary meanings assigned to the SO by critical mistakes. For this reason, regarding the repercussions of the organization only from a political and judiciary perspective is not a useful method of historical classification.

The phrase “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” expresses more than the mere title of an organization that ceased to exist nearly one hundred years ago. It is the product of a conscious choice to refer to a formation acting in a different but certain way, and the mission it was obliged to devote itself to, as well as the position this formation occupied in the civilian-military bureaucracy.

Despite this, the terms “intelligence” and “band”, are the two most frequently encountered decisive conceptual tools in the comprehension and explanation of the SO. It can even be said that the SO is comparatively nonexistent without these two terms.⁶ The usage or misuse of these two

⁶ This problematic attitude is going to be touched upon in detail in Chapter One. Yet it might prove useful to cite a few articles published in newspapers and popular magazines

terms has culminated in the production of a number of irreconcilable SO definitions in literature, thereby leading to complications in the limitation of the scope of the subject matter.⁷

This does not necessarily imply that “intelligence” and “band” have no share in understanding and structuring the accumulation of knowledge on the subject. On the contrary, it is possible to draw more sound conclusions about the SO by rendering these epistemic tools more useful.⁸ This thesis,

where this attitude can be most easily tracked. M. Ali Eren, “Cumhuriyeti Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa kurdu,” *Aksiyon*, Vol. 49 (1995): 24-29; Hande Öngören, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’dan MİT’e Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye’de gizli servis hanedanlığı,” *Nokta*, Vol. 30 (1996): 20-25; Yalçın Küçük, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa bir ihtilal örgütüdür,” *Aydınlık*, Vol. 726, (June 17, 2001); idem, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: Bir Türk İhtilal Örgütü,” *Aydınlık*, March 9, 2012; “Güngör’ün babası, İlber Hoca’ya ikinci ikaz,” *Aydınlık Gazetesi*, May 6, 2012; Avni Özgürel, “Yeni Osmanlılık’, aslında Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’nın projesiydi,” *Radikal*, November 29, 2009; Arif Çarkçı, “Milli şairimiz Mehmet Akif Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’ya çalışmış mıydı?,” *Milli Gazete*, September 5, 2008; Eren Keskin, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa işbaşında!,” *Birgün*, January 26, 2007; İbrahim Çelik, “İlk gizli istihbarat teşkilatımız,” *Bilecik Aktüel*, August 13, 2008; Halil Berktaş, “Vecdi Gönül, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, Diyarbakır Cezaevi,” *Taraf*, December 20, 2008; Ahmet Kahraman, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’dan Jitem’e,” *Özgür Politika*, February 3, 2004; Ali Haydar Koç, “Birinci Dünya savaşında Almanya İstihbaratı, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ve Kürdistan,” *Dema Nu*, December 17, 2009; Mine G. Kırıkkanat, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’da CIA’ye,” *Vatan*, June 6, 2006; Ali Bayramoğlu, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ve Zabıtlar,” *Yeni Şafak*, March 25, 2009; Taha Akyol, “Tarih Savaşı,” *Hürriyet*, December 21, 2011; Aziz Üstel, “Topal Osman’dan Ergenekon’a,” *Star*, November 17, 2011; Orhan Kemal Cengiz, “Soykırım mıydı?,” *Radikal*, December 23, 2011; Ayşe Böhürler, “Batıların menfaatleriyle sarhoş olmak,” *Yeni Şafak*, September 10, 2011; Erol Şadi Erdiç, “Derin devletin ilk izleri: İttihat ve Terakki’nin fedaileri,” interview by Behice Tezçakar, *Atlas Tarih*, Vol. 10 (2011): 68-77; Ayşe Hür, “Nisan 1915’te Van’da neler oldu?,” *Taraf*, December 25, 2011.

⁷ Even the author of these words fell into such an error in his MA thesis submitted in 2006. My intention was not to characterize the SO, nor did I have such a concern. But disregarding the danger of anachronism, I opened a vast historical field for the SO which was not so much relevant to it by qualifying it as an operational intelligence agency using bands. It took me a PhD time to notice my mistake. No doubt, this dissertation, as is the case with all other theses, might be lame with flaws, if not with mistakes. But I no longer doubt that as long as the SO remains unconceptualized, it seems not possible to get closer to the essence of the matter. See Polat Safi, “The Ottoman Special Organization – *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*: A Historical Assessment with Particular Reference to its Operations against British Occupied Egypt (1914–1916)” (MA thesis, Bilkent University, 2006).

⁸ It is simply not the intention of this study to attempt at crafting a theory of intelligence as intelligence is not only deemed too broad a term to be comprehensively explained, but is a slippery word that seems to have no accepted definition. As put forth by Michael Warner, “the term is defined anew by each author who addresses it, and these definitions rarely refer to one another or build off what has been written before.” See his “Wanted: A Definition of ‘Intelligence’,” *Studies in Intelligence* 46, no. 3 (2002): 15-22. It is, however, quite clear that without a clear idea of intelligence it may not be possible to understand the intelligence aspects of the SO. To further the debate on the subject and pinpoint the essentials of the term, following studies which are also utilized throughout the study in passing at different

however, argues that the most effective way to understand and grasp the SO is closely related to the conceptualization of the term, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa". In this way, a simple definitional model of the SO is produced, thus eliminating some ambiguities about the subject from the outset. This definition emphasizing the nature of the SO is also expected to act as an epistemic guide for the clarification of the administrative and operational characteristics of the SO.

To this end, this study is primarily based upon the sources housed in several official Turkish archives. The relevant archives outside Turkey remain a subject for further study. It is further worth mentioning that the Security General Directorate (*Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü*), the Ministry of National Defense (*Milli Savunma Bakanlığı*) and the National Intelligence Agency (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) are all uncompromising on the issue of access to their relevant classifications, if any.⁹

parts might prove critical: Richard Horowitz, "A Framework for Understanding Intelligence," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 389-409; David Kahn, "An Historical Theory of Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 79-92; Thomas F. Roy, "The 'Correct' Definition of Intelligence," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1991-1992): 433-454; Philip H.J. Davies, "Ideas of Intelligence: Divergent Concepts and National Institutions," *Harvard International Review* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 62-66; Martin T Bimfort, "A Definition of Intelligence," *Studies in Intelligence* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1958): 75-78; Michael Warner, "Wanted: A Definition of 'Intelligence'," *Studies in Intelligence* 46, no. 3 (2002): 15-22; Lawrence T. Mitelman, "Preface to a Theory of Intelligence," *Studies in Intelligence* 18, no. 3 (Fall 1974): 19-22; Michael Herman, "The Development of National Intelligence," *Foreign Intelligence Literary Scene* 12, no. 3 (1993): 3-4; Winn L. Taplin, "Six General Principles of Intelligence," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 475-491; Loch K. Johnson, "Bricks and Mortar for a Theory of Intelligence," *Comparative Strategy* 22 (2003): 1-28; R. A. Random, "Intelligence as a Science," *Studies in Intelligence* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1958): 75-79; Arthur S. Hulnick, "What's Wrong with the Intelligence Cycle," *Intelligence and National Security* 21, no. 6 (Dec. 2006): 959-979; R.V. Jones, "Some Lessons in Intelligence: Enduring Principles," *Studies in Intelligence* 38, no. 5 (1995): 37-42; Sherman Kent, "The Need for an Intelligence Literature." *Studies in Intelligence* (Spring 1955): 1-11.

⁹ Oktay Özel maintains in his latest article that the archival problems in Turkey have much deeper reasons than the current discussions of recent history that are easily swept up into heated debates seem willing to offer, and thus deconstructing the problematic relation between the historian and politician. According to Özel, it is critical to pose the question of which archive on which subject is open, semi-open or completely closed, to understand the

There are, however, other resources. Although not extensively utilized, a number of documents on the SO have long been available to the public in the Prime Ministry's General Directorate of State Archives - Ottoman Archives (*Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü - Osmanlı Arşivi*) in Istanbul. These documents relate to the cooperation between the SO and the Ministry of Interior as well as Security General Directorate, and demonstrate that they cooperated to some extent in the creation of operational units. The Prime Ministry's archive also contains materials associated with the directorate of the Special Office (*Kalem-i Mahsusa*) from 1913 to 1922 and Cipher Office (*Şifre Kalemî*), which are again highly significant for researchers. The details these sources provide on guerilla units and operations, the appointment and dismissal of state officials, and the decoration of soldiers might well supply the conscientious researcher with constructive ideas on the interaction between diverse organizations at both the administrative and operational levels, as well as shedding light on the relations between the Ministry of Interior and of the Ministry of War. The Prime Ministry's General Directorate of State Archives – Republic Archives (*Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü - Cumhuriyet Arşivi*), too, is useful for tracking employees of the SO during the post-war period.

The Pension Fund Archive (*Emekli Sandığı Arşivi*) of the Social Security Institute (*Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu*), containing the records of military and civil officials who served between 1914 and 1927, constitutes another

current situation of the archives in Turkey, which seems to be recently mired in the political quagmire. In this context, Özel provides updated and detailed information on almost all the archives in Turkey that have been alleged to be open to public disclosure in his article. See his "Arşivler Meselemiz: Siyaset Kurumunun Tarihçiyile Tehlikeli Dansı ve Meşruiyet Kaybı," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 217 (2012): 24-33.

important source of material for researchers. These registry files cover information on the position of civil and military officials, their salaries, promotions, identities, and places and dates of birth and death. In addition, because the registry files contain information about the pensions of martyrs, veterans, widows, and orphans, information about an individual's relatives can also be identified from these sources. The Pension Fund Archive's value only increases when one takes into account the uncompromising attitude of the Ministry of National Defense, which houses the personal accounts and life histories of SO personnel. Rarely used in Ottoman historiography, these sources stand to prove especially valuable in the context of biographical studies and oral and institutional history. Documents in the Pension Fund Archive might complement the biographical studies of Mehmet Tahir, Mahmut Kemal İnal, Ali Çankaya, and Mehmet Süreyya, or add to the information available in the *Sicil-i Ahval Defterleri* and *Tekaüt Defterleri*. The archive of the Turkish Red Crescent (*Türk Kızılayı*) has recently accelerated its classification process, and holds the promise of offering researchers insight into the relationship between the SO and Ottoman Red Crescent (*Hilal-i Ahmer*).

The Archive of Turkish General Staff Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies (*Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi*, ATASE) is also indispensable for researchers. Material contained there details the roles of some of the SO's leading personalities during the Tripolitanian and Balkan Wars. The fact that the groups who organized the resistance in these campaigns joined the SO shortly before World War I highlights the significance of original documents relating to the

wars. When this particular context is combined with the fact that the Ottoman government benefited so fundamentally from the SO during World War I, the immense value of the ATASE archive is reiterated. In this context, the Special Branch (*Şube-i Mahsusa*) registers found in the World War I Collection stand out, though only partially open to access, as the most important source of information on SO studies.¹⁰

As is already understood, the present study is based on a comprehensive and systematic critical reading of both the existing literature and certain sets of hitherto unused archival material. By this way, this thesis aims to present the multidimensionality and intricacy of the organization on the one hand, and point to ways to overcome the many dead-ends that hound the researchers, on the other.

It is, however, not the intention of this study to include all aspects of the SO that one could study on the basis of existing sources. In this respect, maximum attention will be paid to different dimensions of the SO's structural elements. Nonetheless, the SO's propaganda and political intelligence activities, financial structure, as well as attendance in international meetings will remain subjects for further studies. In addition, this is not a thesis about the relation of the SO to the forcible relocation of the Armenians. This is, of

¹⁰ To have a closer look on the content and physical characteristics of the Special Branch registers housed at the ATASE archive see, Polat Safi, "The Ottoman Special Organization", 25-32. This does not necessarily mean that all the SO documents are available. Some of them might have been destroyed, lost, become unusable or closed to accession. In this context, Taner Akçam's insight into Turkish archives, including the ATASE, might prove useful and illuminating. See his *Ermeni Meselesi Hallolunmuştur Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Savaş Yıllarında Ermenilere Yönelik Politikalar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2008), 20-34. Yet it is obvious that some part of the SO documents were taken under protection by the Turkish General Staff Thirteenth Branch Office. See Vahdet Keleşyılmaz, "Türk Ordusunda Bir Vefa Örneği ve Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Belgeleri," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, no. 44 (1999): 647. For more on the collections of the ATASE Archive also see; Ahmet Tetik, "Dünden Bugüne Genelkurmay ATASE Arşivi" *International Symposium on Turkish Archives, November 17-19 2005* (Ankara: Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2006), 106-113.

course, not to dispute the increasingly important position of the relation between the Armenian question and the SO in the literature.

Indeed, there is a major line of argument in the literature that the SO, a secretive organization established and operated by CUP officials, was employed to ethnically purify the Empire by means of organizing, coordinating and carrying out massacres against the problematic minorities, especially the Armenians living in various parts of the Empire. In this approach, the SO supposedly becomes the part of a centrally orchestrated program that murdered mass numbers of Ottoman Armenians.¹¹

In this context, a number of experts maintain that the fundamental aim of the SO was to exterminate Armenians. Only lately has this rigid and somehow incoherent approach begun to be modified. Instead, it is now argued that struggling against the separatist movements within the country itself or dealing with domestic security was one of the two most important

¹¹ There is a substantial literature concerning the relation of the SO to the forcible relocation of the Armenians. Although most of them refer to the same source materials, it may not be superfluous to quote a few: Vahakn Dadrian, "The Role of the Special Organization in the Armenian Genocide During the First World War," in *Minorities in Wartime, National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during Two World Wars*, ed. P. Panayi (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1993), 50-82; idem, "The Naim-Andonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: The Anatomy of a Genocide," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (1986): 311-60; Taner Akçam, *Türk Ulusal Kimliği ve Ermeni Sorunu* (İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 2001); idem, *İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu, İttihat ve Terakki'den Kurtuluş Savaşı'na* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1999); idem, *A Shameful Act, The Armenian Genocide and the Question of the Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 93-97, 130-139; Reymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide, A Complete History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 180-188; Richard G. Hovannisian, "Intervention and Shades of Altruism during the Armenian Genocide," in *The Armenian Genocide, History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 174; Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69-70, 78-79; idem, "Power Politics, Prejudice, Protest and Propaganda: A Reassessment of the German Role in the Armenian Genocide of World War I," in *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern*, eds. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (Zurich: Chronos, 2002), 220; John S. Kirakossian, *The Armenian Genocide: The Young Turks Before the Judgment of History* (Madison: Sphinx Press, 1992), 161, 166-167; Rouben Paul Adalian, "The Armenian Genocide," in *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, eds. Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny (New York: Routledge, 2004), 63.

duties of the SO, the other being the destabilization of the enemy's rear. Notwithstanding, a number of experts defend that the SO played no role in the Armenian question.¹²

As to who is primarily responsible for the "genocide", some experts maintain that it is the SO. This approach argues that the SO had a dual-track system, one that was open and the other that was deeply secret. The one that was open was subject to the authority of the Ministry of War, and the other to the CUP. It is claimed that the SO subjected to the CUP was especially established for the implementation of the deportations, which would amount to "genocide" of the Armenians.¹³ In this context, it is maintained that the SO, which was deployed in remote areas of Turkey's interior, thanks to a great deal of collaboration between the SO and the CUP as well as the provincial offices of the CUP, ambushed and destroyed convoys of Armenian deportees along with the tribes in the regions in question.

As is seen, the Armenian question is not, actually cannot be entirely out of scope in a study dealing with the SO. This study touches upon the

¹² Philip H. Stoddard, "The Ottoman Government and the Arabs, 1911 to 1918: A Preliminary Study of the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1963); Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005), 82-88; idem, "Revisiting the Armenian Genocide," *Middle East Quarterly* 4 (2005): 3-12; Gwynne Dyer "Correspondence," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (1973): 379; Edward J. Erickson, "Reexamining History: Armenian Massacres: New Records Undercut Old Blame," *Middle East Quarterly* 3 (2006): 67-75.

¹³ Dadrian, *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide: A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity*, 43-49; idem, "The Role of the Special Organization in the Armenian Genocide During the First World War"; Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 95-97, 130-139; Erik Jan Zürcher, "Jön Türkler, müslüman Osmanlılar ve Türk Milliyetçileri: Kimlik Politikaları, 1908-1938," in *Osmanlı Geçmişi ve Bugünün Türkiye'si*, ed. Kemal Karpat (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004), 271-273; idem, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 1993), 115, 120-121; Marc Nichanian, "The Truth of the Facts about the New Revisionism," in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 269.

essentials of the subject in passing at different parts, which might well supply the conscientious researcher with a concern for reviewing the adequacy of the arguments for and against the genocide thesis. Further efforts, however, will be the subject of another research. The author also believes that an effort to clarify the extent of the SO's involvement in the Armenian question, if any, runs the risk of being submerged in a hundred years long debate, and thus avoiding the real questions of this dissertation.

Accordingly, the first chapter of the study comprising four sections focuses on two distinct points. In general, the first and third sections are intended to raise the foundation of the SO to a level of question and discussion. In doing so, one can understand that researchers with the intention to comprehend and explain the SO within the framework of intelligence, trace the origins of the SO to intelligence services, while those who prefer to comprehend and explain the SO within the framework of a band trace its origins to underground organizations. In this way, the concrete equivalents of the theories developed within the framework of terms, "intelligence" and "band" will be opened to discussion. The second and the fourth sections, on the other hand, shall address the problems that the misuse of these terms has specifically created in the SO and in general in recent history studies, and point out the potential expansions of these terms. This effort, hopefully, will facilitate an understanding of what the SO actually was, as well as encouraging a serious revision of a number of points in the literature associated with semantics, methodology, and historical practice.

Chapter Two is devoted to an analysis of the operational features of the SO through the conceptualization of the term, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”. Subsequently, essential factors that made it convenient to set this unconventional warfare organization in motion in the First World War will be briefly touched upon. Due to the fact that those factors are closely related to the period roughly between 1911 and August 1914, the period that can be defined as a phase of formation and experience, this discussion will pave the way for the analysis of significant developments preceding the foundation of the SO. Accordingly, this chapter might also be partially regarded as the continuation of the foundation discussions detailed in Chapter One. The third section is devoted to the practical benefits expected from the SO by the Ottoman ruling elite. However, as will clearly emerge later on, those expectations were always accompanied by certain limitations on the maneuvers of the SO, and remained the weakest aspects of the organization until its closure. In this context, firstly, logistical activities and limitations of the SO as a manifestation of the will to gain victory at little cost will be analyzed generally with examples drawn from the SO activities in Libya. Secondly, military expectations and limitations will be discussed, and in the last section, significantly related to the previous, the human resources of the SO and its limitations will be detailed. This will eventually necessitate a brief mention of the formation methods of the SO operational units and their indiscipline.

In the third and final chapter, the SO’s position in the military-civilian bureaucracy and its central administrative structure therein will be discussed. The subject will first be analyzed through an introduction into the realm of phrases that are alleged to have been used interchangeably with the SO.

Such a discussion clarifying the differences between phrases that were alleged to have been used synonymously with the SO might elucidate the SO's place in the bureaucracy. On the other hand, it may alert researchers to certain problems associated with the ensuing semantics and methodology in the literature from such expressions. The Chapter will continue to the account of the closure of the SO to illustrate the structural, operational, and administrative changes that occurred in the transition period from the SO to the Office for Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Şarkıye Dairesi*, OEA). Since the termination of the SO band organization was the most important step of this process, basic arguments as to when, how, and why the band organization was abolished will be briefly discussed in this section. In the ensuing four sections, the central command of the SO will be evaluated from the outbreak of the First World War to May 1915, when it was replaced by the OEA, with particular reference to the SO's Supervisory Council, its directors, Central Command, and its branches.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL TOOLS USED TO COMPREHEND THE SO: INTELLIGENCE AND BAND

Prior to the identification of the military meaning, determining various trends or schools generated in SO studies by epistemology might serve as a useful point of origin. In the broadest sense, the manner of knowledge acquisition about the SO in the literature is encountered in two distinct ways. In this context, “intelligence” and “band” have maintained their significance in the literature over many years as the two most decisive conceptual tools that reached the level of representation in the comprehension and explanation of the SO. There are so few narrations, analyses or theories concerning the SO that could disassociate themselves from these two terms.

A few primary sources were responsible for the terms “intelligence” and “band” coming into prominence in SO studies. On the other hand, it is undeniable that daily and political concerns and expectations had a significant impact on the formation of this situation. At this point, scrutinizing social and/or political agendas of roughly two types of groups might lead one deviate from the essence of the subject. One might, however, contend with mentioning the fact that the form of usage or misuse of these two terms not

only confines the SO to a certain pattern of behavior, but also acts as a disincentive in the development of fundamental questions about the terms themselves. Under these circumstances, confrontation with ahistorical explanations becomes almost inevitable; for these terms are generally taken at face value, and definitions ascribed to the SO on the basis that these terms do not correspond to what the SO actually did. In other words, the problematic usage of the terms “intelligence” and “band” in SO studies serves generally as a misleading tool, and mostly brings about a pejorative perception, misunderstanding, or fiction rather than fact.

The emergence of confusing, vague and inconsistent sets of arguments and assumptions whenever the definition of the SO comes into question is related to this approach. This approach, on the other hand, leads the central theoretical issues in the field to be marked by a similar degree of contention and ambiguity. The establishment of certain cannons, which seems unlikely to be correct within a logical framework, over the problem of the foundation of the SO, is one of the most speculative and well-trodden research topics of the literature, and represents one of the finest examples of such contention and ambiguity. Researchers with the intention of comprehending and explaining the SO within the framework of intelligence trace the origins of the SO to intelligence services, while those who prefer to comprehend and explain the SO within the framework of a band trace its origins to underground organizations.

The subjects addressed in this chapter, comprising of four subsections focus on two different points. The first and third sections introducing the general features of discussions on the foundation of the SO would also

open to discussion the organizations that are the concrete equivalents of the theories developed within the framework of terms, “intelligence” and “band”. The second and the fourth sections, on the other hand, shall address the problems that the misuse of these terms has created, specifically in the SO, and generally in recent history studies, and point out to the potential expansions of the these terms. This effort will facilitate an understanding of what the SO actually was, as well as encouraging a serious revision of a number of points in the literature associated with semantics, methodology, and historical practice.

2.1 Notes on the Foundation of the SO – I

It is not possible to come to a consensus on the foundation of the SO. What is more remarkable is the fact that thus far, no one has considered its foundation problematic or a solemn matter of debate. Yet to understand the nature and activities of the SO, it is necessary to understand how the organization evolved into an integral part of bureaucratic arrangements. Such an effort is out of the scope of this dissertation. The purpose of the first and third sections is more limited, and attempts to bring into question, through a critical analysis of the literature, to what extent the tools used to explain the foundation of the SO are useful, as well as offering some conceptual tools to provide a modicum of flexibility for this discord of hypotheses.

First, it should be noted that institutional continuity plays a central role in almost all interpretations concerning the foundation of the SO. Even

though researchers have constructed different ideas and submitted new items from the origin of the SO, this theory has maintained its appeal for nearly 50 years. Assertions cover a series of organizations that were founded from 1850 through 1914. Some contend with providing general characteristics of institutional transformation. Almost none of the research falsifies or verifies the other. This is why they do not appear, at first glance, contradictory to each other. However, they often seem so diverse in their collections that it is implausible to reconcile them or suggest one of them as more logical.

Does the SO date back to a revolutionary organization established by Eşref Kuşçubaşı along with a few exile and fugitives against Abdulhamid II? Or does it date to earlier times in history and require researching the roots of the SO as an intelligence service founded on the report by the First Secretary of the Paris Embassy, Sefels Soldenholf, who had been entrusted with the task of searching the French secret service? If all such arguments, presented almost as preconditions of the foundation of the SO, were based on solid facts, it would be very difficult to validate or invalidate them. Nonetheless, the fact that the majority of the arguments on the subject have been adorned with unrealistic and indecisive data does not make the task of rectifying this intricate situation an easy one. It might, however, still prove useful and incorporate some flexibility and arrangement into this disarray of hypotheses if one discovers the general relationships among the diverse theoretical aspects.

In this context, a sharp distinction must first be made between the preconditions, long-term circumstances that potentially founded the SO, and

its precipitants, more immediate factors that eventually triggered its foundation. Precipitants are primarily outcomes of unique and accidental events, which can be considered as forces external to the already established modes of action. Hence, the stress on precipitants can only occupy a secondary place in the foundation discussions.

Could the assertions developed within the framework of institutional continuity be regarded as long-term preconditions that can be used to explain the foundation of the SO? An examination of the subject by dividing the theses into two might be useful. The theses in the first group date the SO back to intelligence services established before the Second Constitutional period. In terms of clarifying the issue, it might be enough to make mention of two researchers.

According to Mustafa Balciođlu, a specialist on the administrative features of the SO, Abdulhamid II attached particular importance to intelligence activities due to its positive effect on prolonging the periods of peace and winning wars. Because this “intelligence agency” (*haber alma örgütü*), which Balciođlu referred to as “Yıldız Intelligence Service” (*Yıldız İstihbarat Teşkilatı*), posed an obstacle to the ambitions of “Western countries”, it eventually became a target to be removed. Although this agency was abolished after the restoration of the Constitutional Monarchy in 1908, its functions were transferred to the Security General Directorate (*Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti*) under the administration of Colonel (*Miralay*) Galip Bey. However, newly emerging developments created a need for a stronger

intelligence service, and finally the SO was founded shortly before the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁴

A similar view is suggested by Hamit Pehlivanlı, who traces the organization back to “an inward-oriented secret service” (*içe yönelik gizli bir teşkilat*) established during the reign of Sultan Abdulmecid. Over time, the Ottoman ruling class planned to substitute “this organization that does not comply with the rules of law and does not hesitate to consult arbitrary practices” with a European model of organization. Eventually a new organization was established as a result of the report sent by a French citizen who had been serving in the Ottoman Embassy in Paris, supposedly on the model of French secret service. A man named Civinis was appointed as head of the organization upon the recommendation of British Ambassador Sir Stratford de Redcliffe. This organization of little reverence during the reign of Abdulaziz, was reorganized in Yıldız Palace during the rule of Abdulhamid II and exhibited continuous improvement. The SO substituted this organization after the Unionists (*İttihadists*) took the lead, and according to Pehlivanlı, some sort of connection between the two organizations must be assumed because the SO was seriously affected by this service organized in Yıldız Palace.¹⁵

To trace the SO back to the Yıldız Secret Service (*Yıldız Hafiyeye Teşkilatı*, YSS) is an approach that can pose a series of problems. There are essentially two reasons for this. First, the current level of knowledge about

¹⁴ Mustafa Balcioğlu, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa yahut Umur-i Şarkiyeye Dairesi,” in *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’dan Cumhuriyet’e* (Ankara: Asil Yayın Dağıtım, 2004), 1-2.

¹⁵ Hamit Pehlivanlı, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa: Türk Modern İstihbaratçılığının Başlangıcı mı?,” *Osmanlı* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), 285-286, 293.

the YSS and SO is extremely limited. This limitation makes it very difficult to compare and discover the channels of interaction between the two organizations. Secondly, a great part of this limited information is adorned with highly distorted and controversial data. What makes the data controversial is the regard of the YSS as the soul of the “despotic regime” (*istibdat rejimi*) by many opponents of Abdulhamid II. During the post-war court-martials, the SO, too, was to be regarded as an organization obliged to do the “dirty” work of the CUP by the many opponents of CUP. The two organizations had a similar fate. All in all, a majority of the decisive opinions about the two organizations that reached the masses were generally penned by opponents of both these organizations and the political systems they represent. This does not necessarily imply that there is not a hint of truth to the narratives.

Most of the information about the YSS, regarded as one of the main tools of suppression, is based on works drafted after the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908. These works, in which current and ideological concerns become prominent, were mostly written to take vengeance upon the past. Such motives further complicate the already limited information about the subject and make it difficult to distinguish the fact from fiction.

In steering the dominant political opinion, such a course about the reign of Abdulhamid II laid the groundwork for unfavorable views about the YSS. The four-act drama, named *Fehim Paşa Mezaliminden Hafiye Melanetleri* (Malices of Spies from the Atrocities of Fehim Paşa) by Yusuf Niyazi, could be read as a classical reflection of the viewpoint of the opponents of Abdulhamid II that developed following the Second

Constitution. Fehim Paşa, in the section where information about the roles was given, was introduced as “one of the famous spies” (*meşhur hafiyelerden*).¹⁶ Coincidentally, the officer’s name, who headed the YSS after Ahmed Celaleddin Paşa and remained in office until he was dismissed by the Young Turks, was Fehmi Paşa.

Another work bitterly criticizing the YSS is *Yıldız’da Yeni Casuslar Cemiyeti yahut Yaveran Tensikatı* (The New Society of Spies or the Reorganization of Aide-de-camps at Yıldız) by Ahmed Raci. In this piece, the YSS is indicated as an organization that engages in activities that are “devilish” (*iblisî*) or which “even the devil would not give consent” (*iblisin bile kabul edemeyeceği*). A text calling Ferik Hüsnü Paşa a traitor and a spy, charged with the duty of pending Mithad Paşa in İzmir,¹⁷ and qualifying Grand Vizier Said Paşa as a bloodthirsty spy who even abuses his father’s honor,¹⁸ can be said to share the same characteristics with the reports (*Jurnal*) given to Abdulhamid II in respect to its style and content.

There is no doubt that the most important factor that limits the current level of knowledge about the subject is the burning of the YSS’ reports held in the palace. According to Asaf Tugay, who was then in the Examination of the Records Commission (*Tedkik-i Evrak Komisyonu*) and the Central Commander’s deputy, the reports of the YSS, its examination and classification of that took five years, were not published and subsequently

¹⁶ Yusuf Niyazi, *Fehim Paşa Mezaliminden Hafiyeye Melanetleri* (İstanbul: Uhuvvet Matbaası, 1327/1911-1912), 2.

¹⁷ Ahmed Raci, *Yıldız’da Yeni Casuslar Cemiyeti yahud Yaveran Tensikatı* (İstanbul: 1324/1908-1909), 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

were burnt in the garden of the Ministry of War because among those who gave reports to the sultan were members of the CUP and those who played a role in the dethronement of Abdulhamid II.¹⁹ As the commission's studies that began in 1909 progressed, such names appeared and as a result of discomfort, the reports were burnt on the order of Enver Paşa.

The fact that the decisive opinions about the YSS were penned generally by pro-Itthadists and other opponents of Abdulhamid II, and that the majority of the reports that could provide insight to the organization were burnt, accordingly unfolds the difficulty to access reliable or controllable information about the YSS. Therefore, on what basis do the authors establish a relationship of continuity between the organization that they call "Yıldız Intelligence Service" and the SO? This is not clear. Though if a correlation is unveiled between the YSS and SO, there are basically two channels that could confront researchers. These channels, both of which could bring some certain methodological problems can be evaluated under two headings, one at the individual and the other at the institutional level.

Spy names given in pamphlets drafted during the Second Constitutional era may lead researchers to the conclusion of the existence of a serious interaction on an individual level, if not at an institutional one, for some of the figures mentioned in these lists participated in the SO. This, however, would not be a suitable approach because, as noted earlier, a majority of these works qualify as propaganda, and are thereby accompanied by certain falsehoods. In this context, Yusuf Şetvan Bey, is worth contemplation as an example.

¹⁹ To see more on such reports and informing, see; Asaf Tugay, *İbret: Abdülhamid'e verilen Jurnaller ve Jurnalciler* (İstanbul: Okat Yayınevi), 17-22.

Yusuf Şetvan Bey served as an official in the Department of Criminal Investigation (*Umur-i Cezaiyye Kalemî*) in the Ministry of Justice during the reign of Abdulhamid II,²⁰ promoted to appellant of the Ministry of Justice Department of Statistics,²¹ subsequently became Justice Inspector (*Adliye Müfettişî*), and eventually was elected to the parliament as the representative of Bingazi.²² What makes Yusuf Şetvan Bey important within the context of this debate was his charge of spying and carrying out duties as a member of the SO.

By far the most obvious accusation of spying by Yusuf Şetvan Bey appears in the second fascicle of the pamphlet published in 1909, titled *Mebusana Takdim Olunan Hafiyelerin Listesi yahut İstanbul'da Kimler Hafiyelik etmiş* (The List of the Spies Presented to the Deputies or who spied in Istanbul). Although it is mentioned that the pamphlet penned by Mahmud is published as four fascicles, the last two fascicles could not be found.²³ According to the information Mahmud gives, Yusuf Şetvan was a first class spy. The first class spies were composed of high officials close to the palace

²⁰ BOA, İ.TAL.: conferring of second grade, second class rank (*rütbe-i saniye, sınıf-ı sanî*) to Yusuf Şetvan Bey (09 Zilhicce 1310/24 June 1893); G: 1310/Z-053, D: 23.

²¹ BOA, İ.TAL.: conferring of distinguished class rank (*sınıf-ı mütemayizi*) to Yusuf Şetvan Bey (01 Receb 1312/29 December 1894); G: 1312/B-06, D: 69; BOA, İ.HUS.: increase in the salary of Yusuf Şetvan (01 Receb 1312/29 December 1894); G: 1312/B-005, D: 33.

²² BOA, DH.MKT.: "misconduct" of Yusuf Şetvan Bey, ex-judiciary inspector of Dersaadet (05 Zilhicce1326/29 December 1908); G: 54, D: 2695.

²³ According to Faiz Demiroğlu, this work was "written to exploit the excitement and curiosity of the community" and stained "many honorable men of the officials of reign of Abdulhamid II with spying". Faiz Demiroğlu, *Abdülhamide Verilen Jurnaller* (İstanbul: Tarih Kütüphanesi Yayınları, 1955), 24.

and its surroundings and able to present their objectives and aspirations directly to the sultan by written reports or verbally.²⁴

According to Mahmud, Yusuf Şetvan was not accepted to the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*) with regard to his spying. He cites the chamber speech by Arif İsmet Bey, deputy of Biga, as evidence to this. For Arif İsmet Bey, Yusuf Şetvan is a character who leaves a negative impression on men of honor, in consideration of which he did not befit the chamber's dignity. Arif İsmet Bey underpins his accusations on two grounds, the first of which is Şetvan Bey's expulsion from the Sacred Sweeping Office (*Feraşet-i Şerife Vekaleti*). According to the story, Şetvan Bey misstated a letter or telegram of the Sacred Sweeping Commissioner in Taif. Secondly, Şetvan Bey, in addition to his connection to İzzet Paşa, was also used by many high officials of the palace.²⁵

Such claims can be considered to be true, at first glance, to official records. As a matter of fact, the deputyship of Yusuf Şetvan was not approved due to his "misconduct" (*kötü hal*).²⁶ Furthermore, even when he was travelling to Medina during the First World War, the Security General Directorate issued an order for the Medina Guardianship (*Medine Muhafızlığı*) to watch Yusuf Şetvan.²⁷ Despite such signs of mistrust, Yusuf

²⁴ Mahmud, *Mebusana Takdim Olunan Hafiyelerin Listesi yahud İstanbul'da Kimler Hafiyelik etmiş*, vol. II (1326/1908-1909), 9-10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ BOA, DH.MKT.: "misconduct" of Yusuf Şetvan Bey, ex-judiciary inspector of Dersaadet (05 Zilhicce1326/29 December 1908); G: 54, D: 2695.

²⁷ BOA, DH.ŞFR.: cipher from Security General Directorate to Medina Guardianship (02 Cemaziye'l evvel 1333/18 March 1915); G: 51, D: 51.

Şetvan worked for the SO during the First World War, especially in North Africa.

Şetvan Bey was the editor of *Cihan-ı İslam* (World of Islam), a bulletin that propagandized Pan-Islamism before and during the war. *Cihan-ı İslam* was established under the supervision of the Islamic Benevolent Society (*Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i İslamiye*) and Şetvan Bey served as the general secretary of this society. Members of the bulletin made the duty of Şetvan Bey more important: Enver Paşa's uncle and the upcoming director of the SO, Halil (Kut) Paşa, and Ali Bey Başhamba, who directed the SO during the most of the First World War, as well as members of the SO who served specifically in the Arab regions, such as Şekib Arslan, Abdülaziz Çaviş, and Salih eş-Şerif et-Tunusi.²⁸

Şetvan Bey was helpful not only in the press but also actively in the field. He played important roles especially in agitating and driving the Senusis, settled in different locations, both in Libya and other parts of North Africa, in war against the British on the western frontier of Egypt, and worked as a spy and strategist. As early as the beginning of March 1915, Yusuf Şetvan suspected that the Senusi leader, Seyyid Ahmed's cousin, Seyyid Idris, who was in Mecca, had concluded an agreement with the British for financial and military assistance and warned supreme headquarters that the upcoming years would witness his rightfulness. Şetvan Bey understood the real intention of the British side, which was to hinder a possible agreement between the Senusis and Ottomans that could jeopardize British interests in

²⁸ Ebu Said el-Arabi was the publisher of the journal, which was published every 10 days by the Islamic Benevolent Society (*Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i İslamiye*) in various languages, such as Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Indian. See for an issue of the journal published during the war: *Cihan-ı İslam*, No. 50 (14 Zilkade 1333/23 September 1915).

Egypt, as well as instigating the Senusis against the Italians, who at that time could join the war on the side of the Central Powers. According to Şetvan Bey, revealing British intentions and making it known to the Italians would lead the Italians to join the war on the side of Central Powers, thereby agitating them against the British.²⁹

Considering the summary information on Yusuf Şetvan Bey, could it be argued that there is an interaction between the YSS and SO on a personal level? Had it been proven that Yusuf Şetvan was a spy, it would have been considerably easier to speak of such a relationship. Such allegations were raised explicitly during the 84th and 85th sessions of the Assembly; specifically, Hüseyin Cahit Bey accused Şetvan Bey of previously being a spy and an informer of Abdulhamid II. Şetvan Bey, in response, asked the Assembly to present proof of the allegations, and take action as necessary. Yet during the renewed elections the re-election of Şetvan Bey, a deputy whose mandate of deputyship had previously been rejected, and his subsequent work in the Assembly suggests that malignant accusations about him were unconfirmed.³⁰

Thus it is possible to claim that the accusations against Şetvan Bey could not go beyond a rumor spread from a coffeehouse in Beşiktaş, and an interaction on an individual level between the SO and YSS becomes difficult to prove. The establishment of a relationship at this level by future studies indeed would not change the result, as the participation of spies who had

²⁹ Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Araştırmalar Enstitüsü Arşivi (Turkish General Staff Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies, ATASE), Birinci Dünya Harbi Katalogu (First World War Catalogue, BDH): Cıpher from Yusuf Şetvan Bey to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (March 1915), Klasör (File, F): 1863, Dosya (Dossier, D): 153, Fihrist (Index, I): 8.

³⁰ Orhan Koloğlu, *Osmanlı Meclislerinde Libya ve Libyalılar* (İstanbul: Boyut Kitapları, 2003), 110-114.

previously worked for the YSS in the SO cannot be cited as evidence serving the thesis of institutional continuity that might be established between the SO and YSS. The following section addressing the problems at the institutional level is expected to promote a better understanding of this.

The leading problem in this respect is about the organization called “Yıldız İstihbarat Teşkilatı”. Do the authors have knowledge that such an organization existed during the reign of Abdulhamid II? Or is it the spy organization centered in the palace that is referred to? In view of both authors’ consideration of the YSS a subject in need of research, it is indeed the spy organization that is referred to by this name. It may be claimed that the name by which the organization is indicated might not be important in establishing a relationship of continuity or of interaction. “Yıldız Hafiyeye Teşkilatı”, however, is an expression that should be taken into account in respect to its capacity to act as a proper device for the self-definition, thus offering a clear insight into the organization’s nature, quality of activities, and mode of action.

In this context, it should be noted that the palace once again became the center of authority after 1878, and its relatively modest structure developed by Abdulaziz evolved into a complex bureaucracy,³¹ which, besides collecting intelligence on enemy and friendly powers, was obliged to consolidate the authority of the palace over regular branches of government and administration as well as over certain groups in society that had

³¹ According to Abdurrahman Şeref, Yıldız Palace became the centre because the role played by Bab-ı Ali at the dethronement of Abdülaziz and V. Murad caused a feeling of insecurity in Abdulhamid II, and this resulted in assignment of a couple of informers to every state department. The aim was obvious: “espial of circumstances (*tecessüs-i ahval*)”. Bayram Kodaman, *Son Vakarıvis Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi Tarihi: II. Meşrutiyet Olayları (1908-1909)* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, 1996), 5.

previously exercised some sort of autonomy. The spy agency developed within the palace, too, was an integral part of this bureaucracy, and it appears that it had existed even before the reign of Abdulhamid II.³² Despite the claim that it was founded upon a spy ordinance arranged by Said Paşa during his grand viziership, he actually did no more than reform an already-existing organization within the framework of the police organization.³³

Like the SO, the YSS had a special place in the bureaucratic structure, a place unnoticeable at first sight. It was officially attached to the Police Ministry (*Zaptiye Nezareti*), founded during the reign of Abdulhamid II, but much like the SO, its name could not be found in the foundation charts of Police Ministry. This situation is relevant to a certain extent to the independence of the spy organization from the Police Ministry, and its dependency on the personality of the sultan and the palace. In this way, the sultan ensured the two organizations continued to spy on each other. Ahmed Celeleddin Paşa was the first known head of this organization that was under the personal supervision of Abdulhamid II. Subsequently, Fehim Paşa held the office until he was discharged by the Young Turks.

The organization had two primary functions. The first was to penetrate all governmental departments in order to thoroughly examine the thoughts and conduct/misconduct of public officers and report accordingly to the

³² The YSS was established, according to Tahsin Paşa, during the reign of Abdulhamid II. Tahsin Paşa states that "Said Paşa, ilk sadaretinde bir hafiye teşkilatı talimatnamesi kaleme alıp bunu Amedi Kalem'inde bir zata yazdırdığı ve iradesini alarak tatbik ettirdiği bir hakikattir". *Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları Sultan Abdülhamid* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1990), 34.

³³ The YSS has not yet turned into a matter of discussion. Despite numerous popular accounts, the only academic article worthy of note is written by Mehmet Ali Beyhan. See his "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Hafiyeye Teşkilatı ve Journaller," *Türkler*, vol. 12 (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2002), 939-950.

palace that took action against the officers reported.³⁴ The YSS' second function, beside collecting intelligence on enemy and friendly powers³⁵, was to work in and out of the country to consolidate the palace's authority over certain political opposition groups. In other words, the YSS was primarily a defense mechanism to avoid the campaigns directed against the state and Abdulhamid II himself.

The primary device of this control mechanism was reports, called *jurnal*, generally composed of notes of denunciation, warning, and/or blacklisting. In other words, journals were the major instruments that made spying a security service. The journals, however, were used to serve a host of different aims other than mere security matters, as they represented unparalleled tools for attracting the sultan's attention, proving loyalty and/or acquiring office, rank or promotion. The fact that the palace seems to have lent its approval to such problematic usage led to the multiplication of groundless, false, and/or fraudulent journals, and this in turn led this organization, that had been designed primarily as a security service, to obtain quite a different profile.

³⁴ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Modern Türkiye, Reform, Devrim ve Cumhuriyet: Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu 1808-1975* (İstanbul: E Yayınları, 1994), 265-266.

³⁵ A number of researchers are inclined to highlight the intelligence activities of the YSS conducted against the foreign countries more than its activities of political repression and ideological surveillance. Despite this, they do not give examples of such intelligence activities. Bora İyiat, *Hunlardan Günümüze Türk Derin Devleti* (Ankara: Kripto, 2008), 32-49; Serhat Tezsever, *Milli Güvenliğimiz İçinde İstihbarat* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1999), 96-97; Bora İyiat, *Türk İstihbarat Tarihi* (Ankara: Platin Yayınları, 2006), 27; Gültekin Avcı, *İstihbarat Teknikleri-Aktörleri, Örgütleri, Açmazları* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2004), 13; Erdal İlter, *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı Tarihçesi* (Ankara: MİT, 2002), 7; Serdar Yurtsever, "Milli Mücadele Dönemi İstihbarat Faaliyetlerinin Olaylar Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi (1919-1922)", (MA thesis, Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Anabilim Dalı Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi Bilim Dalı, 2007), 41-47; Remzi Güney, "Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminden Cumhuriyet Dönemine İstihbarat Teşkilatlarının Tarihi Süreçleri ve Polis İstihbarat Tarihi", (MA thesis, Kırıkkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Bölümü, 2008), 7-8.

As noted earlier, the organization of spying is a topic that is difficult to obtain satisfactory information about. Yet a pamphlet published after the dethronement of Abdulhamid II, though written in an open opposition to the YSS, might render researchers a general idea on the subject. According to the author, spies were divided into four parts and were active in various centers.³⁶ First-class spies consisted of high officials of the palace, and present their aims and desires directly to the Sultan in either written (jurnal) or oral form. The author defines second-class spies as “the chiefs of brigand bands found in the capital and other Ottoman realms” and adds that this class acts under the command and auspices of the first-class. Third-class spies, on the other hand, were made up exclusively of the personal retinues of the first and second-class spies, ranks of which were partially filled by officials. The fourth and last class of spies generally consisted of those who send telegrams to the palace with a concern for rank and status, and if called to testify, present journals with the expectation of a promotion to a higher class of spies.³⁷

Spy groups had determined observing stations and centers in Istanbul,³⁸ which were generally commissioned by spies belonging to the first and second-class, but neither the centers nor the stations were organized as

³⁶ In the first and second fascicles of the pamphlet, a list of people belonging to different groups of spies are provided. Of course, one is not at liberty to believe it without questioning as the pamphlet in terms of its style is not much different than the journals submitted to Abdulhamid II. In addition, it is especially mentioned by the author that various copies of these pamphlets were published, each time with new names added and ommitted. Mahmud, *Mebusana Takdim Olunan Hafiyelerin Listesi yahud İstanbul'da Kimler Hafiyelik etmiş*, vol. I (1326).

³⁷ Ibid., 4-8.

³⁸ By “center”, the author refers not to spies but to localities where spies wander and watch continously. Ibid., 9-10.

an official department, which would otherwise be detected by the society. Spies “preferred places like the corner of a coffeeshop in Çamlıca, the bottom of a tree, or a secret locale on the streets.”³⁹

Considering this brief but potentially controversial information, one can at least affirm that major methods of action performed by the YSS to support the palace’s control mechanism was spying and reporting. This situation leaves all efforts at making an analogy or establishing an institutional continuity between the YSS and SO mired in the quagmire of obscurity and partial indolence that has dominated the subject over the past few decades. This is due to the fact that it is barely possible to detect an analogy between the fundamental structure and major modes of action of the YSS and of the SO as it is known that the SO neither had a widespread spy ring, nor was it involved in reporting. The most fundamental aspect that distinguishes the SO from the YSS is its adoption of unconventional warfare in which armed bands were heavily used. It should, however, be noted that the SO, when appropriate, utilized spies, although not named as such, of one class or another for different purposes. These spies, unlike the YSS, were not used to monitor and control the activities of the Sublime Port and state officials, but to provide intelligence for covert and military or semi-military operations. Thus, on both logical and empirical grounds it can be argued that establishing a direct and chronologically contiguous relation between the YSS and SO, both

³⁹ According to author, the spy centers were as follows: 1) Yıldız 2) Beşiktaş and from Çırağan, Feriye and Dolmabahçe Palaces to Büyükdere Sarıyer 3) Bab-ı Ali 4) Mekatib-i Askeriye 5) Beyoğlu 6) İstanbul and Mevlevihaneler 7) Üsküdar 8) Çamlıca and Şehzadegan mansions 9) Ministry of War (Bab-ı Seraskeri) 10) Fatih 11) Medreseler 12) Şeyhülislam kapısı 13) Adalar 14) Harbor Department (Liman Dairesi) 15) Makriköy and Ayastefanos 16) Şişli 17) Tersane 18) Yıldız Department of Exhibition) Yıldız Sergi Dairesi 19) Anadolu Hisarı Kanlıca, Çubuklu 20) All dervish lodges and hermitages (bilumum tekaya ve zaviyeler 22) Kadıköy 23) Beykoz. Ibid., 10-11.

of which should make one wary of whether they were intelligence services in their own right, and which had almost nothing in common, may lead us to a distorted conceptualization along with causing certain historical data to become invisible.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the CUP did not have definitive information on the YSS. As a matter of fact, examinations of the reports by the Examination of the Records Commission must have extracted enough information on the YSS for the CUP. It is, however, most likely that the knowledge and experience obtained from the YSS were transferred to the Security General Directorate as the Police Ministry, regarded as the most important center of spying was abolished by the beginning of 1909 and replaced by the Security General Directorate that was commissioned to undertake all security matters of the state, supervise all police directorates and directly attached to the Ministry of Interior.⁴⁰

It is, of course, impossible to evaluate the SO independent of the YSS, for the activities of the YSS, together with a number of other factors seem, to a great extent, to have been the sultan's policy that triggered the CUP to set up its own underground network. This might provide fruitful insights into one

⁴⁰ A week after the restoration of the Constitution, spying was abolished by a decree issued on July 30, 1908. Yet the Ministry of Public Security remained open to be reformed. But the 31 March Incident spread and strengthened the idea that Ministry of Public Security could not be reformed, as a result of which it was closed. After the closure of the Ministry of Public Security, various police duties were initially assumed by the Inspector General of the Police and Gendarmerie. This duty was first assigned to Colonel Galip Bey, one of the commanders of the Action Army (*Hareket Ordusu*). Finally on July 22, 1325, Security General Directorate was established and Galip Bey became its first director. But the policing duty of the Province of İstanbul was allocated to the Police Directorate of the Province of İstanbul that was under the command and administration of the governor of İstanbul. By a decree issued on May 22, 1327, this institution was attached directly to the Ministry of Interior, and İstanbul's General Directorate of Police was established as a separate organization. Thus Security General Directorate was left nothing to do with the policing duty of the capital. Halim Alyot, *Türkiye'de Zabıta: Tarihi Gelişim ve Bugünkü Durum* (Ankara: Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü Polis Akademisi Türk Tarihi Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2008), 487-495.

of the foundational dynamics of the SO that was not sharply different from the CUP in terms of its administrative mechanism and structural elements. But in the relationship established between the YSS and SO, further efforts would amount to no more than an imputation.

Therefore, do the negation of efforts at tracing the SO back to the YSS and establishing a relation of institutional continuity between them constitute an obstacle beyond considering the SO an intelligence service? Of course not, but in order to crosscheck this, one must attempt to answer some fundamental questions relating to the meaning of intelligence, a general view of intelligence activities in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, and the SO's place within this context.

2.2 “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa is an intelligence service”: Deconstruction of an acknowledged presumption

Nowadays, this special structure, named no other than Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa by its contemporaries, has come to be routinely or habitually considered as a sort of intelligence service. The SO, in this context, has been positioned in a central place between the traditional and modern Ottoman intelligence. This appears to be the natural result of shoddy scholarship that has generally conducted research without reference to the most essential aspects of the SO, thereby leading to a false impression as to the nature of the organization. The term “intelligence”, used as such to define the SO is condemned to remain a hollow term, rather than a powerful explanatory device. Distancing oneself from the term “intelligence”, and thereby setting a

wrong agenda of questions concerning the definition of the SO, constitutes the conceptual step in this problem.

The second and methodological step of the problem is determined by the fragmentary approach that has dominated the vast majority of the studies on the SO. One of the weaknesses of such studies lies in their inclination toward viewing the whole through the lens of but a fragmentary part. One of the main factors leading to this flaw is the bias that all documentary sources on the SO can be found in one well-arranged repository. It is, however, time to accept that the historical sources on the SO, as in other topics, are abundant and scattered. Generally speaking, it may cause disappointment to search for answers to historical problems concerning the SO by making use of a set of uniform historical sources (for instance, correspondence of the SO center). Those qualifying the SO as an intelligence service may content themselves with exploring a minor part of SO correspondence. Researchers, however, should bear in mind that even taking a short look at other Ottoman intelligence units, especially the Second Branch (2. Şube) of the Ottoman General Staff that has become invisible before the aforementioned fragmentary approach can provide as much information on the SO as the SO's own correspondence. Thus, the purpose of this part is to discuss whether the SO can be accepted as an intelligence service by examining the aforementioned conceptual and methodological problems. Such a discussion is expected to facilitate an understanding as to what the SO actually was, as well as bearing the qualification of a preliminary study on introducing the intelligence efforts of the SO.

The approach brought into question over the YSS, one of its concrete equivalents, considers the SO as a turning point in the emergence of the modern intelligence. This problematic approach gives the impression that the static Ottoman intelligence system underwent a complete change in a very short period of time without any preliminary preparation. Based on the simple hypothesis that the Ottoman State had no other choice but to modernize, the SO is interpreted as the institutional form this modernization took within the intelligence field.

Treating the SO as the precursor of modern Turkish intelligence services serves the establishment of another relationship of continuity. In this relationship, the SO holds a unifying and infusive position between the YSS or other organizations, institutions, groups and the intelligence services of the Republic of Turkey. In other words, the SO becomes the representative of the transition from conservative to modern intelligence. Studies that seek to establish such a connection generally omit the differences between the structures of the two governments and the SO and modern Turkish intelligence. The recent increase in the number of studies intending to establish a connection, positively or negatively, between the SO and the secret services of the Republican period is thus not entirely coincidental. Such works include those by Tuncay Özkan,⁴¹ Emin Demirel,⁴² Cemal Anadol,⁴³ Kaya Karan,⁴⁴ İlhan Bahar⁴⁵ and Gültekin Ural.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Özkan, Tuncay, *MİT'in Gizli Tarihi* (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2003).

⁴² Emin Demirel, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Günümüze Gizli Servisler* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2008).

⁴³ Cemal Anadol, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan MİT'e Susurluk Dosyası* (İstanbul: Bilge Karınca Yayınları, 2009).

The “continuity” between the SO and later Turkish intelligence services is the deceptive result of an exclusive focus on the exterior structures of these organizations, because even the extent of the internal changes that took place in the transition from the SO to its immediate successor that was founded in the second week of May 1915, the OEA, has never been the subject of concerted study. This, coupled with the fact that a host of different organizations followed the OEA in rapid succession, as one after another were closed down and replaced by a new organization, makes it incredibly problematic to directly compare the SO with later Republican intelligence services. To do so leaves one with a misguided impression that the old structures and leadership remained intact. There are simply too many unknowns in between.

Another factor in the failure to establish this relationship of continuity is directly related to one of the most common problems of the literature. This problem, as noted earlier, is the fragmentary nature of almost all studies concerning the SO, with the exception of those of Tunaya,⁴⁷ Shaw,⁴⁸ and Stoddard.⁴⁹ The strengths and the weaknesses of such studies lie in their attempt to view the whole through the lens of but a fragmentary part.

⁴⁴ Kaya Karan, *Türk İstihbarat Tarihi: Yıldız İstihbarat Teşkilatı ve Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan MİT'e* (İstanbul: Truva Yayınları, 2008).

⁴⁵ İlhan Bahar, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa, MİT ve İstihbarat Örgütleri* (İstanbul: Kum Saati Yayınları, 2009)

⁴⁶ Gültekin Ural, *Abdullah Çatlı ve Susurluk Dosyası, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan MİT'e* (İstanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 2008).

⁴⁷ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. III (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000).

⁴⁸ Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. I (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006).

⁴⁹ Stoddard, “The Ottoman Government and the Arabs”.

Whether this is a strength or a weakness depends on the nature of the subject. In the face of a lack of data, and bits and pieces of information, even if vague, may make it easier to get a glimpse of the historical reality.

Stoddard's study, for instance, cannot be merely considered an area study limited to pointing out the activities of the SO in various Arab-speaking regions like Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya. Although the information he had about these regions was limited and he crosschecked this information with Eşref Kuşçubaşı, a character whose role in the SO has long been exaggerated, Stoddard was able to employ a more holistic approach, focusing not only on the actions of the SO itself, but also on the ideological and political motivations out of which these actions sprang. Although Stoddard qualified his dissertation as a 'preliminary study', recognizing that any study of the SO could only be a modest effort, the transformation of his findings into indisputable laws by later experts seeking to capture the secrets of this mysterious organization is related to this holistic approach.

Fragmentary studies, on the other hand, may lead to the risk of overgeneralizing on the basis of insufficient data. Fragmentary information on a multi-faceted and multifunctional organization like the SO when used with the fragmentary information on another part tends to result in misunderstanding more often than insight, thus seriously distorting the historical reality. The consideration of the SO as an intelligence service established to meet the modern and strong intelligence needs of the Ottoman State confronts us as one of the most common examples of such a weakness in the literature.

It may initially seem appealing to consider the SO an intelligence service. Assertions, hastily put forth to clarify what sort of an intelligence service the SO was, is the first proof of how dubious the origin of this approach is: to some, it represents a central intelligence agency, for some others, the Ottoman military intelligence service, and for some, a full-scope secret intelligence service.⁵⁰

There are two factors directly connected with each other that are effective in the emergence of such definitions. The first is a result of a question, the premises of which are wrongly formalized. A majority of experts believe that intelligence assignments carried out by the SO are capable of making it an intelligence service. Nonetheless, as will be dealt with in more detail later, there is no fundamental difference between qualifying the SO as an intelligence service through considering the intelligence assignments it performed, and defining some other organizations like the Ottoman Red Crescent Association (*Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti*) and the National Defense Society (*Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*) as intelligence services, used from time to time used as sources of intelligence. In other words, rather than asking whether an organization has carried out a number of intelligence assignments defines it as an intelligence service, it is more appropriate to ask

⁵⁰ According to Stanford Shaw, for example, the SO represented the Ottoman military intelligence service. Stanford J. Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, vol. I, 353. That the SO was simply an intelligence agency is another view often expressed in the theses submitted during the last few years. Remzi Güney, "Osmanlı'nın Son Döneminden Cumhuriyet Dönemine İstihbarat Teşkilatlarının Tarihi Süreçleri ve Polis İstihbarat Tarihi", (MA thesis, Kırıkkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Bölümü, 2008), 9; Yurtsever, "Milli Mücadele Dönemi İstihbarat Faaliyetlerinin Olaylar Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi", 46-47. It is also mentioned that the SO was a paramilitary intelligence organization. Mehmet Beşikçi, "Between Voluntarism and Resistance: The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War", (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2009), 198.

what an intelligence service does. Otherwise, a number of organizations would be labeled as intelligence services for their intelligence connections.

A second factor, associated with the former, is the tendency to overlook other intelligence units in the Ottoman administrative mechanism. As a matter of fact, neither the Second Branch of the Ottoman General Staff nor the Intelligence Department of the Security General Directorate could thus far find a proper place in the SO narrations. To these might perhaps be added the force Cemal Paşa, attained through the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*) established at many points throughout the country, and to a lesser extent, the secret police he established in Syria. This being the case, referring to the SO as the organization on whose shoulders rested almost all the intelligence burden of the Ottoman State, constitutes an inconclusive and misguided approach. The question must also be posed as to why Enver Paşa embarked on a quest for a new “intelligence organization” rather than advancing the Second Branch that was totally under his control. Asserting that the SO would fill the void or meet the Ottoman State’s great need of central intelligence can only be the result of a retrospective reading of modern intelligence needs. In the same vein, an answer purporting that the political conflict among the triumvirate of the Young Turks would result in Enver’s favor, would rather serve to enlighten one of the fundamental dynamics of the SO, rather than explain why the SO was designed as an intelligence service.

It is imperative to have a brief look at the Ottoman General Staff’s Second Branch, the mission load of which heavily increased due to the outbreak of the war, and which, in turn, became the most effective Ottoman

intelligence unit, to set forth that intelligence assignments attributed to the SO have indeed been carried out by the Second Branch.

Until the end of the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman army did not enjoy an intelligence network operating on a large-scale. No regular staff and methods were employed in intelligence in peace and war. Intelligence activities were substantially limited to the output resulting from reconnaissance operations and communication possibilities during war. Until the outbreak of the First World War, only one staff officer was found in the General Staff, as well as the Army Headquarters, Corps Headquarters, and Division Headquarters for intelligence activities. There were no intelligence organizations and activities at the level of brigade and regiment, and therefore they could only be warned by intelligence received from higher units. The division's intelligence section and activities can thus be said to have formed the first step of intelligence in the tactical field.⁵¹

Together with the regulations of 1878/1879, the Ottoman General Staff's Second Branch, then called the Statistics and Translation Department (*İstatistik ve Tercüme Şubesi*) began intelligence activities concerning military affairs, though poorly equipped and organized. Primarily responsible for the arrangement of military statistics, this department transmitted information on the military strength and organization of foreign powers, both hostile and friendly, to the relevant branches in the form of a military newspaper, handbook, or through special notices. Its information sources included, but were not limited to memorandums and reports, originating from military attaches, consuls, and officers who went abroad for travel or on an

⁵¹ T.C. Genelkurmay Harp Tarihi Başkanlığı, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi (1908-1920)*, Vol. III, p. VI (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1971), 380-381.

extraordinary mission. The department, on the other hand, performed the functions of a censorship office, and was authorized to allow the printing of memorandums and handbooks, as well as translations by departmental staff or associations consisted of military personnel. By following the foreign press, the department also gathered information and pieces that could be useful to the Ministry of War or the Commander in Chief (*Serasker*).⁵²

Following the declaration of the Constitution, the replacement of the Offices of the War Ministry (*Bab-ı Seraskeri*) by the Ministry of War (*Harbiye Nezareti*), the abolition of the General Staff (*Erkan-ı Harbiye*) located in Yıldız Palace, and the regulations by İzzet Paşa, the Deputy Chief of General Staff, were all important steps at centralizing the intelligence, though unable to renovate the department. During this period, too, the Second Branch was responsible for such tasks as the collection of military information pertaining to the armed forces of foreign powers from military attaches, analysis of the information and knowledge gathered by the agents, as well as following domestic and foreign press and publications.⁵³ The Balkan Wars, however, revealed the weakness of the Second Branch research and information sources, of which was exclusively limited to sources of official intelligence and printed publications, and intelligence collected through such means proved once again to be useless. Even the officers of this department had been sent as liaison officers to various locales during the war. In this context, information gathered by the intelligence department could not go beyond the

⁵² Kadir Acar, "Seraskerlik'ten Harbiye Nezareti'ne: Türkiye'de Genelkurmay Başkanlığı ve Milli Savunma Bakanlığı'nın Temeli" (MA thesis, Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2002), 85-87.

⁵³ Zeynel Abidin Küçük, "Osmanlı Askeri Salnamelerine Göre Erkan-ı Harbiye-i Umumiye Riyaseti ve Harbiye Nezareti Teşkilatı" (MA thesis, Kırıkkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2002), 68-75.

data obtained through air reconnaissance in terms of its quality, and that their efforts did not contribute positively to Staff Operations (*Harekat Şubesi*).⁵⁴

Together with the declaration of mobilization for the First World War, the duties of the Second Branch were enlarged, defined, and clarified. The first and foremost task handed over to the Second Branch was to collect 'information' relating to enemy armies' deployment, structure, weaponry, and training essentials; highways and railroads, and their capabilities; terrain and climate; condition of the population, animals, livestock carriers, and officers; personality of major commanders and their place before the indigenous population; and the domestic wealth of countries. The Second Branch was also to unfold the operational objectives of enemy armies and possible operational plans through evaluating the extent of military mobilization, and deployment, structure, concentration and build-up of potential enemies' expeditionary forces.⁵⁵

This process and the quality of collected information is the primary feature that distinguishes the Second Branch from the SO, seeing as the information collected by the Second Branch was the strategic knowledge and insight of the world surrounding the Ottoman State. It was the information that was processed and made as accurate as possible. Because of this, the Second Branch refers to a systematic organization of collecting and exploiting information, in conformity with any definition of intelligence. As a matter of fact, intelligence is as broad a term referring to both the process and end product.

⁵⁴ Hüseyin Hüsnü Emir, *Erkan-ı Harbiye Meslek, Vezâifi ve Teşkilatı* (Yıldız-İstanbul: Erkan-ı Harbiye Mektebi Matbaası, 1924), 46-47.

⁵⁵ *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi (1908-1920)*, 380-381.

The Second Branch was charged with the fusion of intelligence collected from a host of sources, both open and secret. The consideration of the SO as an intelligence service actually lies in this quagmire, for the Second Branch had the right to benefit from the SO as a source of intelligence.⁵⁶ The Office of the Supreme Military Command (*Başkumandanlık Vekaleti*) was right in making such a decision, because the SO was a structure active either on the fronts or the flank and rear of the enemy, thereby representing an unparalleled opportunity, and a valuable source of human intelligence to collect local intelligence from places, often far afield, where agents and informers of the Second Branch were rarely found. For instance, a military and political intelligence bureau was established in Sellum (Egypt), located east of the border with Libya by the SO, upon the order Nuri Pasha received from the Supreme Command on August 9, 1915. Its duty was to reconnoiter, incite the populace on the eve of the invasion attempt against Egypt, make Egyptian soldiers change sides, and presumably collect intelligence on the Egyptian Nationalist Party, Hizb al-Watani, though not specified in that order.⁵⁷ Ruşeni Bey's (Hasan Ruşeni Barkın) trip to Baku where he was assigned to conduct propaganda activities before the Caucasian Islamic Army (*Kafkas İslam Ordusu*) was actually designed to serve a similar objective⁵⁸, that is, to establish an intelligence bureau, disguised as a political

⁵⁶ For an example, see; ATASE, BDH: from the Second Branch of General Staff to the SO (5 Kanun-i Sani 1330/18 January 1915); F: 1868, D: 174, I: 1/2 ve 1/3.

⁵⁷ The bureau would be run by three people: Captain Muhammad Hasan Fehmi from Egypt in the *Maiyyet-i Seniyye* Company; First Lieutenant Ahmad abu Ali from Egypt, quartermaster in the headquarters of the Supreme Command, 1st regiment, 1st regular battalion; First Lieutenant Lutfi Efendi from Egypt, reserve officer in the 4th Company of the *Maltepe Endaht Mektebi*. ATASE, BDH: F: 1863, D: 153, I: 16, 16/1.

⁵⁸ ATASE, BDH: from the Caucasus Branch of the OEA to the Intelligence Department of the General Headquarters (14 Eylül 1334/14 September 1918), F: 1851, D: 111, I: 32.

representative office, indeed commissioned to contact the pro-Ottoman groups in Azerbaijan and Northern Caucasia, to keep the state supplied with necessary and up-to-date information about the region as well as serving the new expansionist policy of the state by ensuring the rebellion of the population spread to the east, concurrently with the intervention of Ottoman troops in Caucasia.⁵⁹

Such a relation between the SO and the Second Branch, however, seems to have been established only during the directorship of Seyfi Bey (Düzgören), as no records have yet been found conforming to such a relation during the directorship of Kazım Bey (Karabekir), a point also mentioned by Kazım Bey himself in his memoirs. Kazım Bey, advancing the point, even claims in his discussion of the Second Branch's fierce and continual struggle with the spies, that he was by no means unaware of SO activities back then.

“Benim en büyük çabam Merkez Karargaha casusların sokulmamasıydı ve Merkez Karargahtan gizli işlerin dışarıya sızmamasıydı. Fakat bu bile çok basit değildi. Çünkü Enver Paşa'nın odasının yanındaki büyük salon hergün türlü türlü insanlarla dolar boşalırdı. Ayrıca Enver Paşa'nın bir de Özel Şube'si vardı. Yüzbaşı Ömer Fevzi Bey idare ediyordu. Enver, Berlin'de askeri ataşe iken bu zat da Almanya'da tahsilde bulunuyormuş.

Bu şubenin barış zamanındaki işlerinden bile katıyken haberimiz olmazdı. Seferberlikle birlikte bu şube faaliyetini İran ve Afganistan üzerinde yoğunlaştırdı.

Enver'in İslam dünyasıyla ilişkilerini kuran (!) galiba bu şubeydi. Hergün Enver'in kıymetli vakitlerini alan bir takım misafirlerden bu şubenin bilgisi olsa gerek. Ben bunlarla bizzat görüşmemesini Enver Paşa'dan rica ettiğim gibi yaverlerine de bunlara karşı gözü açık bulunmalarını söylemekle yetindim.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Yalçın Murgul, “Baku Expedition of 1917-1918: A Study of the Ottoman Policy Towards the Caucasus” (MA thesis (Ankara: Bilkent Üniversitesi Tarih Bölümü, September 2007), 117.

⁶⁰ On the same page, Kazım Karabekir mentions that the Special Branch refers to the Special Branch (*Şube-i Mahsusa*) which would later on become the Special Organization. Kazım Karabekir, *Birinci Cihan Harbi'ne Nasıl Girdik?*, vol. II (İstanbul: Emre Yayınları), 250-251.

Kazım Bey's statements aside, the cross-checking of which would be extremely vexatious and quite time-consuming, the fact that the SO was used, though rarely, by the Second Branch as a source of intelligence is valuable information, indicating that the SO could act neither as a central intelligence agency, which appears to have never existed in the Ottoman Empire, nor the Ottoman army intelligence. If that were the case, it would not have been the Second Branch, but the SO, that was charged with the task of processing the intelligence and cross-checking it with other information obtained through a host of sources. It is, however, surely beyond doubt that such functions were performed by the Office of Supreme Military Command, specifically by one of its subordinate departments, the Second Branch.

In this context, a glance at the intelligence and reconnaissance missions assigned by the Second Branch to the SO, which played a relatively active role in the implementation of the Ottoman containment policy against British occupied Egypt during the First World War, might prove useful for both placing the discussion on solid ground and demonstrating that the same information required from the SO was indeed demanded of various other sources that will only be briefly touched upon here.

The activities in Egypt were under the responsibility of the SO agents who had been trained in Istanbul, and sent to Egypt before the war. The cell in Egypt was located in Cairo and directed by Sheikh Abdülaziz Çaviş. Along with Çaviş, the SO agents like Ferit Bey, Dr. Fuat, Dr. Nasır, and Dr. Tabit Maheab, together with some 600 people including Turks, Germans, and Austrians, employed as agents and agitators were also present in the

region.⁶¹ Despite the limited information sources provide about the actions and participators of this group, it is likely that the SO first and foremost assumed the function of a force multiplier in the region. In this context, the very unreactive inhabitants of Egypt were to be instigated to revolt against the British authorities through Pan-Islamic propaganda, thus getting support for the operation that would be performed by the Fourth Army from the target of the operation. In addition to this, the SO would be charged with a duty similar to the one they carried out in Sinai, and provide the commanders and planning staff in Istanbul, Syria, and Libya with the intelligence required about the British forces, her military equipment, and the native population in Egypt.

In this context, the SO forces, on the order of the Second Branch, were involved in intelligence and reconnaissance activities in Egypt and were expected to report on the number of Australian and Indian troops in Egypt; whether troops of Canadian origin had been dispatched; the number of troops stationed along the Canal, in Port-Said, el-Kantara, İsmailiye and Süveys; the fortifications and fortified points on both sides of the Canal; the amount and types of field and machine gun emplacements, and of artificial obstacles such as wire and barbed fences; the nationality of the troops deployed along the Canal and thereof, the number of Indian and indigenous Egyptian troops; the amount of the forces and fortified points in the interior regions such as İskenderiye, Cairo, Matruh, Dimyat, Zegazig, and Feyyum; the whereabouts of radio and telegraph emplacements and airplane hangars; whether any troops were moved from Egypt to Europe; whether British troops were dispatched via the Red Sea and India to other regions; whether any

⁶¹ Safi, *"The Ottoman Special Organization"*, 63.

railway lines were built from Salihiye to Elkantara; the warships stationed both to the north and south of the Canal; military volunteers in Egypt; coast guard forces; and whether the Syrian Christians who were given guns took service with the British.⁶²

The Second Branch, nonetheless, required similar information from other sources to rectify the intelligence collected, a portion of which was inevitably unreliable. The end product of this process was expected to shed light on the governmental policies in general, and determine, to a certain extent, the Ottoman army's counter-preparations, order of battle, and deployment. For instance, as early as September 23, 1914, the Security General Directorate transmitted intelligence, obtained through two reporters in Egypt, to the Second Branch on the departure of Indian and British forces by steamboats, and the manufacture of steamboats.⁶³ In the same vein, Governor of Beirut, Bekir Sami Bey, informed the Supreme Command of the forces coming from India to Egypt, on the basis of intelligence provided by the Ottoman dispatcher in Port Said, a city north of the Canal and an important harbor for exports of Egyptian products (specifically cotton and rice). According to the report dated October 7, 1914, the Indian forces in Egypt, mostly infantry, were estimated at about 9,000, and in addition to the British forces in Cairo, to the total was approximately 12,000.⁶⁴ Earlier, on August, 30, Macit Bey, the Regional Governor (*Mutasarrıf*) of Jerusalem,

⁶² ATASE, BDH: from the Second Branch of General Staff to the SO (5 Kanun-i Sani 1330/18 January 1915); F: 1868, D: 174, I: 1/2, 1/3.

⁶³ ATASE, BDH: information document from the director of the Security General Directorate, İsmail Bey, to the Second Branch of Ottoman General Staff (23 Eylül 1330/6 October 1915); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/11.

⁶⁴ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the governor of Beirut, Bekir Sami Bey, to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (23 Eylül 1330/6 October 1915); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/12.

telegraphed the Ministry of War that approximately 400 British officers were brought to Egypt to replace the officers commanding the Egyptian soldiers.⁶⁵ Yet in another telegram, dated September 29, he again informed the Ministry of War of the forthcoming dispatch of troops from Sudan to Egypt, and the number and station of colonial troops dispatched from India.⁶⁶ A third lieutenant attached to the Hicaz Division was drawing up a report for the Supreme Command describing the uniforms of the Irish, British, Scottish, and Indian infantry, and of the British cavalry.⁶⁷

Nabi Bey, Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, was also a relatively important intelligence source. In his telegram that arrived at the Ministry of War 56 days before the first Canal campaign on December 6, he reported the distribution of the British forces, which had at the outset of December amounted to 80,000,⁶⁸ and grew to 100,000 by the second week of December,⁶⁹ into locales like Feyyum, Zegazig, Mansure, İskenderiye, and Cairo. He also mentioned that Indian soldiers opposing to fight against the Muslims were executed by gunfire, and further reported on the dispatch of suspended Egyptian officers to Sudan, and the British efforts at making

⁶⁵ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the (*mutasarrıflık*) of Kudüs to the Ministry of War (17 Ağustos 1330/30 August 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/5.

⁶⁶ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of Kudüs to the Ministry of War (17 Ağustos 1330/30 August 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/3.

⁶⁷ ATASE, BDH: report, titled "circumstances in Egypt (Mısır'da ahval), sent from Hicaz Division to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (29 Eylül 1330/12 October 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/22 ve 2/22a.

⁶⁸ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (6 Eylül 1330/19 September 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/44.

⁶⁹ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (12 Kanun-i evvel 1330/25 December 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/50.

Seyyid Ahmed Es-Senusi change sides.⁷⁰ One other point required of the SO would again begin to find answers in the ciphered messages of Nabi Bey. As a matter of fact, in his telegram to the Ministry of War, dated December 10, Nabi Bey stated on the basis of information provided by a reporter of a British newspaper that Canadian troops began to arrive in Egypt,⁷¹ and in another telegram dispatched a few days later, he indicated that the Canadians along with Indians, Australians, and New Zealanders formed the bulk of the British forces in Egypt.⁷²

Even Süleyman Askeri, the former head of the SO, sent the intelligence reports he drew up after he had been appointed to the Commandership of the Iraq Area Command⁷³, to the Second Branch. For instance, a report on the results of a clash between the detachment of the Osmancık Volunteer Battalion formed by the SO and an enemy gunboat approaching Rota was sent to the Ministry of War, and thence to the Second Branch to be processed:

“1- Mah-ı halin ikinci Cuma gecesi Gönüllü Osmancık Taburuna mensub bir müfrezemiz düşman mevazıına baskın vererek düşmana yüzü mütecaviz telefât verdirmişdir. Gönüllülerden iki mecruh vardır.

2- Kanun-i evvelin otuzuncu Salı gübü Rota'ya takarrüb etmek isteyen düşman gambotuyla küçücük bir müfrezemiz arasında

⁷⁰ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (6 Eylül 1330/19 September 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/44.

⁷¹ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (10 Kanun-i evvel 1330/23 December 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/49.

⁷² ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (12 Kanun-i evvel 1330/25 December 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/50.

⁷³ “Irak ve havalisindeki kuvvetler kumandanlığına Kaymakam Süleyman Askeri Bey tayin edilmiştir. Muma ileyhe umur-i muamelatı devrederek Dersaadet'e hareket edebilirsiniz.” ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from Enver Paşa to the Iraq Area Command (7-8 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20-21 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 3, I: 28.

vuku bulan neticesinde gambot mürettebatından yirmi kişinin telef olduğu ve cebel toplarımızdan atılan mermilerden bizzat gambotların hasara uğradığı mevsukan istihbar edildi. Bu müsademede iki ester ile şehit düşmüş bir saka neferimizden başka zayiatımız yoktur.”⁷⁴

The SO collected intelligence as well, as clearly understood from the examples above. The intelligence collected by the SO, however, was qualitatively not strategic, rather tactical and operational. The SO used the intelligence it gathered first and foremost to aid its own operations. The intelligence collected by the SO along with reconnaissance facilities performed before and during the war were becoming a source of information for the armies too, as the SO operations were incorporated into the strategy of the Ottoman armies the SO units were attached to. In this context, the very first duty of the SO was to provide the expeditionary forces with topographic intelligence. In this way, for instance, the Fourth Army, which the SO units were a part of, would mediate the hardships of the Sinai, which was not encouraging for either prolonged operations or movement of large forces due to poor terrain conditions, in terms of water and nourishment supplies. The reconnaissance patrols formed by the SO prepared reports covering specific topics such as the location, condition, troop movements, and artillery of the British forces; the location of the wells and their state of water; the quality and quantity of fuel and aliment resources across the desert; survey of impediments such as wire fence and artificial water flood; the appropriate transportation line of military items like ammunition and bridge building

⁷⁴ This telegram after a day it had arrived at the cipher office on 5 Kanun-i Sani 1330 was transmitted to the Second Branch. ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from Süleyman Askeri, Commander of Iraq Area Command to the Ministry of War (3 Kanun-i Sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 193, D: 816, I: 10.

equipment. Kress von Kressenstein would give the SO a number of orders to these effects. Similar missions were undertaken by the SO in Libya. In this context, it is plausible to state that these field reports dispatched to army commanders both helped to a certain extent to determine the Ottoman order of battle and deployment in the regions the SO existed after being analyzed and assessed, and served for the SO's courses of action itself.

The second duty of the SO was to gather information about the enemy forces located in the center of the regions that the operations would be directed at. The SO, for example, in gathering information about the enemy forces in Egypt, used various sources such as soldiers, Bedouins, refugees, tourists, defectors, and informers in Egypt and Libya. Not surprisingly then, an uncertain portion of the information gathered was unreliable. It was after the flaw of such erroneous, either exaggerated or intentionally fabricated, reports, Süleyman Askeri ordered Hasan Efendi in Jaffa to draft the reports in three ways such as "personally seen", "reported by a secondary person", or "estimated".⁷⁵ The SO used such information, as noted earlier, primarily to aid its own operations. On the other hand, the intelligence collected by the SO at the tactical and operational level would become an important source for the Supreme Command and the Second Branch to improve its capability to verify information from other sources.

The SO's employment as a source of intelligence or its involvement in intelligence collection is not on its own a sufficient condition to indicate that it is an intelligence service. It is true that the intelligence collected by the SO was by its very nature secret and mostly concerning military affairs, and this,

⁷⁵ ATASE, BDH: from Süleyman Askeri to Major Hasan Efendi in Yafa; F: 1836, D: 35, I: 8/10.

in turn, might give the SO the impression of a secret intelligence service or an army intelligence agency. It would be irrational to give such definitions, for ensuring the accuracy of intelligence at least necessitates the evaluation of the information gathered, and this evaluation procedure brings together a series of steps, such as the record of the intelligence, its collation, validation of reliability and source, comparison and subsequent inference of the information collected, integration of this inference into the larger picture, and finally the prediction of events for the near and distant future. The SO, however, with regard to its organizational structure and of its cadre, did not have a structure that could guide and perform such functions.

Moreover, it can be estimated that the side collecting information must have full information about the operations and plans of its own state if the information processed and presented as final intelligence is to create any value in the development and implementation of the plans, policies and decisions of that state, because information about others' actions is only valuable insofar as it is related to what one's own forces plan or carry out. This is to say that intelligence is only meaningful as long as it contributes to a total volume of information. It would be otherwise unreasonable to expect from intelligence to act as a force multiplier. In this respect, in order for the SO to have been an intelligence organization, it must have been at the receiving end of all the streams of information about the plans and actions of the Ottoman State during World War I. The current field of knowledge, however, points to the contrary.

The fact that there is almost no mention of information gathering activities of the SO in the narratives and discussions related to the topic

further enforces the argument that the SO was not an intelligence organization: without any reserve, experts do seem to have focused on the SO's unconventional warfare operations. This makes it legitimate that the definitions of the nature of the SO are neither factual nor internally consistent. Furthermore, this raises the suspicion that biases and unwarranted assumptions played an important role in the development of such definitions.

Limited source material may have concealed SO's information processing mechanism. Different forms of future evidence that could be presented to prove the existence of the mechanism SO used to process raw information on the basis of hitherto undiscovered documents would not detract from the conclusion reached here. Since the information, even if proven to be processed, never reached the level of complete intelligence, it would still not be possible to consider the SO an intelligence organization. Intelligence is meaningless unless it is distributed to those whose actions depend on it. It can be accordingly stated that the distribution of the complete intelligence to the consumers is one of primary functions of an intelligence agency. In other words, if the SO had been an intelligence organization, it would have been charged with passing on the information it gathered to a number of governmental institutions, if not directly, through the Office of the Supreme Military Command or the Ministry of War. An analysis, however, of the outgoing documents from the office of the SO reveals that they are typically related not to intelligence matters, but to the details of the SO operations conducted in the colonies of the Entente powers, neutral countries, as well as some parts of the Empire.

On the other hand, the Second Branch was required to pass on the necessary part of the information, gathered both from open and secret sources, to other state institutions. Having been transformed into summaries, this intelligence, collected from a number of official and non-official sources, was distributed to the military and administrative authorities with designations of “secret” (single crescent) and “top secret” (double crescent).⁷⁶ Among those institutions were the SO itself. For instance, the Second Branch shared the information it had received from the Baku Muslim Benevolent League (*Bakü Müslüman Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi*)⁷⁷ and the Third Army Command,⁷⁸ on the Armenian “atrocities” against the Muslims in Yerevan and the Southern Caucasus, with the OEA.⁷⁹

The distribution of intelligence by the Second Branch indicates that it was also the institution that analyzed it, as information not subjected to

⁷⁶ For a number of examples on the intelligence reports prepared and disseminated by the Second Branch of the Office of the Supreme Military Command, see: BOA, DH. EUM. 3. Şb.: Intelligence summary on Caucasus, Gallipoli, Egypt, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Russia (15 Mart 1331/28 March 1915); D: 4, G: 32; BOA, DH. EUM. VRK.: various intelligence on Caucasus, Black Sea, Gallipoli, Syria, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece (14 Şubat 1330/27 February 1915); D: 14, G: 71; BOA, DH. EUM. VRK.: intelligence report on the Southern and Northern zone of operations (28 Kanun-i evvel 1333/28 December 1917 ve 31 Kanun-i evvel 1333/31 December 1917); D: 14, G: 55; BOA, DH. EUM. KLH.: intelligence summary on Russia, Greece, Romania, Greece, Straits, Iraq, Caucasus, Black Sea, Aegean Sea (Adalar Denizi), Syria, Yemen, Gallipoli, and İzmir (21 Şubat 1330/6 March 1915); D: 5, G: 24; BOA, DH. EUM. VRK.: intelligence summary on the Eastern and Western zone of operations (19 June 1332/4 July 1916); D: 22, G: 95; BOA, DH. EUM. VRK.: intelligence summary on Caucasus, Black Sea, Gallipoli, and Iraq (18 Şubat 1330/3 March 1915); D: 14, G: 74; BOA, DH. EUM. VRK.: intelligence summary on Caucasus, Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and Gallipoli (19 Şubat 1330/4 March 1915); D: 14, G: 76; BOA, DH. EUM., VRK.: intelligence summary on Caucasus, Black Sea, Gallipoli, Russia, Romania, Italia, and Bulgaria (30 March 1915); D: 14, G: 82.

⁷⁷ ATASE, BDH: from the Second Branch of the General Staff to the OEA (18 Ağustos1334/18 August 1918); F: 1847, D: 89, I: 7-12.

⁷⁸ ATASE, BDH: from the Second Branch of the General Staff to the OEA (18 Ağustos1334/18 August 1918); F: 1847, D: 89, I: 7-13.

⁷⁹ See for the details of the “atrocities”: ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Third Army Command to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (18 Ağustos1334/18 August 1918); F: 1847, D: 89, I: 7-14 ve 7-15.

evaluation, analysis, integration, and interpretation possesses no intelligence value and can serve as no more than raw material. In other words, the intelligence distributed by the Second Branch was finished intelligence, and in order for information to be counted as such, it must have passed through all, or at least some of the processes mentioned above. As a matter of fact, the basics of intelligence, counter-intelligence, espionage, and counter-espionage were set by the Second Branch. On the contrary, it was almost impossible for the SO to analyze the intelligence institutionally. The most important reason behind this was that once the SO officers and operational units were sent to the fronts from either Istanbul or their own locales, they broke connections with the SO. In fact, they were expressly forbidden to send reports to the center about their operations.⁸⁰ Thus there was no line of communication that could enable the intelligence circulation between the SO center and operational zones. More importantly, there was no military cadre in the SO center who could develop plans and projects on either a tactical or strategic level by evaluating the developments in the field and intelligence. This can be considered as yet another piece of evidence of the fundamentally operational character of the SO.

On the basis of this information, it should not be assumed that there was a close collaboration between the Second Branch and the SO with regard to sharing intelligence. In fact, intelligence matters constituted but only a small portion of the documents sent from the SO to the Second Branch. This can be explained by the fact that the intelligence gathering activities of the SO focused more on tactical and operational levels. Correspondence exchanged

⁸⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 27-Supplement (Ek, SUP); Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi Muhakematı Zabıt Ceridesi (DHÖM), Second Session (4 May 1919).

by the Second Branch with the SO, on the other hand, were generally restricted to requests by the SO seeking measures to facilitate the mobility of its officers. In this context, the request for the delivery of a passport to Ruşeni Bey, a famous member of the SO to be sent on a propaganda mission before the Caucasian Islamic Army (*Kafkas İslam Ordusu*), can be considered a typical example:

“Zirde esamileri muharrer zevat Kafkasya’da propaganda ve memur işlerde çalışmak üzere ilk vapurla izam olunacaklarından muktezi pasaportun itasına müsaade buyurulması mütemennadır efendim.

- 1- Ruşeni Bey bin Hüseyin Sadi Efendi, Girid, sinni: 36
- 2- Biraderi Vehbi Bey bin Hüseyin Sadi Efendi, Girid, sinni: 55
- 3- Refakatlerinde Muhammed Ruşeni bin Sadi Efendi, Girid, sinni: 24”⁸¹

Another request was made to facilitate the travel of the committee members who would be sent to Berlin to embark on an enterprise for Batum, Kars, and Ardahan during the peace negotiations:

“Ba emr-i nezaret-penahi teşekkül eden heyet 22 Kanun-i evvel 1333 tarihinde Balkan treniyle Berlin’e hareket edeceklerdir. Heyet-i mezkurenin esamisi ve pasaportu münderic müşarlarını havi pusula leffen takdim kılınmıştır. Maksud-ı seyahatleri sulh müzakeresi esnasında Batum, Kars, Ardahan hakkında lazım gelen teşebbüsatda bulunacaklardır. Müşar ve muma ileyhim mutemed zevatdan bulunmağla tesri-i hareketleri için muktezi muamelenin buyurulmasını rica ederim.”⁸²

The correspondences sent by the Second Branch to the SO, apart from requests for and dissemination of intelligence, were generally for information purposes. Accordingly topics were restricted to the subjects that fell within the assigned duties of the SO, such as the settling of refugees in the

⁸¹ ATASE, BDH: from the Caucasus Branch of the OEA to the Intelligence Department of the Ottoman General Headquarters (14 Eylül 1334/14 September 1918); F: 1851, D: 111, I: 32.

⁸² ATASE, BDH: from the OEA to the Intelligence Department of the Ottoman General Headquarters (20 Kanun-i evvel 1333/20 December 1917); F: 1867, D: 167, I: 2/1.

capital,⁸³ the enrollment of suitable candidates in schools,⁸⁴ the fulfillment of the requests of delegates,⁸⁵ propaganda-specific works (such as the publication of newspapers), and orders of inquiry about people who worked for the SO.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, since dealing with espionage would not be enough to prevent information leakage, the Second Branch was also charged with controlling publications and correspondences in order not to overlook those who could reveal information about the Ottoman Empire and its army that should be concealed from the enemies and potential enemies. In a sense, the Second Branch worked like a censor bureau. As a matter of fact, all the tasks of the Censor Inspectorship of Dersaadet Central Command were handed over to the Second Branch in 1915.⁸⁷ The measures to be taken by the Second Branch should also prevent the spies from leaking information through code, stenography, or ads in newspapers. Of course, applying censure⁸⁸ and struggling with espionage and foreign propaganda would

⁸³ ATASE, BDH: from Enver Paşa to Ali Başhamba Efendi, member of Council of state (9 Teşrin-i Sani 1331/22 November 1915); F: 1835, D: 30, I: 1-37.

⁸⁴ ATASE, BDH: from the Intelligence Department of General Headquarters to the OEA (11 Ağustos1334/11 August 1918); F: 1862, D: 150, I: 1-8; BDH: from the Intelligence Department of General Headquarters to the OEA (11 Ağustos1334/11 August 1918); F: 1857, D: 131, I: 1-20.

⁸⁵ ATASE, BDH: from the Intelligence Department of General Headquarters to the OEA (12 Temmuz 1334/12 July 1918); F: 1857, D: 131, I: 1-22.

⁸⁶ ATASE, BDH: from the Intelligence Department of General Headquarters to the OEA (18 Temmuz 1334/18 July 1918); F: 1850, D: 107, I: 1-58.

⁸⁷ BOA, DH.EUM.5. Şb.; G: 54, D: 7 (22 Safer 1333/9Ocak 1915).

⁸⁸ The material to be censored were as follows: 1 – All kinds of information about the army and the fleet; 2 - All kinds of information about the internal and external policies of the country, foreign diplomats and consuls, the financial and commercial situation, the movements of the Ottoman and foreign commercial ships and the health condition of the population; 3 - All material that could make a negative impression inside and outside the country (including news about train and naval accidents and fires); 4 – Telegrams in commerce about the quantity and price of food and fuel as well as about transport, unless

require close collaboration with the Police and Press Directorates of the Ministry of the Interior.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it would not be expected from the SO to make cryptic analysis as it did not even have codes for its own correspondence even a year after its foundation, and had to compensate for this deficiency using gendarmerie codes.⁹⁰

The SO activities in the field of espionage, too, give the impression of the subject based on anonymous stories and rumors. Still, it can be said that the SO was faced with and fought against problems of field security and counter espionage. For example, the SO, along with the intelligence units of the Fourth Army, struggled to hinder the British efforts to obtain information about the movement of Ottoman detachments in the desert, and accordingly, interrogated people in Sinai. In addition, a number of enemy agents were seized and employed, sometimes as double agents, both to plant false reports and gather information on the enemy.⁹¹

These tasks that the SO fulfilled in the context of intelligence, however, had always remained secondary in importance. The SO never had a central position or the authority to act on its own in the operations of intelligence or counter-intelligence. Otherwise, two English spies of Egyptian origin named Meşil es-Salih and İbrahim Maraş would have been pursued for a significant

each of them are confirmed in writing by the local government; 5 –Telegrams without signature or text (with pre-agreement), or with very short address or written in code. Karabekir, *Birinci Cihan Harbi'ne Nasıl Girdik?*, 170-171.

⁸⁹ For a couple of examples on the joint counterespionage activities of the Ministry of War and Interior, see; Servet Avşar, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Irak Cephesindeki Aşiretler ve Casusluk Faaliyetleri," 129-144; Burhan Sayılır, "Çanakkale Kara Savaşları Sırasında Casusluk Olayları ve Türklerin Aldıkları Tedbirler," *Askeri Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8 (2006): 99-108.

⁹⁰ ATASE, BDH: from Süleyman Askeri in the Hotel Meserret in İstanbul to Major Hasan Efendi in Yafa (16 Eylül 1330/29 September 1914); F: 1836, D: 35, I: 1/1.

⁹¹ Safi, "The Ottoman Special Organization", 135-136.

amount of time by SO agents. It was, however, not the agents of the SO, but of the intelligence unit of the Arabian Command of the Syrian Groups who followed them, captured them in their house in Cairo, and uncovered that they had been used in setting up an intelligence network in Haifa and Cairo.⁹²

The SO did not control the press as well. Yet the Translation and Compilation Branch (*Tercüme ve Telif Şubesi*) of the OEA appears to have followed a part of the newspapers and journals published inside and outside the country: Among the former were *Tanin*, *Tasvir-i Efkar*, *İkdam*, *Sabah*, *Atı*, *Zaman*, *Vakit*, *Hilal* (French), *Lösvar* (French), *Otoman* (French) and *Osmanişer Loyd* (German). Among the latter were *Karagöz*, *Tiyatro ve Temaşa Mecmuası*, *Edebiyat-ı Umumiye Mecmuası*, *Havir*, *el-Adl* (Arabic), *Servet-i Fünun*, *Yeni Mecmua*, *Kadınlar Dünyası*, *Donanma*, *Türk Yurdu*, *Talebe Defteri*, *Ticaret-i Umumiye*, *Sanayi*, *Çiftçiler Derneği*, *Sipahi Mecmuası*, *İzdivac*, *Harb Mecmuası*, *Türk Kadını*, *Küçükler Gazetesi*, *Osmanlı tarih-edbiyat Mecmuası*, *Darülfünun Edebiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, *Darülfünun Tıp Fakültesi Mecmuası*, *Darülfünun Huku Fakültesi Mecmuası*, *Milli Tetebbular*, *Terbiye*, *İctimaiyyat*, *Tarih-i Osmani Encümeni*, *Milli Talim ve Terbiye* and *Bursa ve Muallim*. This standard monitoring alone, does not suffice to indicate that the SO functioned as a sort of censorship bureau.⁹³ It seems that the SO's control over correspondence was restricted to the correspondence of prisoners of war. The Second Branch, at this point, could issue commands and transmit the commands issued by the Military Censor

⁹² ATASE, BDH: from Damascus to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (6 Kanun-i evvel 1333/6 December 1917); F: 536, D: 2094, I: 3. For the details of the mission of these two spies, also see: F: 536, D: 2094, I: 3/1; 3/2; 3/3.

⁹³ ATASE, BDH: F: 1844, D: 72, I: 7, 7/1, 7/2.

Inspectorship to the SO.⁹⁴ For the Second Branch, just as in the case with intelligence and espionage was the main authority that determined the basics and principles of censorship. Had it been the SO, the Second Branch would not have possessed the right to give instructions to the SO on this issue:

“Kuttulamare’de esir olan İslam ve Hristiyan İngiliz üserasına aid olarak vürud eden mekatib Hind lisanıyla muharrer bulunmuş ve gerçi bu lisan talimatnamece kabul edilmemiş ise de bu Hindlilerin bizden gördükleri muameleyi memleketlerine bildirmeleri bizce mucib-i faide olacağından bu mekatibin reddinden ise bu lisana aşına memur efendiler tarafından tedkik edilerek mahzursuz olanların mahallerine sevk edilmek üzere işaret edilerek İstanbul Sansür Müfettişliği’ne iadeleri rica olunur.”⁹⁵

As a matter of fact, the SO had a say in such issues as spreading propaganda among captives and refugees, securing their comfort, dispatching those qualified to military divisions and factories, and settling day laborers in suitable places after their inspection.⁹⁶ It should not be therefore surprising that the Second Branch consulted the SO on the issue of propaganda among captives. The communication of a question addressed by the Berlin Directorate of the Political Section (*Berlin Şube-i Siyasiyye Müdüriyeti*) to the OEA by the Office of Supreme Military Command might set an example in this regard:

“Kuttulamare’de esir olan Hindli efrada propaganda yapmak için putperest üç Hindlinin Bağdad’a hareketini Berlin’de Hind İstiklal Komitesi teklifine atfen bunun kabul edilip edilmeyeceği Berlin’de

⁹⁴ See for an example; ATASE, BDH: from İstanbul Inspectorship of Military Censor to the Intelligence Department of General Headquarters (1 Kanun-i sani 1332/14 January 1917); F: 1847, D: 91, I: 1-82.

⁹⁵ Subsequent to the aforementioned demand of the Second Branch, the SO appointed Hindli Sabru(?) and his brother to this mission on 20 Haziran 1331/3 July 1915. ATASE, BDH: from the Second Branch of General Headquarters to the SO (18 Haziran 1331/1 July 1915); F: 1845, D: 76-A, I: 1-34.

⁹⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Enver Paşa to Ali Başhamba Efendi, member of the Council of state (9 Teşrin-i Sani 1331/22 November 1915); F: 1835, D: 30, I: 1-37.

Şube-i Siyasiye Müdüriyeti tarafından istizan olunuyor. Bu babdaki emr-i samilerine intizar olunur.”⁹⁷

What is remarkable at this point is that the Translation and Compilation Branch of the OEA, composed of a modest staff of ten people, was headed by Major Ali Rıza Bey, who had been appointed from the Second Branch.⁹⁸ Among the staff were also Ferid Bey, appointed temporarily from the Second Branch, and Ziya Efendi from the Censorship Bureau. This piece of information appears to be important in unfolding the extent of the impact the Second Branch had on this branch, which was fundamentally charged with assisting in the preparation of propaganda, such as newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, and posters, as well as translating foreign publications.

This chapter, in which different aspects of intelligence is explored and discussed, has argued, through providing a summary of the intelligence-related tasks carried out by the SO, that it did not serve the functions normally expected of an intelligence organization. As a matter of fact, studies on the subject have hitherto focused on unconventional warfare operations the SO carried out in support of the army rather than its intelligence activities. However, since the SO was accepted without questioning as an intelligence organization, the ensuing picture leads to a more confusing and erroneous path. In such discussions, the SO is treated simultaneously as the agent collecting information, the analyst evaluating the information, and the institution carrying out operations in tandem with the finished intelligence.

⁹⁷ The cipher was transmitted on 7 May 1332/20 May 1916 to Ali Bey Başhamba, the director of the OEA, three days after it had been written. ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the chief of the Intelligence Department, Seyfi Bey, to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (17 May 1916); F: 1847, D: 91, I: 1-21.

⁹⁸ ATASE, BDH: information document titled “Officials in the Translation and Composition Branch of the OEA (undated); F: 1851, D: 110, I: 1.

Since today a number of intelligence organizations carry out clandestine and covert operations, researchers might have been convinced that there should have been a center in the Ottoman Empire, as well, that coordinated intelligence and operations. It, however, appears that there was no such center in the Ottoman Empire. Even if there had been one, the Second Branch, not the SO, would have been the possessor or the uppermost unit of such a mechanism. Nevertheless, this argument should not cause one to overlook the fact that the SO, when appropriate, engaged much like modern intelligence services in small scale intelligence activities, either for defensive or offensive purposes in collaboration with other state institutions, and carried out operations of espionage and counter-espionage, campaigns of disinformation as well as facilities of propaganda.

2.3 Notes on the Foundation of the SO – II

Unlike the theses discussed hitherto, a second group of theses explored in this chapter trace the origins of the SO back to certain underground organizations established before and after the Second Constitutional period. Each of the theses in question takes different organizations as the core of the SO and does not mention the existence of other organizations and their impacts on the foundation of the SO. Specialists' silence against each other's assertions might derive from the dead-ends and flaws that plagued their own respective research just as equally as it might be read as the difficulty they have in confuting each other's hypotheses.

Should the origins of the SO be traced back to the Arab Revolutionary Organization (*Arap İhtilal Örgütü*) established (1903-1907) by Eşref Kuşçubaşı against the Hamidian regime?⁹⁹ Or do its origins lie in the Serez Band (*Serez Çetesî*) that was established shortly before 1908 and is qualified as a terrorist organization by Abidin Nesimi?¹⁰⁰ Perhaps one should consider Stoddard, who seems somewhat conflicted due to the meetings and interviews he had with Eşref Kuşçubaşı, and approve his other thesis tracing the origins of the organization back to the Self-sacrificing Officers (*Fedai Zabitan*) established by Enver Bey against the Italians in Libya.¹⁰¹ Or should

⁹⁹ This claim essentially belongs to Cemal Kutay. However, since the most authoritative scholar in the field, Philip H. Stoddard, also draws upon Eşref Kuşçubaşı, one of the few survivors of the SO members, the explanations of the two authors display resemblances from time to time. The aim of this committee was to show, by acts of terror, the corruption and inefficiency of the Sultan's administration. Enver Bey and other administrators of the CUP charged this group with various missions after their arrival in İstanbul following the declaration of the Second Constitutional period. The acts in question were restricted at first to the ongoing struggle for power. The supporters of Abdülhamid and the circles against the CUP, especially Freedom and Accord Party, became the targets of this committee that functioned under the aegis of the CUP. The resistance movement organized in Tripoli against the Italian occupation would follow those acts of terror. The unconventional activities in Rumelia, on the other hand, would result in the establishment of the Temporary Government of Western Thrace, and finally, this organization founded originally to function in the Balkans would be expanded gradually to function in all the regions the Ottoman rulers were interested in. Cemal Kutay, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ve Hayber'de Türk Cengi* (İstanbul: Ercan, 1962); Stoddard, *The Ottoman Government and the Arabs*, 52-54; 162-165.

¹⁰⁰ According to Nesimi, the Hearth of Salonica (*Selanik Ocağı*), predominated by the Jews and Masons, represented the intellectual force of the CUP, whereas the Hearth of Manastır (*Manastır Ocağı*), predominated by the Albanians and Melami-Bektashis, represented its striking force. With the Hearth of Salonica's grab of power in 1908, pressure groups and especially the security forces of the state had come under its influence. The Hearth of Salonica had also acquired power over the armed forces, thanks to its influence on the security forces. However, the Hearth of Salonica did not prosecute those individuals who had maltreated them during the underground period of the CUP. The reason they gave for this was the need to refrain from adopting a revanchist attitude against the authorities of the previous period, but the real reason was their preoccupation with bolstering their own position. The Hearth of Manastır that was offended by this sort of attitude began to liquidate the spies of the preceding period, and to this end, established a "terrorist organization" in Serez first. The Hearth of Salonica secretly supported this organization in its efforts to purge the spies as well as the opponents of the CUP. They even had some of their trusted men enter this organization. According to Nesimi, this organization, called the Serez band (*Serez Çetesî*), was the core of the future SO. Abidin Nesimi, *Yıllarından İçinden* (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınevi, 1977), 31-35.

¹⁰¹ According to Stoddard, 1911-1912 formed the first stage of this resistance movement, which covered the time span from the Italian occupation to the Treaty of Ouchy (18 October

one consider the Turkish Committee (*Türk Komitesi*) founded in 1913 in the Balkans as the immediate predecessor of the SO?¹⁰²

Like the theses in the first group, the theses in this group, too, present the organizations almost as a precondition for the foundation of the SO, again within the context of institutional continuity. Yet a different point immediately emerges herein. From these four theses, those with explanations dating back to before 1908, such as the Arab Revolutionary Organization and Serez Band, approach the foundation of the SO from the perspective of the Ottoman State, whereas the explanations that date after 1908 have the tendency to approach it from the perspective of the Entente powers; that is, on one side are the explanations regarding the estrangement of the Hamidian regime's ruling elite, functional failures of the

1912) during which the active resistance took place. The second stage was the interim period from 1912 to 1915. The main characteristic of this period was determined by the movement organized by the Senusis and the officers left behind by the *Fedai Zabitan* to hold on to the territories in their hand against the Italian occupation forces. The following period from 1915 to 1918, when Seyyid Ahmed es-Senusi would go to İstanbul, was to bear the stamp of SO itself., Stoddard, *The Ottoman Government and the Arabs*, 76-78.

¹⁰² Despite a discussion of the activities of the Turkish Committee, Keleşılmaz does not provide the researchers with the sources he based himself on. Whether deliberately or not, the footnotes of the most critical part of of this article should be supplied if the article is to be published again. In any case, Keleşılmaz in constructing this narrative should have made use of the memoirs by Nevrekoplu Celal Perin and Fuat Balkan as well as of the works by Tefik Bıyıklıoğlu. But references to other sources, if any, should be provided. *Nevrekoplu Celal Bey'in Hatıraları: Batı Trakya'nın Bitmeyen Çilesi* (İstanbul: Arma Yayınları, 2000), 36-41; Metin Martı (haz.), *İlk Türk Komitacısı Fuat Balkan'ın Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1998), 9-13; Tefik Bıyıklıoğlu, *Trakya'da Milli Mücadele*, Vol. I (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1987), 87-92. According to Keleşılmaz, one of the most important activities of the Turkish Committee was to ensure the Radoslavov Party, a cabinet friendly to the Ottoman Government, remain in power in Bulgaria. Backed up by Süleyman Askeri Bey, the head of the Turkish Committee, the party managed to stay in power by getting the support of 32 members of parliament, half of which was of Turkish origin. Although the effects of these friendly efforts were reversed in a short time, a new ground for agreement with the Bulgarians emerged when the First World War broke out: the Bulgarian revolutionaries working in Serbia sought help from the Turkish Committee to acquire the support of the Turks in that region. The ensuing negotiations led to the resolution that the Turkish Committee would work together with the committee of the Protokerov Party, which was under the aegis of Radoslavov, against Serbia and Greece. Vahdet Keleşılmaz, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Kuruluşu, Başkanları ve Mustafa Kemal," *Türkler Ansiklopedisi*, vol. VIII, 316-320.

State, and the pressure exerted mainly through the YSS. On the other is the blatant encroachment of Italy and Serbia against the Ottoman lands and system. In other words, the pressure of the Hamidian regime on society on the one hand, and of opponent states on the Ottoman system on the other, are presented as the most fundamental factors behind the creation of the political consciousness that was alleged to have led to the emergence of various underground organizations mentioned above.

Nevertheless, excessive concentration on such objective structural conditions, which are attempted to be connected directly to the actions, gives the appearance that there is a direct correlation between them. In fact, similar conditions may practically pave the way for dissimilar conclusions, and vice versa. In other words, mechanical responses attributed to similar specific conditions miss the point that human action is not always motivated by a response to external forces, but to an extent they advance independently of objective changes. Another fundamental problem in this context is that they cannot explain the weight of some nonpolitical sources on the foundation of the SO, such as different associational networks, material resources, and collective beliefs and discourses. Indeed, given the critical connection between social organization, resources, and culture on one side and collective action on the other, this stands out as a noteworthy impediment.

These do not necessarily mean that the groups asserted to have been the predecessors of the SO have no value in explaining the foundation of the SO. The intention here is to stress that the basic data used by the approaches providing a leading role to the ruling elite and opponent states falls short of explaining the emergence of the SO, and thereby to highlight the

relatively high elucidative capacity of pointing to the CUP, the organization that all of the mentioned underground groups, without any exception, had derived from. In a sense, instead of searching mechanical patterns and responses alleged to be given to objective social, political, and economic conditions, it seems more plausible to identify how these conditions were perceived by the masses, thus the CUP within this context, an approach whereby it would be possible to understand certain characteristic features of the organizations in the second group. More concretely, there are a number of common threads to all of the organizations in the second group and these are neither the outcomes of a coincidence nor of the 'failure' of the Hamidian regime and the pressure exerted on the Ottoman Empire by hostile powers. The vulnerability of the Ottoman army to politicization on the one hand, the reorganization of the CUP (1906-1908) and the subsequent rapprochement between the CUP and the army on the other, led to the establishment of certain features as structural elements in the CUP, such as secrecy and underground activity, band and self-sacrificing organizations, and revolutionary ideas, thus preparing the ground for the most basic modes of action in the SO.

2.3.1 Secrecy and Underground Action

The reorganization of the Young Turks between 1906-1908, which can be marked as a turning point in the history of the CUP, led to the establishment of a number of structural elements in the CPU (*Terakki ve İttihad Cemiyeti*).

Secrecy and underground activities, the origins of which can be traced back to much earlier times than the reorganization, without doubt, take the lead among other elements. Activities such as the resort to encrypted exchanges¹⁰³ and pseudonyms¹⁰⁴, smuggling propaganda material¹⁰⁵, the establishment of secret societies¹⁰⁶, the infiltration of disguised members of the secret societies into towns and villages to establish new branches¹⁰⁷, and the secret establishment of band and self-sacrificing organizations are all examples of the conditions under which the CUP had planned the revolution. The most important factors leading to this secrecy were undoubtedly the control policy applied by the ruling elite to political opposition groups, and the CUP leadership's acute rejection of a foreign intervention.¹⁰⁸ Under these

¹⁰³ CPU used different ciphers for each department, making it impossible for the ciphered communication of one department to be deciphered by another. Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir and Dr. Nazım to the CPU Kızanlık Branch, 25 Teşrin-i evvel 1906/25 October 1906, no. 181, *Kopya Defteri, cild-i evvel, 1 Mart-ı Efrenci, 25 Rue Bonaparte Paris (Kopya Defteri I)*, 136-137.

¹⁰⁴ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with "Aziz Vatandaş", 27 September 1907, no. 379, *Kopya Defteri I*, 436.

¹⁰⁵ In this context, the CUP was closely concerned with smuggling Şura-yı Ümmet and Meşveret to the interior. For a few examples, see: Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to İbrahimzade Hayri Efendi in Kızanlık, Paris, 25 April 1906, no. 10, *Kopya Defteri I*, 18-19; letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with "Aziz Kardeşimiz", Paris, 25 April 1906, no. 11, *Kopya Defteri I*, 20; letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with "Aziz Kardeşimiz", Paris, 29 May 1906, no. 17, *Kopya Defteri I*, 35; letter by Dr. Nazım ve Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to Kızanlık Branch, Paris, 27 July 1906, no. 50, *Kopya Defteri I*, 77; letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to Kızanlık Branch, 24 Teşrin-i Sani 1906/24 November 1906, no. 211, *Kopya Defteri I*, 172.

¹⁰⁶ Letter by Dr. B. Server (Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir) to Vicdani (Colonel İshak) and Mihrabi (Ali Necib), Paris, 25 March 1906, no. 1, *Kopya Defteri I*, 2; letter by Dr. Nazım ve Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with "Kafkasya'daki Müslüman Kardeşlerimize", Paris, 22 Teşrin-i Sani 1906/22 November 1906, no. 215, *Kopya Defteri I*, 179; Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with "Muhterem Vatanperver Kardeşimiz", undated, no. 296, *Kopya Defteri I*, 315-316.

¹⁰⁷ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with "Muhterem Vatanperver Kardeşimiz", undated, no. 296, *Kopya Defteri I*, 315-316.

¹⁰⁸ Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir explains the primary purpose of keeping the existence of their organization secret as follows: "Teşkilatı gizli tutmağı ihtardan maksadımız evvela: hususat-ı zatiyyeleriniz için dahile gitmek icab etdikde hükümet-i Hamidiyye tarafından duçar-ı müşkilat olmamaklıdır. Saniyen her kangı bir suretle içinizden biri dahile gidecek olduk da, kimsenin haberi olmaksızın dahildeki memurlarımızla temas ve münasebette

circumstances, the CPU had no choice but to go underground as time passed and attach further importance to secrecy. The 3rd, 4th, 7th and the 9th clauses of the regulation sent by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to Talha Kemali Bey regarding the establishment of the branches during the reorganization period might prove elucidative with regard to its capacity in pointing to the extent of the mentioned secrecy and underground activity in the CPU:

“3- Azay-ı cemiyet kendilerini meydan-ı aleniyyete koymayub serbest bir memleketde değil belki İstanbul'da Abdülhamid'in casusları arasında icra-yı teşkilat ediyorlarmış gibi kendilerini gerek hükümet-i mahalliye gerek komiserlik ve gerekse ahaliden tamamen ketm ve ihfa etmeleri lazımdır. Yalnız azay-ı cemiyetden biri ve ba-husus en marufu diğerlerinden daha az ihtifa edebilir. Fakat diğerlerini kimse tanımamalıdır. Çünkü icabında İstanbul'a girip çıkmak için istimleri mümkün olabilsin.

4- Muhaberatınızda geçecek hususat-ı mühimme, eşhas ve aza isimleri her ihtimali nazar-ı dikkate alarak mektum kalmak için bir kıta şifre defteri irsal olunacaktır.

7- Mühür, şifre defteri, kopye defteri, hesap defteri gibi cemiyetin esrarını muhtevi mevadd, bir münasib çekmece içinde anahtar tahtında gayet emin bir mahalde hıfz edilmesine gayet itina lazımdır.

9- Heyet-i idareyi teşkil eden azay-ı cemiyetten beheri bir kolbaşı olmak itibarıyla kendilerinin yakinen bilip tanıdığı ve namuslarına itimad ettiği eşhası cemiyete idhal halinde yalnız kendisiyle münasebet ve merbutiyette tutup diğer azalar o zata tanıtırılmamalıdır. Ve her kolun kendine mahsus birer numero tertibi olub efradına tevzi edecektir. Ve efradı yekdiğerine lüzumsuz yere tanıtdırmamağa dikkat olunmalıdır. Efrad kendisini cemiyete idhal eden ve bilahare kendisinin dahi cemiyete idhale tavassut ettiği zevatdan gayrısını hiç bir suretle öğrenememelidir.”¹⁰⁹

bulundurabilmek; salisen ileride Bulgaristan hükümetinin tazyik ve entrikasına maruz kalmamanızdır.” Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Aziz Kardeşimiz”, Paris, 29 May 1906, no. 17, *Kopya Defteri I*, 34-35.

¹⁰⁹ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to Talha Kemali Efendi (Dobrovic, Bulgaria), Paris, 10 May 1906, no. 12, *Kopya Defteri I*, 23-25. The 3rd, 4th, 7th and the 9th clauses of the regulation sent to Kızanlık regarding the establishment of the branches refers to the same point. See the letter by Dr. Bahaheddin Şakir to İbrahim Rahmi Efendizade Hayri Efendi, Paris, 10 May 1906, no. 14, *Kopya Defteri I*, 28-29.

This structural element that left its mark in the history of CUP revealed itself in the SO. The preoccupation with grappling with the secrets of the SO today is actually more than enough to demonstrate of the level of secrecy surrounding this subsidiary organization of the CUP. It was an organization that even its contemporaries had no idea existed, and deputies had rarely heard of its name.¹¹⁰ Besides, it is difficult even on paper to determine the authority to which the SO was attached or the ultimate authority to which the SO was supposed to be answerable,¹¹¹ let alone the means by which the SO was answerable.¹¹² No one, except the personnel of the relevant departments attached to the Ministries of War and Interior, as well as the Central Committee of the CUP, were not cognizant of the SO's central and regional administration and organization. In a similar vein, its contemporaries did not know much about the personnel employed in its central and regional branches, as well as those serving on the Supervisory Council and presiding over the SO. In other words, almost all the sine qua non elements of the SO

¹¹⁰ The name of the SO is rarely mentioned in the minutes of the Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*). Yet any account as to the nature of the organization has yet to be encountered. The passages where the organization is mentioned often pertain to the permissions given to the members of the parliament. For example, the local command requested permission for Seyfullah Bey, deputy of Erzurum: "...Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa müfrezeleriyle ifay-ı hizmet etmekte olduğundan kendisinin mezun addedilmesine dair mahalli kumandanlığın telgrafnamesi... Reis – Maettakdir Meclis-i Ali kabul ediyor değil mi? (Hay hay sedaları) Efendim yine mücahadeye iştirak buyuran Emir Ali Paşa hazretleri müsaade talep ediyorlar. Bu mezuniyeti de tabii terviş buyurursunuz (Hay hay sedaları)". *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* (MMZC) 1330, 7; cited by Tunaya; *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 341.

¹¹¹ For instance, Yusuf Hikmet Bayur while talking about Süleyman Askeri states that "He was working in a department of the Ministry of Interior occupied with the SO." Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. III, p. I, 398, n. 35.

¹¹² Although all the İttihadists questioned in the Court Martial, without exception, claimed that the SO was attached to the Ministry of War, the opinion of the court board was clearly put forth in the ordinance, according to which the SO was nothing but a puppet organization responsible with secretly implementing and executing the goals of the leaders of the CUP. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337/5 May 1919, No. 3540, s. 5-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 April 1919).

are considered missing, if not misleading, and thereby remain a controversial issue to this day.

The SO was an organization that performed operations on the basis of such principles as self-sufficiency, speed, and teamwork, in addition to its secrecy. Its great tendency in favoring operations such as raids, sabotage, surprise, hit and run, and ambush can give one a valuable clue to this secrecy. Apart from this, utmost care was always taken to make every step of the SO activities perfectly secret, from the preparation of operational units, to their deployment to the combat zone (either to the front or rear of the enemy), and from support to the army through forming strike force from the local population, to the reinforcement and transport facilities, supply of logistical needs, and the infiltration of propaganda materials. Such a level of secrecy existed that the Entente powers could not be sure even of the name of this organization, and had difficulty in attributing to the Ottoman Empire the SO activities conducted on behalf of the Ottoman Empire due to lack of evidence.¹¹³

At this point, however, researchers are required to be attentive to a handful of points. First, the CPU, the Ottoman Freedom Society, or the CUP (after the merger of the two societies in 1907) were all illegal organizations

¹¹³ For example, the British Intelligence managed to gather a serious body of information, though with some delay, about almost all of the important SO agents in the Middle East. However, even by the end of 1916, when the SO no longer existed, they had failed to realize that these men had been employed systematically by an organization called the SO. Admittedly this could not have prevented the English from taking measures against the agents in question, but it is still important in indicating that the SO members had been successful in keeping the name and administrative structure of the organization secret so much so that the Entente Powers long remained unaware of its existence. For the intelligence gathered by the Arab Bureau about Eşref Kuşçubaşı as well as Mümtaz Bey, the chief of the SO forces on the Sinai-Palestine front, see: *The Arab Bulletin: Bulletin of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, 1916-1919*, vol. I (London: British Library Archive Editions, 1986), 361-362. Also see: Ü. Gülsüm Polat, "İngiliz İstihbaratına Göre Birinci Dünya Harbi Başlarında Ortadoğu'daki Osmanlı Ajanları," *History Studies*, Middle East Special Issue, (2010): 393-410.

up until the declaration of the Constitution. Accordingly, it was quite normal for them to conduct underground activities and conceal their own identities. The structural secrecy surrounding the CUP was also oriented towards the state of which it was a part. On the contrary, founded on October 30, 1913,¹¹⁴ the SO was an organization that came into existence during a period when the CUP seized the government and had strict control of the country, thus leading the SO encounter no pressure from within the state. As a result, the SO, unlike the CUP, used this secrecy and conducted underground activities for a different purpose; that is, against the political authorities in the Entente colonies. This element would make its presence felt at almost every step of the SO, from its intervention in the Bulgarian elections on December 7, 1913 to its abolition.

2.3.2 Revolutionary Element

Secrecy and underground action had no meaning for the CPU on its own. If so, the Young Turk intellectuals who went underground for many years in exile should have come to power. That seems to be the reason why Bahaeddin Şakir endeavored to change the CPU into a well-organized revolutionary committee after his arrival in Paris in September 1905.¹¹⁵ To

¹¹⁴ ATASE, BDH; report beginning with “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ahiren Umur-i Şarkıye namı alan ve müteakib tarihde ilga edilen dairenin esbab-ı teşkili (Reasons of the foundation of the SO Department, lately entitled OEA and subsequently abolished)”, undated: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

¹¹⁵ Yahya Kemal, *Siyasi ve Edebi Portreler* (İstanbul: 1976), 122. Dr. Nazım and Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir attributes the revolutionary initiatives of the Ottomans to “the disaster inflicted on the nation” by the administration of Abdulhamid II. According to them, “hurriyetin kıymeti, zulm altında ezilmedikçe anlaşılabilir... Bugün küçük, büyük rical ve ahad-i nas

that end, Bahaeddin Şakir, who would take on important tasks in the SO in the years to come, studied Armenian, Bulgarian, and Greek revolutionary organizations and expounded as follows: “The most important requirements a committee needs to achieve its goal were money and self-sacrifice.”¹¹⁶ For the CPU, money was important, so much so that they deemed it possible “to revolutionize the dormant Turks within a short period of time” with “a sufficient amount [of money]”.¹¹⁷

Analysis of the Armenian, Bulgarian, and Greek revolutionary organizations by the CPU leadership was not a matter of coincidence. The common feature that unites the aforementioned organizations was that they gravitated toward a revolutionary struggle long before the Young Turks. For instance, shortly after the Treaty of Berlin (1878), the Armenians had their eyes on the Bulgarians and Greeks who had previously succeeded in revolts against the Ottoman Empire, and begin to produce models emulating them. The Black Cross Organization (*Sev Khach Kazmakerputiun*) formed in Van as early as 1878, and the Protectors of the Fatherland (*Pashtpan Hayreniats*)

bütün millet rub-ı asırdan beri felaket mektebinden geçtiler. [İhtilal için] zemin hazırdır.” Letter by Dr. Nazım and Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to the CPU Köstence Branch, 23 Teşrin-i Sani 1906/23 November 1906, no. 212, *Kopya Defteri I*, 166-170. For more on Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, see; “Merhum Bahaeddin Şakir Bey,” *Darulfünun Tıp Fakültesi Mecmuası* vol. IV, 3(1338); 210-211; İstanbul Üniversitesi, Cerrahpaşa Tıp Fakültesi Tıp Tarihi ve Deontoloji Arşivi (İstanbul University Cerrahpaşa Medical Faculty, Archive of Medical History and Deontology, TTDA); dosya (dossier, D): İttihat ve Terakki (İ.4); Alaatin Uca, “İttihad ve Terakki Liderlerinden Doktor Bahaeddin Şakir Bey”, (PhD diss., Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Anabilim Dalı, 2009); Hikmet Çiçek, *Dr. Bahattin Şakir, İttihat ve Terakki'den Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'ya Bir Türk Jakobenî* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2004).

¹¹⁶ Letter by Dr. B. Server (Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir) to Vicdani (Colonel İshak) and Mihrabi (Ali Necib), Paris, 25 March 1906, no. 1, *Kopya Defteri I*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Letter by Dr. Nazım and Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to the CPU Inspectorship, Paris, 9 Kanun-i evvel 1906/9 January 1906, no. 222, *Kopya Defteri I*, 191.

formed in Erzurum in 1881, represent the first examples of such illegal organizations.¹¹⁸

The forthcoming years would witness the formation of more serious organizations like the Armenakan Party founded by the students Mkrtych Portukalian in 1885. Portukalian's importance lies in the pivotal role he played in transitioning the Armenian movement from a middle class liberalism to an armed movement defending the interests of the peasantry, and from a limited resistance movement to larger revolutionary parties.¹¹⁹ As a matter of fact, a group of intellectuals, who had wanted Portukalian to formulate a coherent view of the Armenian national movement and assume responsibility for a revolutionary organization, founded the Hnchakian Party in Geneva in 1887. Its immediate aim was to politically and nationally liberate the Ottoman Armenians by means of engaging in revolutionary activity in Ottoman Armenia, including violence against the Ottoman government. Also noteworthy are the tactics, as proposed in the Party's program, to achieve the goal of independence, in view of the several characteristics bearing similar qualifications with the tactics used by the CUP during and after the reorganization period: propaganda, agitation, terror, and organization of workers and peasants into revolutionary groups.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Houri Berberian, "The love for freedom has no fatherland: The politicization of Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911", (PhD diss., University of California, 1997), 31-33.

¹¹⁹ For more information on Portukalian and Armenakans, see; Gerard Jirair Libaridian, "The Ideology of Armenian Liberation. The Development of Armenian Political Thought before the Revolutionary Movement (1639-1885)", (PhD diss., University of California, 1987), 221-242.

¹²⁰ The Hnchakian Party had been established in Geneva by six Greek-Armenian intellectuals: Avetis Nazarbekian (Nazarbek, Lerents), Mariam (Maro) Vardanian, Gevorg Gharajanian (S. T. Arkomed), Ruben Khanazatian (Khan-Azat), Kristapor Ohanian ve Gabriel Kafian (Shmavon). Berberian, "The love for freedom has no fatherland", 43-44.

Due to its alliance with the CUP in the upcoming years, Dashnaktsutiun, known also as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), founded in 1890, was of more importance than the other Armenian groups in this context. Like the Hnchakian , the Dashnaktsutiun was founded in Tiflis in 1890 by three Russian Armenians. It was actually designed as a party that intended to unite all the Armenian groups under one banner and initially, the Hnchakians merged into this newly formed federation. However, the union did not last long, as the Hnchakians broke from the union six months later.¹²¹ The primary aim of ARF, as expressed in its first congress held in the fall of 1892, was to achieve autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. The means to achieve this aim included propaganda, arming the population, and violent acts against the officers that were thought to be corrupt.

Due to its positive attitude towards the reinstatement of the constitution and overthrow of the Hamidian regime, the ARF was able to enter into a close relationship with the Young Turks in exile. As early as 1902, the ARF participated in the Congress of Ottoman Liberals held in Paris (some Hnchak members were also included). Yet an agreement could not be reached, as the Young Turks at that time lent their acceptance neither to the use of revolutionary tactics nor to the consideration of an Armenian question guaranteed by international treaties. All in all, it was pretty hard to reconcile

¹²¹ The founders of Dashnaktsutiun were Kristapor Mikayelian, Rostom (Stepan Zorian) and Simon Zavarian. Its original name was the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries. After the secession of the Hnchaks, its name was changed to Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Berberian, "The love for freedom has no fatherland", 46-47; Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation under Ottoman Constitutional Rule, 1908-1914", (PhD diss., Boston College The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Department of History, December 2003), 1-2.

the policies of the ARF inclined to bring the Ottoman Empire into a federal regime and of the Young Turks inclined towards centralization.¹²²

In large part due to the efforts of Sabahaddin Bey, the relations between the Dashnaktsutiun and the Young Turks improved between 1905 and 1907, and an agreement was reached with the Armenians for the first time in the history of the Young Turk movement. This cooperation transparently indicated the transition of the Young Turks movement from an evolutionary to a revolutionary structure. Opposed to revolutionary tactics in the Congress of 1902, the Young Turks would adopt them in the Congress of 1907, when they came to terms with the Dashnaktsutiun. The 12th clause of the principle decisions taken by the subcommittee formed before the inauguration of the Congress unambiguously confirms: “legal and revolutionary means shall be taken to achieve the objectives”¹²³ The Young Turks’ approval, except for a few points, of the proposal submitted by the Dashnaktsutiun on the legal and revolutionary tactics, represents another proof of this: to exhort people not to yield to the illegal propositions and actions of the administration, refusal to pay taxes, formation of bands, refusal of conscription, general revolt, strike of policemen, postal clerks, railway and government officials, and collective and individual terrorism.¹²⁴ One should

¹²² Bedross Der Matossian, “Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Arabs, and Jews during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1909)”, (PhD diss., Columbia University, The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2008), 12-18.

¹²³ As indicated in Article 3, these groups had two main purposes: one of them was to topple the Hamidian regime, and the other was to bring about the reassembly of Meclis-i Mebusan. From Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to the Committee of the Internal Center of CPU, Paris, 20 Teşrin-i sani 907, 442-4, *Kopya Defteri, Cild-i Sani 15 Teşrin-i Sani-i Efrenci 907, 25 Rue Bonaparte (Kopya Defteri II)*, 22-24.

¹²⁴ The administration of the CUP had caveats especially about the articles about the resistance to conscription, the establishment of bands and the acts of collective terrorism. From Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to the Committee of the Internal Center of CPU, undated, *Kopya Defteri II*, 52-53.

bear in mind, though, that the revolutionary efforts of the Dashnaksutiun as a socialist organization and member of the Second International, were more genuine than those of the CUP. Ideological conservatism of the CUP seems to have left the adopted revolutionary tactics to remain simply as a form of activism. Hence, Bahaeddin Şakir must have been influenced by the organizational framework and revolutionary tactics of the Dashnaksutiun.¹²⁵

Bahaeddin Şakir mentioned the CUP's two most important shortcomings as follows:

“Adem-i muvaffakiyetimizi mucib olagelen noksanlarımızı ikmal maksadıyla istiklaliyet ve dava-yı hürriyet talebinde bulunan hangi komiteye müracat veya hangi fırkayı yakından tedkik etdikse temin-i muvaffakiyet için iki mühim noksan gözümüze çarpmaktan hali kalmadı. Organisation ve Propaganda.”¹²⁶

Hereby, a powerful organizational system is referred to as an “organization”, and a revolutionary discourse expected to arouse a public sympathy and sentiment in favor of the Committee refers to “propaganda”. A memorable quote by Şakir from a letter of Sarafov, considered an enemy “who wants to separate Macedonia from our fatherlands”, affirms this in the most explicit way:

“Siz Jön Türkler Avrupa'nın tevecühünü kazanacak teşkilatınız yok. Buna muvaffak olmak için ciddi fedakarlık göstermek lazım. Bu maksada vusul büyük himmetlereve uzun zamana tevakkuf eder. Herşey evvela beyinlerin terbiyesiyle başlar. Bunun için kalemler ve kavlen neşriyata fevkalade kuvvet vermek icab eder. Aynı fikirler terbiye olunan zihinler aynı sancak altında gizli olarak toplanır, bu sayede memleketin her tarafında şubeler tesis edilir,

¹²⁵ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 146, 204-205. It was the ARF that decided in Autumn 1919 to punish Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, who was accused of being one of the responsables of Armenian losses during the First World War. Şakir was assassinated together with Cemal Azmi Bey, governor of Trabzon, in Berlin on April 17, 1922 under operation Nemesis. See TTDA: Bahaeddin Şakir; D: İttihat ve Terakki (İ.4).

¹²⁶ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Aziz biraderimiz”, Paris, 29 May 1906, no. 16, *Kopya Defteri I*, 32.

bu şubeler efradın adedini arttırmak için muhtelif vesaitte müracaat eder. Bu hususta her şube bir dereceye kadar serbest bırakılmak iktiza eder. Hususi teşebbüsat tarafdardların adedinin tezayüdüne pek büyük hizmet eder. Tarafdardlar çoğaldıkça her ferдин cemiyyete ve netice-i maksadın husulüne itimadı daha doğrusu kuvve-i maneviyesi artar, gönüller coşar, bu coşkunluk öyle bir dereceye vasil olur ki onu ... zabtetmek ademü'l-imkan haline gelir. İşte o vakit evvela beyinlerde ekilen tohumlar sokaklarda, hürriyet ve hamiyet meydanlarında neşv ü nemaya başlar; bu cüş ü husuş önünde en kuvvetli istibdad bile zeval bulur.”¹²⁷

Following the molding and reshaping of the central structure of the CUP, Şakir,¹²⁸ who along with his colleague Dr. Nazım, a future member of the SO's Supervisory Council,¹²⁹ would serve from 1906 up until 1918 as the secret decision-makers in the CUP, concentrated their efforts on creating an effective network to implement the revolutionary program of the Committee. As stated in the official correspondences, Şakir's first duty was “to supervise the organization within the empire”.¹³⁰ One of the chief activities carried out within this context was the formation of branches attached to the Central Committee in various regions. After the establishment of several branches in

¹²⁷ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to Talha Kemali Bey in Dobrovic, Bulgaria, 10 May 1906, no .12, *Kopya Defteri I*, 21-22.

¹²⁸ The steps Şakir would take to implement his new program, especially his preparation of a new regulation for the CPU and the reorganization ensued as result of the division of the Central Committee into four, would make him the secret leader of the Committee. Haniöğlü, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 139. Even Şerif Mardin, draws a parallel between the roles of Şakir on CUP and that of Joseph Stalin on the Bolshev'k Party. Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri, 1895-1908* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 283-284.

¹²⁹ For detailed information on Dr. Nazım, see: Ahmet Eyicil, *İttihad ve Terakki Liderlerinden Doktor Nazım Bey* (Ankara: Gün Yayıncılık, 2004); M. Vahit İpekçi, “Dr. Nazım Bey'in Siyasi Yaşamı”, (MA thesis, Yeditepe Üniversitesi Atatürk İlike ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, 2006).

¹³⁰ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Vatanperver efendim”, Paris, October 30, 1907, no. 397, *Kopya Defteri I*, 470. Haniöğlü, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 143.

a region, the Central Committee was also charged with the establishment of a regional central branch to supervise the branches in its domain.¹³¹

In a letter by Dr. Nazım and Şakir, it was clearly mentioned that the Central Committee intended to establish two types of branches: “both the simple branches and branches for action are included in our program. Anyone’s choice of these two by your branches is acceptable to us.”¹³² The branches were to inform the Central Committee of the existence of self-sacrificing volunteers. For instance, Bahaeddin Şakir, in a letter to the Kızanlık Branch of the CPU stated: “inform us if you discover true self-sacrificing volunteers who would risk their lives and everything for the fatherland.”¹³³ Furthermore, newly established branches were charged with raising self-sacrificing volunteers. Sacrifice was one of the two most important elements that the CPU had been in need of, and the other was, as noted earlier, was money. Bahaeddin Şakir noted as follows:

“Fedakarlık ihtiyar eden bir cemiyet parayı kolaylıkla tedarik edebileceği için dahilde teşkil edeceğimiz gizli şubenin en evvel nazar-ı dikkate alması lazım gelen fakat fedakarlık edebilecek azaların intihabı olması tabidir. Rum, Ermeni, Bulgarların tecarübü gösteriyor ki sinnin hadaseti, vesait-i saadetin mefkudiyeti fedakarlık hususunda büyük saik olabilirler. Yani genç, bekar ve fakri kimseler müteehhil, müsün, mesud kimselerden ziyade nefislerini tehlikeye koymaktan çekinmezler.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Haniöğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 145.

¹³² Letter by Dr. Nazım and Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Aziz refikimiz”, Paris, 6 August 1906, no. 57, *Kopya Defteri I*, 93. Haniöğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 145.

¹³³ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to the directorate of CPU Kızanlık Branch, Paris, 6 September 1907, no. 363, *Kopya Defteri I*, 412.

¹³⁴ From Dr. B. Server (Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir) to Vicdani (Colonel İshak) and Mihrabi (Ali Necib), Paris, 25 March 1906, no. 1, *Kopya Defteri I*, 2.

In a sense, the CPU Branches became local organizations, recruiting militants for the activities of the CPU.¹³⁵ These branches were also charged with progressively establishing new branches through sending their men in disguise into every corner of the country. This way, according to Şakir, all the people would rebel against the Sultan at a single order of the Central Committee:

“Sultan Hamid... vali, mutasarrıf, kumandan, kaymakam, alaybeyi unvanları altında gizleyerek zehirli çekirgeler tarzında memleketlerimizin her bucağına dağıtdığı hafiyeler sayesinde milletimizin kanını emdi. Onu adeta cansız bir mahluk haline getirdi. Madem ki bizler saldırmak, bu hainliği meydana çıkarmak, milleti uyandırmak istiyoruz. Öyle ise işe evvela gizli cemiyetler yapmak ve sonra bu cemiyetler büyüdüğüce onu şubeler açmak suretiyle her tarafa seyyah, vaiz, müderris hatta dilenci kıyafetinde memurlar, adamlar göndermekle inşaallah yakın bir zamanda memleketimizin her noktasında böyle gizli cemiyetler teşekkül etmiş bulunacaktır. Ve emin olunuz ki buna ahali tamamiyle ateşlendirilecek ve merkez-i umumiden verilen bir emir üzerine her taraftan bu zalim padişahın zalim hükümeti aleyhine birden kıyam edilecektir.”¹³⁶

This revolutionary component, which emerged as a structural element during the reorganization of the CUP, was among the key factors that led to the revolution of 1908. As seen in the principle of secrecy, some revolutionary features retained by the CPU would reveal themselves in the SO with a few differences. This component is closely related to the foundational aim of the SO as the Ottoman Empire was considering “the

¹³⁵ According to the CPU, these secret societies had to be “brought under an order similar to that of a regular army organization.” Letter by Dr. Nazım and Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Kafkasya’daki Müslüman Kardeşlerimize”, Paris, 22 Teşrin-i Sani 1906/22 November 1906, no. 215, *Kopya Defteri I*, 178. Haniöğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 146.

¹³⁶ Letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Muhterem Vatanperver Kardeşimiz”, undated, no. 296, *Kopya Defteri I*, 315-316. Also see: letter by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir beginning with “Vatanperver Efendim”, Paris, 30 Teşrin-i evvel 1907/30 October 1907, no. 397, *Kopya Defteri I*, 467. Haniöğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 147.

union of easterners, and in general of the Islamic world for the common interests and exploitation of the force that would be created in this way” as an integral part of its war strategy.¹³⁷ The Ottoman Empire, “as a state that is the fortress of the Islamic world”, was also considering the task of “gathering and unifying of this force” both as her natural right and “requirement of her interests”:

“Bu heyet-i ittifakiyeyi vücuda getirmek için Harb-i Umumi'nin bidayetinden itibaren Fas, Cezayir, Tunus, Trablusgarp, Bingazi, Afrika merkezi, Mısır, Habeşistan, Sudan, Zengibar, Somali, Malay adaları, Açe adaları, Hindistan, Belucistan, Afganistan, Çin ve Türkistan-ı Rus, Hive, Buhara, (?) Rus ve şimali, Şimalî Kafkas ve Azerbaycan, Cenubî Kafkas, Moğolistan, Kırım, Arnavutluk, Trakya ve Makedonya gibi menatıkda ruhları uyandırmak... için Nezaret-i Celile'ye merbut Umur-i Şarkiye Dairesi [Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa] teşekkül etdi.”¹³⁸

By the expression in the text, “to awaken the souls”, a revolutionary discourse, expected to arouse both public sympathy and support on behalf of the Ottoman Empire in the Entente colonies and elsewhere where Turkish and Muslim elements were living, and hatred against enemy is denoted. Without such sympathy and hatred, the Ottoman authorities thought it was impossible to remove the existing hostile political authorities, or, in the worst-case scenario, to hinder completely or slow down the transfer of troops from colonies to the European theater of war, keep the enemy occupied, and frighten and attrite the enemy. In other words, the SO's endeavor to provoke revolts through the adoption, when appropriate, of a pan-Turkist, and more often of a pan-Islamic discourse, was the outcome of a strategy that had

¹³⁷ ATASE, BDH; report beginning with “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ahiren Umur-i Şarkiye namı alan ve müteakib tarihte ilga edilen dairenin esbab-ı teşkili”, undated: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/1.

¹³⁸ ATASE, BDH; report beginning with “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ahiren Umur-i Şarkiye namı alan ve müteakib tarihte ilga edilen dairenin esbab-ı teşkili”, undated: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/2.

been initiated by the CUP, or of a tradition that began to settle, rather than a coincidence. For instance, the SO mission formed after the alliance with Germany and Austria had been concluded on August 2, 1914 under the command of Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay) Bey to venture into Afghanistan would no doubt serve such an aim. Arranged as a joint Ottoman-German enterprise, this mission was projected to be an expedition through Iran into Afghanistan, and win over an ally along the Indian frontier.¹³⁹ This way, it could be possible to reach the Indian independence committees and Indian tribes living on the frontiers and ignite an uprising ultimately projected to evolve into a rebellion.¹⁴⁰

Yet an annotation, as in the secrecy component, is required herein. While the CUP had made use of the revolution against the Yıldız administration as a convenient means to install a new regime, the SO struggled to insure the revolution against foreign enemies. The striking resemblance in terms of the organizational framework between the SO branches, founded on the basis of this revolutionary structure, for instance,

¹³⁹ However, Rauf Bey's platoon never stepped outside of Iran. The underlying reason was the departure of German officers in the platoon on their own for Afghanistan as a result of the conflict Rauf Bey had with Wassmuss. Although Süleyman Askeri Bey, shortly to become the commander of the Iraq Area Command, wanted to appoint Hüseyin Rauf Bey to another region, he insisted on continuing his activities in Iran. BOA, DH. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Ministry of Interior to Süleyman Askeri Bey (21 Kanun-i evvel 1330/3 January 1915); D: 48, G: 267; BOA, DH. ŞFR.: from the Ministry of Interior to Süleyman Askeri, Governor of Basra and Commander of the Iraq Area Command (5 Kanun-i sani 1330/18 January 1915); D: 49, G: 68; BOA, DH. ŞFR.: from the Ministry of Interior to Süleyman Askeri, Governor of Basra and Commander of the Iraq Area Command (29 Kanun-i sani 1330/11 February 1915); D: 48, G: 324.

¹⁴⁰ For detailed information, see: Vahdet Keleşılmaz, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Hindistan Misyonu (1914-1918)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1999), 89-94; Rauf Orbay, *Cehennem Değirmeni: Siyasi Hatıralarım* (İstanbul: Truva Yayınları, 2004), 17-23; İbrahim Kurtcepe and Mustafa Balcıoğlu, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Başlarında Romantik Bir Alman-Türk Projesi: Hüseyin Rauf Bey Müfrezesi," *OTAM*, 3 (1992): 247-269; Barış Metin, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda İran ve Coğrafyasında Etnik, Dini ve Siyasi Nüfuz Mücadeleleri" (PhD diss., Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Anabilim Dalı, 2007), 48-68.

the Caucasus Revolutionary Society (*Kafkas İhtilal Cemiyeti*) and the CUP branches established following the reorganization, even Bahaeddin Şakir's being the head of the Caucasus Revolutionary Society can point no further than the similar nature of the means used by the CUP and the SO.¹⁴¹ The changing conjuncture diversified the aims of both organizations as the CUP, as detailed in the next section, had to make use of the band and self-sacrificing organizations to come to power, whereas the SO operational units were more interested in exploiting the revolution to support the Ottoman army¹⁴², which, in turn, makes the organization belonging to the period of the CUP's underground activity a revolutionary organization in the real sense of the word. Thus the SO was made out to be an organization bearing military characteristics in terms of its aims and area of utilization. This is one of the most critical elements that distinguish the SO from the revolutionary organization pertaining to the period of the CPU's reorganization.

¹⁴¹ The efforts SO undertook to make a Caucasian revolution possible were concentrated in three regions: Erzurum, Van and Trabzon. As in the case of the pre-1908 organization of the CUP in Bulgaria, the establishment of enough number of branch offices led eventually to the establishment of a regional center that would control all the activities in the region and make up for the lack of coordination between them. *Kafkas İhtilal Cemiyeti* (Caucasus Revolutionary Society) was founded with this purpose on 12 October 1914. Sadık Sarısamam, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri ve Gürcü Lejyonu" *XIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi* (Ankara: 4-8 Ekim 1999), 495-534.

¹⁴² Erzurum was selected as the central base for Caucasus Revolutionary Society, and as stated before, Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir was appointed as the director of its central administrative board. The society had also a secret statute. Its first article of is significant in that it reveals that the revolutionary features were conveyed to the SO, with the difference that the target now was not the Hamidian government but the Entente Powers: "Kafkasya'da bir ihtilal-i umumi tertip ve ihzarıyla Rusya'nın hal-i hazır esbab-ı mağlubiyetini temin ve Devlet-i Aliye tarafından Rusya'ya ilan-ı harp edildiği takdirde Kafkasya dahilindeki akvamı bi't-teslih Rusya'nın hareket-ı askeriyesini işkal ve Kafkasya'yı işgal edecek Osmanlı ordusuna bi'l-fiil müzaharettir." A. Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa," *Vakit Gazetesi*, November 8, 1933.

2.3.3 Self-sacrificing (*Feda*) Organization

The revolutionary features of the CPU would not be enough on their own to create a striking force. A major development that has to be taken into account herein was the merger of the CPU with the Ottoman Freedom Society on September 27, 1907, which resulted in a powerful organizational framework by leading to the emergence of two CPU headquarters, one internal (Thessaloniki) and an external (Paris).¹⁴³ Though something novel for the CUP, this structure is also worthy of attention with regard to its evocation of the Eastern and Western Bureaus that the ARF had established as a result of a decision taken in its Second World Congress in 1898.¹⁴⁴ This might be considered the beginning of a new era in the history of the CUP, as the power of dissidents, most of whom were army officers in Thessaloniki, could now be utilized and the CUP would thus act on a more refined and down-to-earth strategy.

One of the two new activist policies that followed the merger was the creation of self-sacrificing volunteer branches. The CUP was in need of such an organization within the context of the terror campaign it had planned to carry out against the Sultan. These branches were formed upon the suggestion of Dr. Nazım and deeply influenced by the internal regulations of

¹⁴³ Document signed by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, titled "Hürriyet ve Osmanlı TİC Cemiyetleri arasındaki mukavelename", Paris, 14 Eylül 1322/27 September 1906, no. 386, *Kopya Defteri I*, 444-445; for the copy of the contract, also see: "suret" signed by Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, Paris, 14 Eylül 1322/27 September 1906, *Kopya Defteri I*, 487.

¹⁴⁴ Although it had a decentralized nature, the central committees elected for the east and the west were charged with taking the decisions related to their own region, implementing the resolutions of the World Congress, and guaranteeing that these directives were put into practice in all regions. Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation under Ottoman Constitutional Rule", 6.

the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (*Vutreshna Makedonska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia*, IMRO) and the Dashnaksutiun.¹⁴⁵ There were indeed forces that could be qualified as self-sacrificing units under the command of both organizations. The 10th clause of the IMRO statute, for instance, stipulates that each of the revolutionary committees was to have a secret police organization, whose duty was to inflict punishment, mostly death penalties, upon those who harmed the cause.¹⁴⁶

Armenian self-sacrificing units, on the other hand, emerged as early as the end of 1870s. This was actually the foremost mode of action that distinguished the Dashnaksutiun from the Hnchakists, which utilized the tactic of mass demonstration to hastily draw the European attention to the Armenian question, while the ARF concentrated on individual assassinations. In this, they took the Russian secret societies such as the Narodnaya Volya and Zemlya i Volya as examples. Despite their failure of attempt to assassinate Abdulhamid II (1905), the incident is important in pointing out the great extent the ARF had in terror campaigns. More important was the way the attempt was editorialized in the *Şura-yı Ümmet*: “Whoever is the one who threw the bomb, wanted to put an end to the killing reign of Hamid, is a self-sacrificing person legally if we want call this person an assassin then he is the assassin of the killer.”¹⁴⁷

Self-sacrificing volunteers represented one of the branch organizations of the CUP and directly attached to the executive committee (*heyet-i idare*),

¹⁴⁵ Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 217-218.

¹⁴⁶ Fikret Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), 130.

¹⁴⁷ Matossian, “Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire”, 13-15.

the highest administrative unit of the CUP. No one, except the members of the executive committee knew the names of the self-sacrificing volunteers. Clauses 48 to 55 in the internal regulations of the CUP provide the structural and functional elements of the branches of self-sacrificing volunteers. It should be before all else noted that it was in the executive board's power to set up self-sacrificing branches out of the men enlisted as self-sacrificing volunteers, and assign special missions to these branches or individuals. Along with the special missions assigned to them, the branches of self-sacrificing volunteers were also charged with carrying out the police tasks of the Committee. The highest decision-making organ of a self-sacrificing branch was its central committee (*heyet-i merkeziye*) and it appears that it was the guide of a branch through whom the executive board was informed of the names of the individuals that wished to be enlisted as self-sacrificing volunteers. In a sense, the guide of a branch was among the most authorized member of the self-sacrificing branches.¹⁴⁸

In case of the indolence of a fedai branch in a given task, the power of decision was vested in the committee of the bench (*heyet-i hakime*), whereas the authority to determine the means of execution within 24 hours was in the hands of the executive board. In case of the failure on the part of a fedai or a

¹⁴⁸ It was stipulated that prior to the implementation of a self-sacrifice announced by the executive committee, lots were to be drawn from amongst those willing to handle the task to select the self-sacrificing volunteer, if the task was given to one person. When the mission was to be carried out by more than one individual, the mission was undertaken by the Branch. Since the self-sacrificing branches had to carry out mission within the time interval set by the executive committee, the branch that was asked to carry out the mission was also charged with monitoring the actions of the self-sacrificing volunteer it had selected to do the job. The self-sacrificing branches, however, were not authorized to act on their own. They could only make some offers or issue warnings to the main branches (*şubeat-ı esasiye*) and the central committee (*Heyet-i Merkeziye*) about the mission they were going to undertake. A. C, "Bahaeddin Şakir Bey'in Bıraktığı Vesikalara Göre İttihat ve Terakki", *Milliyet*, 4 April 1934. Also see, Erdal Aydoğan ve İsmail Eyyüpoğlu (haz.), *Bahaeddin Şakir'in bıraktığı vesikalara göre İttihat ve Terakki* (Ankara: Alternatif Yayınları, 2004), 19.

fedai branch to carry out a given task within the given time due to extraordinary circumstances and valid reasons, they were obliged to request the executive committee to be relieved of such severe punishment as those charged with indolence, by presenting compelling reasons for the delay, and to extend the time for the task at hand.¹⁴⁹

Self-sacrificing volunteers, with their tendency to come into prominence in times of the crises facing the Committee, represented a group whose existence was known. Despite probable exaggerations and platitudes, it should be noted that the dissidents of the CUP consistently highlighted a group that they denominated as the “Serez Committee (*Serez Komitesi*)” or the “Murder Committee of Serez (*Serez Heyet-i Cinaiyesi*).

The Serez Committee was allegedly notorious for its swift political assassinations, such as those of Şemsi Paşa, one of the most trusted generals of the Sultan, of Sami Bey, police commissioner of Manastır, of Mustafa Efendi, imam of the artillery regiment, and of the unsuccessful attempt on the life of Nazım Bey, Garrison Commander of Thessaloniki.¹⁵⁰ Whatever the name of the assassins and of the groups to which they were attached, there is no doubt that the aforementioned political assassinations were all carried out by the self-sacrificing volunteers of the CUP. In this respect, the branches of self-sacrificing volunteers constituted one of the

¹⁴⁹ In the statute it was also stated that help would be extended to the family and children of all self-sacrificing volunteers killed during mission, their biographies would be written and published, and ceremonies would be organized by his grave, complete with public talks, to keep alive the memory of their self-sacrifice. A. C, “Bahaeddin Şakir Bey’in Bıraktığı Vesikalara Göre İtihat ve Terakki”, *Milliyet*, 4 April 1934.

¹⁵⁰ Yakup Kenan Necefzade thinks that beside these, it was also the CUP agents who had assassinated Şemsi Paşa’s relative İsmail Mahir Paşa, Hasan Fehmi, the owner and lead author of the newspaper *Serbesti*, Ahmed Samim, the owner and lead author of the newspaper *Sada-yı Millet*, and the journalist Zeki Bey. Yakup Kenan Necefzade, *Sultan İkinci Abdülhamid ve İttihad-ü-Terakki*, 1908-1918 (İstanbul: İtimad Yayınevi, 1967), 50-51.

primary means upon which the CUP relied to open up blocked political channels. According to Rıza Nur, the Serez Committee, or “this self-sacrificing volunteer committee of lieutenants killing dissidents on the street” was the “instrument, power, and executive apparatus of the central committee”.¹⁵¹

It is understood that it was Şükrü Bey who headed this self-sacrificing committee that was alleged to have calmly decided to assassinate Rıza Nur in response to an article he had published. Rıza Nur highlights that the prominent members of this committee were mostly army officers such as Lieutenant Halil, Lieutenant Edip, Lieutenant Canbolat, Lieutenant Abdülkadir, Lieutenant Mustafa Fevzi and Lieutenant Kazım, and that Talat Bey, Dr. Nazım, Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, and Enver Bey formed and supervised it.¹⁵²

A more detailed yet unsatisfactory account of the Serez Committee is presented by Abidin Nesimi, who seems to be indebted to SO member, Dr. Fahri Kutlar, with whom Nesimi worked in Iran during the First World War.¹⁵³ To Nesimi, the Selanik Ocağı, which was dominated by Jews and masons, represented the intellectual power of the CUP before 1908, whereas the striking force of the Committee rested back then with the Manastır Ocağı, dominated by Albanians and Melami-Bektashis. Following the declaration of

¹⁵¹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım* (İstanbul: Altındağ Yayınevi, 1967), 277.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 277-288.

¹⁵³ Dr. Fahri Kutlar was the military physician of a SO platoon dispatched to Iran-Afghanistan with Ubeydullah Efendi (Mehmet Ubeydullah Hatiboğlu) and without the knowledge of Rauf Bey. For more on Ubeydullah Efendi, see; Ömer Hakan Özalp, *Ulemeden Bir Jöntürk: Mehmed Ubeydullah Efendi* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları); *Mehmed Ubeydullah Efendi'nin Malta Afganistan ve İran Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları); *(Sıradışı Bir Jön Türk) Ubeydullah Efendi'nin Amerika Hatıraları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları).

the Second Constitution on June 23, 1908, the Selanik Ocağı seized power and dominated the armed forces starting with the police department. However, with the seizure of power, the Selanik Ocağı, did not prosecute individuals who had mistreated them before 1908. Nesimi believes it did so in order to strengthen its own position, and this process was disguised under the idealized slogans of public interest such as “the old regime need not be recreated (*devr-i sabık yaratmamalı*)”. The committee established in Serez was concerned and less than pleased with such practices of the Selanik Ocağı, and thereby began to use every means possible, mostly brute force, to disband the spies of the former era.

In establishing a terrorist organization in Serez, the movement spread first to Manastır, then to Thessaloniki, and thereafter to the capital where Mahir Paşa, one of the former spies in Istanbul, fell victim to an unidentified assailant. In the end, the Selanik Ocağı not only provided support for the Manastır Ocağı in its endeavors to disband the spies and dissidents against the CUP, but also put their trusted officers in this committee, which was called the Serez Band (Serez Çetesi). According to Nesimi, it was precisely the Serez Band that formed the nucleus of the organization, which would arise under the name of the SO, and the most important name therein was Çerkez Ahmet.¹⁵⁴

Nesimi’s explanations—often vengeful and wrathful due to the assassination of his father—aside, the self-sacrificing volunteerism that

¹⁵⁴ One of the active elements of the SO, he was caught during the assassination of Zeki Bey, an official of Ottoman Public Debt Administration. He frequently acted on his own and outside the framework of the missions given him by the SO. In one of these cases, in Bilecik, he murdered an entire Armenian convoy that included Topal Vartkez, deputy for Erzurum, and Prof. Dikran Kelekyan as he was taking them to Syria. For this reason Cemal Paşa had him executed in Syria by a firing squad. Nesimi, *Yıllarından İçinden*, 31-35.

emerged as a structural element during this period refers to a tradition that was followed over the next decade. As a matter of fact, clauses 47 to 50 in the regulations for the general tasks of the Sentinel Association (Karakol Cemiyeti) might justify the existence of this tradition throughout the period of National Struggle:

“47- ...mesai-i hainane ile efkara icray-ı nüfuz ve tesire muktedir olanlar ihtara rağmen faaliyetlerine devam ettikleri takdirde derhal idam olunurlar.

48- Hain eşhası idam için ayrıca fedailer teşkil olunur. Kaza ve daha büyük şubelerin birer fedai teşkilatı olup münevver ve muktedir gençlerden kefaletle bi't-telhif fedai kabul olunur.

49- Fedailerin şahsı ve ailesi cemiyetçe hayatında ve mematında taht-ı zaman ve kefaletdedir. Yalnız fedailerin hizmetleri mukabilinde mevki-i memuriyet ve teferrüd-i şahsi ve nüfuz gibi gayr-ı vatani mutalebatda bulunmamaları şerait-i esasiyedendir.

Keza muharebe çetelerinin de muhtaç olanlarının ihtiyacı temin ve umumunun hal-i mematında evlad-ı ıyalinin ihtiyacı cemiyetin taht-ı kefalet ve zamanındadır.

50- Bir fedaiden yalnız bir vazife talep olunur. İfa ve ikmalinden sonra ikinci bir vazife tahmil olunmaz, meğer bizzat ve mısran talep etsin.”¹⁵⁵

In this respect, the SO appears to be the most characteristic and perfect expression of the transition between the two periods. Though decisive and satisfactory information is lacking on the fedai branches pertaining to the period prior to 1908, there is no doubt that most of the CUP fedais were afterwards called on to take up important positions in the SO. In this context, it might conceivably clarify some unclear points to cast an eye over the assassination of Şemsi Paşa in Manastır.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Arşivi (Archive of the Presidency of Republic of Turkey, CBA); Karakol Cemiyeti – Vazife-i Umumiye Talimatnamesi; A: IV-17-d; D: 71; F: 2/7.

¹⁵⁶ See the list of Self-Sacrificing Officers provided by Stoddard: *The Ottoman Government and the Arabs, a preliminary study on the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 173-177.

The murder of Şemsi Paşa, due to its representing the first, and maybe the most important bullets fired by the CUP fedais against the Hamidian regime, has come to be a frequently reviewed subject in the literature. This work attempts to examine it on a different ground, both to examine the extent to which the fedai branches were in compliance with their regulations on the paper, and to reveal the relations of individuals involved in this murder to the SO.

Atif Bey, having graduated from the Ottoman War Academy (*Harbiye Mektebi*) with the rank of first lieutenant in 1904, was posted to the Third Army in Macedonia, where he spent almost four years in Manastır.¹⁵⁷ Although he had been promptly acquainted with the Macedonian revolutionary and independence struggles, he was won over by the CUP as late as 1907. From a letter by Atif Bey to Süleyman Külçe, it is understood that Atif Bey was also a member of the CUP's self-sacrificing division in Manastır.¹⁵⁸

Yet Atif Bey would put his stamp on the history of the CUP after adjutant-major Ahmed Niyazi Bey had taken to the hills on June 3, 1908 to have the constitution reinstated. On that occasion, the sultan definitively

¹⁵⁷ Atif Kamçıl (1878-21 Ocak 1947): His father's name was İsmail and mother's name was Fatma. His spouse was Emine Atifet Hanım. He had five children. He joined the Military School in 1901, graduated in 1904 with the rank of infantry second lieutenant, and was appointed to the Third Army. For four years he was around Manastır, and then worked in İstanbul during the second constitutional period as gendarme and police officer. In 1910 his resignation from this position was accepted and he was elected deputy for Çanakkale. He was discharged from the army on 18 February 1913 because of his involvement with politics during the election period. However, he objected to this decision and thereupon he was appointed as escort officer in İstanbul Guardian Command (*Muhafız Kumandanlığı*) on 24 February 1913. After this, in 1329, he was discharged to be used as reserve if necessary. Then he worked in the Administrative Board of TM. During the war he was deputy for Ankara. On 3 April 1939 he was elected one more time as deputy for Çanakkale. He died of pneumonia on 21 January 1947. Pension Fund Archive (ESA); Dosya (Dossier, D): Atif Kamçıl.

¹⁵⁸ Süleyman Külçe, *Firzovik Toplantısı ve Meşrutiyet* (İzmir: 1944), 48.

decided to send Şemsi Paşa, one of his most trusted generals, to Manastır, where he arrived on July 7 with a force of two battalions and Albanian volunteers. The superiority of the Şemsi Paşa's forces to the CUP band was clear and an armed clash between these two forces doomed to finish in the extermination of the latter, which was actually a part of the Şemsi Paşa's purpose, the other being the dealing a serious blow to the Committee and its members. It might also strain the CUP-Albanian relations beyond repair. This is why the CUP decided to assassinate Şemsi Paşa before he went to Resne and started the operation¹⁵⁹ and it was none other than Atif Bey, the future member of the SO's Supervisory Council and deputy of Çanakkale during the Republican period, who had volunteered for this dangerous attempt, the results of which routed the palace while strengthening the CUP's hand.¹⁶⁰ This important self-sacrificing volunteer of the CUP shot the pasha to death among his Albanian guards as he was stepping out of the post office on July 7, 1908, the very first day the pasha arrived in Manastır.

On the other hand, the person who had, in a sense, motivated this fearless self-sacrificing volunteer before Şemsi Paşa's arrival in Manastır was the future director of the SO, Süleyman Askeri, who told him about the state of panic and exhaustion of the CUP leadership back then, and offered to support him in the attempt by putting a number of CUP officers under his order. Atif Bey declined the offer of assistance with firmness: "without the inculcation of one's own conscience, the dispatch of assistants by order

¹⁵⁹ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 268.

¹⁶⁰ Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (Prime Ministry General Directorate of State Archives - Republic Archives, CA): report by the Directorate of Personal Affairs of Ministry of National Defense on the retirement of Atif Kamçıl (30 Haziran 1942); no: 17430, Fon Kodu (FK): 030. 11. 1, Yer Numarası (Y): 155. 21. 1.

gives harm rather than good on such occasions; a revelation of little weakness would cause the attempt to fail".¹⁶¹ Having survived the mission with a wounded leg, however, it turned out to be once again Süleyman Askeri, then one of the guides of the Committee in the region, and his friends who let Atif Bey escape to Thessaloniki.¹⁶²

Self-sacrificing volunteers also represented a well-known group in the Tripolitanian War of 1911-1912. Generally called the Self-sacrificing Officers (*Fedai Zabitan*), this group would find the opportunity to test the value of the methods once they had used them against the Yıldız administration within the military sphere,¹⁶³ not with the aim of backing the army, as was the case in the Balkan Wars, but with the intention of organizing resistance through mustering local support. Enver Bey's plan was ready in case of the Sublime Porte's bow to Italian pressures. Carried out in Libya, this plan was, in fact, the first step of the struggle that would last through the end of the First World War. This step, at the same time, would set the first model for the SO of the struggle given in an environment far away from the center with easily vulnerable logistical lines and without the support of the regular army. Enver Bey, in a letter to a female German friend written while he was still in Thessaloniki, states that the proper means to be able to carry on the struggle in Libya was to conduct guerilla warfare, the striking force of which would be the bands formed out of the Arabs and

¹⁶¹ Külçe, *Firzovik Toplantısı ve Meşrutiyet*, 49.

¹⁶² For more on the topic, see: Kuşçubaşı, 219; Ertürk 26-31; Vardar, 61-66; Şemsi, 83-86; Resneli Niyazi, 257-306.

¹⁶³ For more information, see: Rachel Simon, *Libya between Ottomanism and Nationalism: The Ottoman Involvement in Libya during the War with Italy (1911-1918)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1987); Stoddard, "The Ottoman Government and the Arab", 76-92.

other local communities under the command of young and self-sacrificing officers set foot in the region:¹⁶⁴

“Pour continuer le combat, nous proposerons au Gouvernement de mener un guerilla-combat dans l'interieur de la Tripolitaine. Les Italiens pourront bien s'emparer des rivages ce qui n'est pas difficile sous l'appui des puissant canons de leurs batiments des guerres. Nous ramasserons nos forces dans l'interieur. Les bandes montees des Arabes, des citoyens du pays, commandes par de jeunes officiers, resteront approches aux Italiens en les harcelant nuit et jour.”¹⁶⁵

This was, in a sense, the test process of the SO mode of action. Curiously enough, most of the officers participated in these battles as an integral part of the Self-sacrificing Officers would-be members, mostly high-ranking officials, of the SO that would become official on the eve of the First World War. Thus the utilization of self-sacrificing volunteers at points where the SO was active, and even the formation of fedai branches, though rarely, in the SO as it had been the case during the reorganization of the CUP should be no surprise.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ernst Jaeckh Papers (EJP), Manuscript Group Number: 467 (Manuscripts and Archives Department, Yale University Library); Ayne'l-Mansur, 9 December 1912, No. 38. For a compilation of translations from these invaluable letters into Turkish, please see; Şükrü Hanoğlu (ed.), *Kendi Mektuplarında Enver Paşa* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 1989).

¹⁶⁵ By attacks that would be conducted by those bands, Enver Bey was planning to provoke to revolt the Muslims living in the African colonies of Italia. EJP; Selanik, 4 September 1911, No. 38.

¹⁶⁶ As stated in Article 2 of its statute, Caucasus Revolutionary Society was divided into three districts administered by a central committee, and each of these districts was again divided into two parts, an interior and an exterior organization. As stated in Article 4, the interior organization of each district was attached to an intermediate center (*merkez-i mutavassıt*), and each intermediate center was attached in turn to the general headquarters of Caucasus Revolutionary Society. It was these intermediate centers that had the corps of trained fedai organization (*muallem fedai teşkilat kıtaatı*). In other words, this SO branch was charged with both establishing a fedai organization of agents and training those agents. Any individual who joined Caucasus Revolutionary Society had to be appointed as *mürşit* (mentor), *rehber* (guide), *muhbir* (informer) or *fedai* (agent). He also had to accept the conditions of a text of oath. This text, used in a ceremony of oath-taking, stressed that all these officials would be treated as *fedais*, whether they were originally so or rather belonged to the other three ranks: “Moskoflar mağlup ve mahkur ve Kafkasya'daki bi'l-umum akvamin mesut olmasına ve Kafkasya'nın Rusya boyunduruğundan kurtulmasına kanaat-i tamme-i vicdaniyemle ölünceye kadar çalışacağım ve bu uğurda hiç bir maniaya ehemmiyet

2.3.4 Band Organization

The CPU was not content with the self-sacrificing organization, which, though organized, was limited in number and generally employed to open up the blocked political channels. The revolution they were planning required more than that. In this context, army officers that rapidly increased in number in the CUP as a result of the merger with the Ottoman Freedom Society would form the second but the most important part of that striking force. However, due to their low ranking, it was relatively difficult for those officers to move large divisions. “This practical obstacle,” Hanioglu states, “compelled the CUP leaders to seriously consider the option of establishing a network of bands in order to carry out a revolution.”¹⁶⁷ In this way, the CUP was laying the foundations of band warfare, which would reveal itself most remarkably and effectively in the SO. For that reason, it might prove useful to more closely examine the factors leading up to the formation of bands.

Above all, the Ottoman army was vulnerable to politicization. Probably one of the most effective factors in this was that the Ottoman “public opinion” remained at a great distance from and generally out of the political movements. During the “modernization” process, neither the bureaucrats or

vermeyeceğim. İcap ettiği dakikada seve seve feday-ı nefis edeceğim ve der-uhte ettiğim hizmeti her türlü hidematıma bi't-tercih dakikası dakikasına icra ve infaz eyleyeceğime dinim ve namusum üzerine yemin ederim. Şayet bunca taahhüdatı namuskaraneyle rağmen hizmet eylemeyecek olursam alçaklık edenleri her nerede olursa olsun zabita-i cemiyetin icra eyleyeceği idam cezasına karşın şimdiden kanımı helal ederim. Vallahi Billahi.” Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” November 8, 1933.

¹⁶⁷ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 221.

dictators of the Sublime Port, nor the centralism or authoritarianism of the Yıldız regime after the declaration of the First Constitutional Monarchy in 1876 exerted much effort to make public opinion function as an active element of the political system.¹⁶⁸ Especially, “in an environment where authority was beginning to decay,” Abdulhamid II’s efforts at monitoring and controlling all sources ranging from governmental departments to press was suppressing all potential elements in society that could produce politics and ideology.¹⁶⁹ This, on the one hand, resulted in the lament deprivation of political culture in society, on the other, led the army to be perceived as the only institution that could prevent the “collapse” of the state.

The special status of Rumelia would bring the Third Army to the very center of the opposition movement in the country. The Macedonian problem that began during the 1870s entered into a new phase when an uprising broke out in Ilinden on August 2, 1903 (St. Elijah’s Day). Carried out by the Sarafov wing of the IMRO, it rapidly escalated into the bloodiest uprising flared in the history of Macedonia. Although the uprising was put down by the Ottomans with troops brought from Anatolia, Austria-Hungary and Russia subsequently sponsored at Müzzsteg a program of reforms that amounted to no more than a foreign intervention for the Ottoman Empire. Implementation of the Müzzsteg program (1904), which actually represented the re-arranged version of the draft prepared in Vienna (February 1903) led to a marked increase in local struggles and clashes among different religious and ethnic

¹⁶⁸ Ahmet Turan Alkan, *II. Meşrutiyet Devrinde Ordu ve Siyaset* (Ankara: Cedit Neşriyat, 1992), 31-36.

¹⁶⁹ İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (İstanbul: Alkım, 2006), 87.

groups, and to the proliferation of band activities in the region.¹⁷⁰ This would lead the Third Army, credited as the most distinguished Ottoman troops, to come up against the terror of the comitajis more often compared to before. On the other hand, Muslims would take up arms going on the defensive, and in terms of the elite, many dissident soldiers, mostly army officers, would approach the Young Turks and delight the CUP leadership with their participation *en masse* in the opposition.¹⁷¹

Apart from that, Macedonia was a more favorable region in terms of ease at reaching such means to produce public opinion and political consciousness as transportation and communication. Particularly Europe's close involvement in the region, thanks to the implementation of military and fiscal reforms, was facilitating the circulation of propaganda materials.¹⁷² Thus the prohibited propaganda materials could be relatively easily disseminated in that region, thus rendering the Ottoman officers more vulnerable to the agitation and political ideas of the opposition.

That region was also a hotbed of complaints, which were quite often becoming more effective at politicizing the Third Army than the Young Turk

¹⁷⁰ Gül Tokay, *Makedonya Sorunu: Jön Türk İhtilalinin Kökenleri (1903-1908)* (İstanbul: AFA Yayınları, 1995), 40-48; İpek Yosmaoğlu Turner, "The Priest's Robe and the Rebel's Rifle: Communal Conflict and the Construction of National Identity in Ottoman Macedonia 1878-1908", (PhD diss., Princeton University, November 2005), 51-55.

¹⁷¹ According to the information received by Kazım Karabekir from Naki Bey, the eight individuals vehemently opposed to foreign intervention (postal official Talat, Major Necmeddin, Major Nuri, Major Kemal, Bayram Fehmi from Ergeri, Major Naki, Captain Asım and İsmail Mahir) resolved to open a branch office of the CUP in Salonica. For this purpose they corresponded with Ahmed Rıza Bey, at that time in Paris, and requested permission. However, Ahmet Rıza Bey told them that the society in Paris was no more than a mirage and the name of CUP was no more than a symbol, and therefore it was necessary to establish an independent organization within the country, without expecting anything from those beyond the borders. See Karabekir, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, 157-158.

¹⁷² İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, vol. 4 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1961), 359.

propaganda. Complaints like the long delay in the payments of salaries, failure to be promoted in time,¹⁷³ confusion and disorder in the command and its spread to the lower echelons,¹⁷⁴ permanent deficiencies in equipment, ammunition, and clothing, use of outdated arms in the battle field such as the Martin rifle (a black-powder single-shot rifle), regard of commanders above regimental level as old, ignorant, and clumsy, and finally, consideration of the army more of a guerilla force than a regular one, were all compelling the members of the Third Army to side against the government.¹⁷⁵

Such sets of social and political expectations would form one important factor that characterized the intellectual world of Ottoman officers. Halil (Kut) Bey, the third director of the SO,¹⁷⁶ began to seek remedies for the salvation of “the mother state” while he was sipping beer in a pub in Thessaloniki along with Valideçeşmeli İsmail Hakkı, his classmate from the War Academy. İsmail Hakkı Bey addressing Halil Bey, stated that:

“Bak Halil... Gece gündüz dağlarda dolaşıyorsun, eşkıyaları, çeteleri, darmadağın ediyorsun, vuruyorsun, öldürüyorsun... Ama yerine hemen yenisi bitiveriyor. Sözün kısası Makedonya'nın vaziyetini sen benden çok daha iyi bilirsin. İstanbul'un aczi ise ortada, gün gibi aşikar... Sarayın sersemce idaresi başımıza her gün yeni bir bela açıyor. Radikal bir hareketle bizler devlet idaresine yeni bir şekil vermezsek bu keşmekeş yıllarca sürer, yabancıların kindar müdahaleleri şımarıklıklarından, şımartıldıklarından daha da artar, sonumuz neye varır bilemeyiz...”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Ibid., 359.

¹⁷⁴ Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. I, p. I, 432-434.

¹⁷⁵ Kazım Karabekir, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, 242.

¹⁷⁶ ATASE, BDH; undated: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

¹⁷⁷ Taylan Sorgun, *Halil Paşa, İttihat ve Terakki'den Cumhuriyet'e Bitmeyen Savaş* (İstanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 1997), 30.

Halil Bey acknowledged İsmail Hakkı to be right. For Halil Bey, as well, the state was going down to its ruins and there was no one else than the soldiers who “would lend a hand to the homeland”. This dialogue, though relating only to a minor incident, shortly precedes Halil Bey’s decision to participate in the CUP through the agency of Captain Canbolat İsmail, one of the guides of the Committee in the region, and may be of value in reflecting the opinion of the founding nucleus of the SO, all fierce Ittihadists without any reserve, as well as of the schooled (*mektepli*) officers.

The mission of liberating the homeland would lead to the tradition of interference in political life. This courage was instilled into Ittihadists when they were merely pupils in military school. For example, Nuri Bey, one of the teachers at the War Academy, mentioned during a lesson that a commander was not only a man who commands but also a teacher. He further added that the real intellectuals of the country were soldiers and the homeland was in great need of “a committee of enlightened people” (*bir aydın kişiler komitası*).¹⁷⁸ Teachers indoctrinating or dictating ideals to pupils were not the only certain and ready source of the courage. Communal concepts like ‘homeland’ and ‘liberation’ had been in use since the Tanzimat period, and it was beyond doubt that Abdulhamid II’s administration had weaknesses in certain areas. Wavered in differences between the ideal society they imagined and the realities of the reign of Abdulhamid II, Ittihadists eventually gravitated to the idea of liberating the homeland and disguised as a “social doctor” – a term used by Şerif Mardin – to cure diseases.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Asım Gündüz, *Hatıralarım*, ed. İhsan İlgar (İstanbul: Kervan Yayınları, 1973), 21.

¹⁷⁹ Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1895-1908*, 17-18, 306; Alkan, *II. Meşrutiyet Devrinde Ordu ve Siyaset*, 22-28.

Such factors that made the army vulnerable to politicization enabled the CPU to easily approach the army and get along with the officers. In an environment where the civil intellectuals remained silent or silenced in the country, and dreamy and ineffective abroad, it was easy for the opposition movement to understand that they did not have any room to maneuver other than the Third Army in Macedonia. In addition, the army along with the Sublime Port was representing the most organized power in society.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the army was the only organization that could prevent a possible foreign interference in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Constant appeal of the Ittihadist press to the army was one of the outcomes of this combination of concerns. All those were among the main reasons of developments that moved Macedonia out of central control.¹⁸¹

Another factor leading to the formation of bands was closely related to the persistent activities of various ethno-religious committees in the Balkans. The Third Army was charged with “banishing the committees and bands” (*komitaları ve çeteleri tenkil*) subsequently to 1902 when the extensive areas of band warfare had begun to surround the Balkans. Most of the graduates of the War Academy were taking charge in Thessaloniki, the center of the Third Army, and this practice almost turned into an unwritten custom. A note on the subject made by Rahmi Apak is explanatory enough:

“Son zamanlarda Pangaltı Harp Okulu, her yıl ortalama bin subay yetiştiriyor ve bunların dörtte üçü Makedonya ve Trakya'ya gönderiliyordu. Bu gençler orada, Bulgar ve Rum çeteleri ile yıllarca dağlarda, bayırlarda çarpışmışlar, istibdadın kötü idaresini zaafını, aczini görmüşlerdir.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Alkan, *II. Meşrutiyet Devrinde Ordu ve Siyaset*, 51.

¹⁸¹ Hanoğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 219-221.

¹⁸² Rahmi Apak, *Yetmişlik Bir Subayın Hatıraları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988), 27.

As a result of the experience gained in this region, the CUP began to see the most fundamental element of the mode of action followed by the Balkan committees, the band warfare, as the only way that could realistically spring itself to action. In this context, the IMRO bands in particular seem to have made a lasting impression upon the Ottoman officers. As a matter of fact, Enver Paşa states while touching on his organization in Manastır that he formed it “on the basis of the Bulgarian organization.”¹⁸³

Indeed, the IMRO’s impression on the activist policies of the CUP can be more easily traced than the Armenian revolutionary organizations that Bahaeddin Şakir researched. CUP’s internal headquarters in Thessaloniki, should have been acquainted with the IMRO long before the leaders in Paris, as the committee in Thessaloniki was actually a continuation of the Ottoman Freedom Society established by the initiatives of Talat Bey, and its members largely consisted of officers who were positioned in Maedonia and charged with banishing the committees and bands. Hence the Young Turks in this region were quite preoccupied with action-oriented facilities, rather than social and political theories, and gradually resembled the Macedonian revolutionary committees. Even an expert on the subject felicitously expresses that it would not risk being misguided to name the committee in Thessaloniki as “Turkish Macedonian Committee (*Türk Makedonya Komitesi*).”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Halil Erdoğan Cengiz (ed.), *Enver Paşa'nın Anıları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991), 72.

¹⁸⁴ Mehmet Hacısalihlioğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu (1890-1918)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2008), 146.

The IMRO, which supported the idea of an autonomous Macedonia where the Bulgarian elements would remain at the forefront, was founded by Damien Gruev in Thessaloniki in October 1893. The statue of this committee that had initially named itself as the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was prepared based on the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee in Bucharest during the 1870s.¹⁸⁵ Another Macedonian organization was established with the name of the Supreme Macedonian Committee (*Vurhoven Makedonski Komitet Vurhovisti*, SMAC) in 1895 in Sofia.¹⁸⁶ Its primary aim was to gain political autonomy for Macedonia. This aim was to be achieved before all else by attracting the attention of the European and Bulgarian public opinion. For that purpose, the SMAC and Bulgarian government directed their efforts in the summer of 1895 at provoking the Macedonian population at a rebellion and armed four detachments in Bulgaria to that end. Although the detachments suffered serious casualties, the band of Boris Sarafov managed to advance into Melnik and organize a rebellion that was quelled swiftly.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ The other members of the Committee were as follows: Dr. Hristo Tatarçev, Peter Pop Arsov, Ivan Hacinikolov, Dr. Anton Dimitrov and Hristo Bostanciev. The name of this revolutionary organization was on several occasions. Until 1902, its name was Bulgarian Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committees. In 1902, it was changed into Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization, and into Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in 1905. We would shortly call it IMRO. Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu*, 118-121.

¹⁸⁶ James Walter Frusetta, "Bulgaria's Macedonia: Nation-Building and State Building, Centralization and Autonomy in Pirin Macedonia 1903-1952", (PhD diss., University of Maryland College Park, 2006), 111-112; Turner, "The Priest's Robe and the Rebel's Rifle", 44-50.

¹⁸⁷ Ferdinand's election as prince of Bulgaria angered the Russians, for he supported the Austrians. Stambulov's accession to power (1887-1894) further deepened the rift in Bulgarian politics between Russia and Austria. However, since Russia was the only power that could enable Ferdinand to find recognition on the international scene, he had to find a way of reconciliation. In this context, activation of the Macedonian movement could suit Ferdinand's book, by which Russia might gravitate towards his recognition. During the government of Stoilov, who replaced Stambulov upon the latter's dismissal in 1894, there were demonstrations demanding reforms in Macedonia. Upon the call of the Union of

Upon this unsuccessful attempt, most Macedonians living in Bulgaria understood that they had been capitalized by the Sofia government, and gave up hope on SMAC and passed to the opposition. Soon thereafter, the IMRO in Thessaloniki stressed the importance of not repeating such conduct and had a sound grasp of the necessity of establishing a broad society-based Macedonian revolutionary organization. For them, the center of Macedonia's struggle for liberation was to be Macedonia, and such a movement could not be controlled from outside. To that end, Damian Gruev and Goce Dolcev initiated revolutionary activities, and within a short of period of time managed to set up a series of revolutionary committees in Macedonia. The revolutionaries who met in Thessaloniki in 1896 delegated the draft of the organization's statute to Gjorche Petrov and Delchev, clarifying the internal structure of the IMRO.¹⁸⁸ It appears that the Thessaloniki wing of the CUP was seriously impressed by this organization and its statute.

Bulgarian organizations were a key factor for Talat Paşa in understanding the importance of armed propaganda. Especially the exaggerated and daunting impact of armed activities by the Bulgarian bands on society convinced him about the necessity of conducting similar actions.¹⁸⁹ One could even possibly trace the signs of such actions in Talat

Brotherhood and Friendship (established in 1894 under the leadership of Trayka Kitarçev), a congress of Macedonians was organized in March 1895. As a result of this congress, the High Committee of Macedonia (*Virchoven Makedonski Komitet*) was established with the purpose of organizing and directing the Macedonian liberation movement inside and outside Macedonia. Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu* 121-125.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 125-129.

¹⁸⁹ Tefik Çavdar, *Bir Örgüt Ustasının Yaşam Öyküsü: Talat Paşa* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2001), 77-78.

Bey's entire life.¹⁹⁰ Evidently, whatever the authenticity of the claims, Talat Bey resembled the leaders of Macedonian revolutionary committees more than the Young Turks in exile. According to Ali Münif Bey, he was a "comitaji spiritually",¹⁹¹ and "an exceptional comitaji and band leader" for Ahmed Rıza Bey.¹⁹²

More important was the impression this organization left on Enver Bey, the true architect of the SO. For example, Enver Bey stated in an interview with Charles Roden Buxton, a member of the Balkan Committee in London, that:

"Başka devrimleri inceledik,'dedi. Gerekli olan şeyin bir lider olduğunu söyleyerek, sık sık, kendilerini yoldaşlarının başına geçirmeye uğraşan insanlar tarafından felakete uğratıldıklarını gördük. Ben kendim Makedonya Bulgarlarının İç Örgüt'ünü çok yakından inceledim. Bu örgütü takdir ettim, pek çok ipucu verdi bize."¹⁹³

Indeed, Enver Bey's band regulations, discussed hereafter, bear a serious resemblance to the IMRO statute drafted in 1896, according to which it was divided into sub-committees of district, town, and village. Soon the central

¹⁹⁰ "Talat Bey üzerinde Bulgar özgürlükçü hareketini sürdüren çetelerin derin bir izi vardır... Selanik'te bilhassa İttihat ve Terakki cemiyetinin kuruluşundan sonra, ortak bir savaşım vermenin doğal sonucu olarak bunların liderleriyle tanıştığı gibi, silahlı eylemlerinden de gerek taktik gerekse amaç açısından haberi idi. Hatta Selanik içinde cemiyet namına bazı bombalı gösterilerde bulunmaları için bunların bir bölümü ile anlaştığı bile söylenir. Doğru yanlış bu nokta bizi ilgilendirmese de, Talat'ın başta Bulgar çetecileri olmak üzere diğer Balkan uluslarının çeteleriyle bazı ilişkilerinin olduğu kesindir...Rumeli'deki iş gezileri sırasında Rum, Arnavut, Bulgar, hatta Sırp gerilla gruplarıyla dolaylı ya da dolaysız ilişkilerde bulunan Talat'ı bunlar arasında gene de en fazla etkileyen Bulgar çeteleri olmuştur. Özellikle bunların Narodnikçi doğrultudaki çizgileri onu çekmiştir." Çavdar, *Bir Örgüt Ustasının Yaşamöyküsü*, 82.

¹⁹¹ Taha Toros (haz.), *Ali Münif Bey'in Hatıraları* (İstanbul: İsis, 1996), 91.

¹⁹² *Meclis-i Mebusan ve Ayan Reisi Ahmed Rıza Bey'in Anıları* (İstanbul: Arba, 1988), 66; Hacısalihlioğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 146-147.

¹⁹³ Charles Roden Buxton, *Turkey in Revolution* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), s. 134-135. There were fundamental similarities in terms of oath-taking ceremonies and their relations to the Mason lodges between the committee in Thessaloniki and the IMRO. Hacısalihlioğlu, *Jön Türkler ve Makedonya Sorunu*, 149-150.

committee in Thessaloniki became the highest decision making body. The number and realm of authority of the district committees were determined by the central committee, the town committees by district committees, and the village committees by the district committees. The bands were integrated into this structure by the instructions and band regulations drafted in 1898, 1900, and 1902.¹⁹⁴

It would be difficult and time consuming for the CUP to create a band organization from scratch. Yet as already noted, the exceptional circumstances in Macedonia convinced the CUP members “to embrace the idea of forming bands under their command” and helped them to acquire this asset in a short period of time, as they had previously distributed rifles and revolvers to Muslim bands in the region to kill people thought to be serving the IMRO.¹⁹⁵ For example, in May 1907, the Special Islamic Committee (*Cemiyet-i Hususiye-i İslamiye*) was established in Ohri to fight Bulgarian and Greek bands. With the initiatives of some Albanians, they achieved success in a short period of time, and the society was incorporated into the Ohri Branch of CUP, formed under the command of Aziz Bey (el-Mısri), Enver Bey, and Eyüp Sabri Bey.¹⁹⁶

Practical reasons played an important role in the CUP’s adoption of bands as a revolutionary tactic. As noted above, military members of the

¹⁹⁴ For the IMRO bands, see: Frusetta, “Bulgaria’s Macedonia”, 111-132; Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu*, 129-144. On the other hand, it was stipulated that in the organization of ARF seven or more individuals in a village or town would form a group (*khoump*). If there was three or more *khoumps* in a region, this made it possible to establish a committee (*gomideh*) to monitor the operations of these *khoumps*. Each central committee was charged with monitoring the activities of the forces, consisting of 5-25 *gomidehs*, in its own region. Kaligian, “The Armenian Revolutionary Federation under Ottoman Constitutional Rule”, 7.

¹⁹⁵ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 221-222.

¹⁹⁶ Külçe, *Firzovik Toplantısı ve Meşrutiyet*, 61-62.

CUP did not possess ranks as high as to move large divisions. Secondly, appropriating already existing bands could increase popular support for CUP, as the Muslims in Macedonia saw these bands as protectors and saviors. Accordingly, both society and local authorities were lenient toward these bands and their members and supported them financially. Thus the CUP was not obliged to disburse large sums of money either to form the bands or feed them.¹⁹⁷ Regulations prepared by Enver Bey prior to the revolution concerning the organization of the bands might be of great value in shedding light on both the CUP band organization and mentioned practical rationales:

“Kuvve-i Müsellaha Nizamnamesi:

Kuvve-i Müsellaha, biri daimi, diğeri milis olmak üzere ikiye ayrılacak.

Daimi Kuvve-i Müsellaha: Kaza Çeteleri ile Vilayet Teftiş Çetesi'nden ibaret olacaktır.

Kaza Çeteleri: Yüzbaşı veya Mülazım rütbesinde bir zabıt kumandasında bir zabıt ile 10 ila 15 neferden mürekkebe olacaktır. Her beş nefer bir Kısım teşkil eder. Bunların iksa (giydirilme) ve techizi, Kaza Heyet-i Merkeziyesi'ne aiddir. İaşeleri ise Köy Sandıkları'ndan olacaktır. Bir çete reisi, aynı zamanda, köylerdeki cemiyet umurunu ve hesabı teftiş edecektir. Eslihası, mavzer ve elbisesi avcı efradı (eri) elbisesi gibi olacak; yalnız, başlarında beyaz keçe ve üzerinde pirinçten bir ay bulunacaktır. Çete reisi, aynı zamanda, kaza milis efradının taliminden ve eslihalarının hüsn-i suretle muhafazası hususunda nezarete memur ve kaza Heyet-i İdaresi'nin yegane kuvve-i icraiyesidir.

Vilayet Teftiş Çetesi: Bir mümtaz veya erkan-ı harb zabiti kumandasında, on beş neferden mürekkebe olup; kaza çetesi gibi taksimatı vardır. Bu çete, kaza çeteleri ve heyet-i idarelerinin muamelatını teftiş (eder) ve diğer kaza heyet-i idareleriyle birlikte herhangi maksada karşı, vilayet heyet-i idaresinin kuvve-i icraiyesidir. Bunların techizi vilayete aiddir.

Milis kuvveti: her köyde, eli silah tutan efrad milisdir. Bunlar onar kişilik Onbaşı Takımları'na ayrılır. Her on kişi onbaşılarını kendileri

¹⁹⁷ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 223.

intihab eder. Bunlar askerlik etmiş etmiş olanlardan bulunması müreccahdır.

Onbaşı Takımları'na bir çavuş nezaret eder. Bu çavuş, köy heyet-i idaresinin nezaretinde, milislerinin eslihalının hüsni muhafazasından, talimlerinden mesuldur.

Esliha: Herkes kendi silahını tedarik edecektir. Buna muktedir olamayanlara zenginlerde mevcut müteaddid eslihadan biri tayin olunacak ve hareket zamanında bu silahı alacak; avdetde, sahibine temizleyerek teslim edecektir. Sarf edilecek cebhane Köy Kasalarından satın alınarak tamamlanacaktır.

Kaza Heyet-i İdaresi, milislerin teslihinde, köy heyet-i idarelerine yardım edeceklerdir. Milisler alelade, bir günden bir haftaya kadar haricde kalabilecektir. Bunlar, büyük iş görmek lazım geldikde veya tehlikeli mahallerde geşt ü güzarda (dolaşmada) daimi çetenin takviyesi için kullanılacaktır. Çeteye giden milis efradının ailesini beslemek, köydeki işini diğer efrada angarya suretiyle gördürmek, köy heyet-i idaresinin borcudur. Çetede vefat eden milis efradının ailesini kaza heyet-i idaresi her suretle temin edecektir. Milis efradı içinde teşebbüsât-ı şahsiyyede bulunmağı taahhüd eden efrad işe çeteye daimi suretde gitmeğe hazır efrad ayrıca tefrik olunacaktır. Bir milis efradı şimdilik bir siyah askeri ceket tedarik edecek ve sonraları daimi çete efradı gibi techiz olunacaklardır.”¹⁹⁸

In addition to volunteers, the CUP made use of deserters, and criminals who were granted pardon, while forming the bands to open the way to the government of the country.

As was the case in other structural elements, the SO would follow the model of the CUP in band warfare and serve the Ottoman war strategy with the commencement of the First World War on the basis of a structure, striking force of which consisted predominantly of bands. Self-sacrificing officers, during their struggle against the Italians in Libya, enjoyed the experience that a resistance could be, mounted by bands formed in their own

¹⁹⁸ Cengiz, *Enver Paşa'nın Anıları*, 11-113. Hanioglu draws attention to the fact that there were as many differences as similarities between the regulations prepared and sent to the CUP by Enver Bey and the band regulations found amongst the personal documents of Bahaeddin Şakir. Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution - The Young Turks*, 451, n. 117.

locales. The second phase of the Balkan wars, on the other hand, for CUP essentially became a test of whether the SO could be beneficially employed as an auxiliary force to the regular army. But before dwelling on such situations any further, it is useful to have a closer look at the term, “çete”.

2.4 A Blind Spot in SO Literature: Band (Çete)

Each of the four structural elements, the summaries of which were given above, can be used as an epistemic guide to properly understand the foundation of the SO. Yet there is still the risk of being misguided in the case of employment of these elements independent of each other. The interdependency and permeability of these elements should always be kept in mind. The most prominent of these elements and the tool used to understand the nature of the SO alongside with “intelligence” is the term “çete”. Compared to the term “intelligence”, the term “çete” is much more useful in understanding and explaining the SO, and those handling the subject over this term would, in all likelihood, reach more qualified conclusions. Yet predominance of this term that thus far could not be conceptualized in the literature cause trouble for the associated semantics, methodology and historical practice. In this context, handling the forms of description that the Ottoman ruling elite developed to characterize the çetes might be useful. Otherwise, the elasticity of the term is lost, thus paving the way, out of a presumed “precise” and “correct” definition, for the adoption of the term to every sort of development, regardless of the term’s respective

relevance to historical reality. Therefore, one should insist on assessing the categories that the Ottomans used to understand the *çetes*' experiences, in their own meaning and context, thus facilitating the reproduction of the meaning of the nature of the SO and/or configure the limited information on the SO.

In this context, one should pay attention to why the term is frequently used with a qualifying adjective in the primary sources such as *eşkiya çetesi*, *Rum çetesi*, *Bulgar eşkiya çetesi*, *memurin çetesi* or the *SO çetesi*. By this way, one could analyze, without refuting their respective historicity, whether each adjective attached to the term had a different rhythm and connotation for the Ottoman authorities. Such an approach can indicate the difference of the SO band from other band formations, if any. More concretely, the *çete* perception of the Ottomans is far more important than what scholars have made it, and the Ottoman authorities seem to have been more analytic on the subject than researchers.

Ömer Fevzi, for instance, in his work detailing the tasks of officers charged with the duty of banishing the brigands, divided *çetes* into two, under the heading "categories of the masters of mischief and hostility" (*Erbab-ı Fesad ve Şakavatın Envarı*). The first is the roadside criminals (*yol kesiciler*) who became involved in ordinary crimes with small *çetes* such as waylaying, robbing, and demanding ransom for the release of the wealthy people they had kidnapped. Fevzi calls the *çetes* in the second group "*çetes* in pursuit of national and political intentions" (*makasid-ı milliye ve siyasiye takip eden çeteler*) that had a congeneric structure including both local and foreign

elements and were derived from committees in pursuit of certain political objectives.¹⁹⁹

An annotation added to the Law of Bands (*Çeteler Kanunu*) issued in 1327 suggests a similar distinction. In a cipher dispatched to the province of Kosovo it is mentioned that “provisions of this [Law of Bands] is not limited to those who dare to commit political crimes only, but also applies to the perpetrators of ordinary crimes” (*bunun ahkamı ceraim-i siyasiye mütecasirlerine münhasır olmayub şekavet-i adiyе erbabına da şamil*), thus the distinction specified by Ömer Fevzi, despite recognition under different names, was confirmed.²⁰⁰

Official correspondence indicates that more subtle distinctions could be made among the *çetes*. Those setting an example for the first group are generally defined as *çetes* “executing brigandage” (*icra-yı şekeavet*). This expression usually implies that the *çete* in question represents illegal and internal local groups acting against the state authority with the sole intention of plunder and robbery (*çete ve çapul*). The members of the group, on the other hand, are generally called “accomplices” (*avane*). A sample of the correspondence regarding the Kel Aşık band between the Ministry of Interior and the Province of Sivas provides a typical example:

“Bir müddetden beri Tokad dahilinde icra-yı şekavet etmekte olan ve geçen gün yolda tesadüf ettiği jandarma piyade neferinin mavzer tüfengini gasb eden Kel Aşık çetesinin takibine çıkarılan müfreze ile vukubulan müsademede şaki-i merkumun avanesinden Acem Mehmed meyyiten elde edilmiştir.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Ömer Fevzi, *Muhâfaza-i Âsâyişe Me'mûr Zâbitânın Vezâifi: Usûl-i Ta'kib-i Eşkiyâ' ve Çete Muhârebeleri* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i İkbâl, 1325/1909-1910), 20-29.

²⁰⁰ BOA. DH.MUİ.; cipher from the Ministry of Interior's Office of General Communication to the Province of Kosova (25 Eylül 1325/8 October 1909); D: 80/-1, G: 11.

²⁰¹ BOA. DH.EUM.KADL.; from the Province of Sivas to the Ministry of Interior (19 Ağustos 1329/1 September 1913); D: 30, G: 31.

A similar opinion is held in a telegram dispatched by İbrahim Bey, the Governor of Thessaloniki, to the Ministry of Interior:

“Yenice havalisinde icra-yi şekavet eden çete reisi Gono, Halil Bey kumandasında sevk edilen müfreze tarafından pusuya düşürülerek meyyiten istihsal edildiği bera-yi malumat maruzdur.”²⁰²

Expressions frequently encountered in correspondence such as “icra-yı şekavet” and “avane” denote, within military terminology, that the band in question was simply made up of brigands and associated with ruffraff. Similar phrases, however, had widespread coverage in political terminology, too, and accordingly should be distinguished from their military usages. For example, after the proclamation of the Constitution on July 23, 1908, opponents of Abdulhamid II frequently used such expressions out of context in propaganda intended specifically to decipher the spy network of the sultan. The pamphlet, *Mebusana Takdim Olunan Hafiyelerin Listesi yahud İstanbul'da Kimler Hafiyelik Etmiş*, published in 1909 is a good example. According to the author, Mahmud, spies are divided into four categories, the second of which was composed of “the chiefs of brigand bands that are found in the capital and other Ottoman realms” (*payitaht ile Memalik-i Osmaniye'de teessüs etmiş haydut çetesi resileri*) and those taking part in their bands are called “avane”.²⁰³ Here, it appears that the terms that were given another meaning, different than the case in their military usage and actually out of context, in order to imply that the duties performed by the spies are simply inferior, thus

²⁰² BOA. DH. EUM.KADL.; from the Province of Salonika to the Ministry of Interior (15 Şubat 1326/28 February 1911); D: 22, G: 49.

²⁰³ Mahmud, *Mebusana Takdim Olunan Hafiyelerin Listesi yahud İstanbul'da Kimler Hafiyelik Etmiş*.

directly contributing to the efforts to create a negative atmosphere about the sultan and his spy organization.

Another noteworthy point about the first group is that these *çetes* are generally defined as “bandit bands” (*eşkiya çetesi*) and gain meaning in the eyes of the ruling class by the name of its chief. In this context, the nationality of *çetes* before the state only had a secondary importance. As long as bands, such as the bands of Kastana in Crete,²⁰⁴ of Vasil Captain in Thessaloniki,²⁰⁵ of Miloş,²⁰⁶ or of Yovan in Varna²⁰⁷ were involved in mere banditry, it had no importance for the state whether they were Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, or Armenian. There was no difference between those leaders, and the bands of Gökçe Hüseyin²⁰⁸ or of Karabey in İzmit.²⁰⁹ In correspondence in which the names of the bands’ chief could not be specified, the bands’ nationality was added before expressions such as “bandit band” or “bandit”.²¹⁰

From the perspective of the Ottoman ruling class, the most fundamental aspect that distinguished two groups of *çetes* from each other was that the *çetes* in the second group were involved in banditry for a certain political and national aim, which was intertwined with a motive of vengeance.

²⁰⁴ BOA. İ.MTZ.GR.; D: 25, G: 913 (27 Şaban 1308/7 April 1891).

²⁰⁵ BOA. DH.MKT.; D: 1444, G: 68.

²⁰⁶ BOA. BEO.; D: 1024, G: 76774 (20 Cemaziye'l-evvel 1315/17 October 1897).

²⁰⁷ BOA. DH.MKT.; D: 2546, G: 44 (14 Cemaziye'l-ahir 1307/5 February 1890).

²⁰⁸ BOA. MV.; D: 198, G: 75 (24 Şaban 1333/7 July 1915).

²⁰⁹ BOA. Y.PRK.ASK.; D: 146, G: 85 (23 Receb 1316/7 December 1898).

²¹⁰ Band also signifies different meanings outside the aforementioned context. For example, “*çete kayığı*” or “*çete sefinesi*” refers to a kind of ship at different size and shape used to move the cannons whereas the “*çete başbuğu*” refers to the responsible of those ships. See for examples: BOA, HAT, d: 1133, g: 45180/H (29 Zilhicce 1230/2 Aralık 1815); BOA, C.AS., d: 96, g: 4398 (29 Rebiülahir 1205/5 February 1791); BOA, C.BH., d:179, g: 8436 (11 Receb 1205/16 March 1791).

Such çetes were generally perceived as illegal and external or externally-oriented entities intended to tear the Ottoman system down. Çetes pertaining to this group generally gained importance by nationality, rather than the name of their chiefs or expressions such as “bandit”. It was this fundamental difference between, for instance, the Kel Aşık band, which espoused brigandage in the environs of Aydın,²¹¹ and a Greek band “that was occupied with military build-up to trespass the Ottoman frontier”, or Bulgarian bands “that were suspected, along with their Armenian counterparts in Istanbul, to attempt to stir up a revolution aimed at overthrowing the central government.”²¹²

There were a few common points between these two groups of çetes. The actions of both groups were secret and illegal and these actions had judicial penalties. Both groups used similar unconventional warfare methods and were formed on the basis of volunteerism. Here, the çetes’ relationship to other milieus, numbers, and objectives result in the key words that fundamentally distinguish these two groups from each other.²¹³ For instance, in a telegram dated August 23, 1916, of the Investigation Commission (*Tahkik Heyeti*), established to investigate the activities of Greek bands in the Black Sea region, information on the activities of 30 bands active in the

²¹¹ BOA, DH.MUİ., d: 2/-3, g: 3.

²¹² BOA, Y.EE., d: 15, g: 109.

²¹³ For instance, that Ottoman citizen Armenian volunteers who gathered in Rusçuk were sent to Russia by the Russian consul there and having been organized as bands, were sent back to Ottoman State, that some Armenians living in Kalas and Ibrail were given passports by the Russian consuls without any difficulty, and that subsequently Armenian bands under Russia’s thumb held a place in various massacres at different regions of Anatolia might have been examples of such a perception. BOA, HR.SYS., d: 2871, g: 1/1 (7 Teşrin-i Sani 914/7 November 1914); BOA, HR.SYS., d: 2871, g: 1/4 (7 Teşrin-i Sani 914/7 November 1914) ve g: 1/16 (25 Teşrin-i Sani 914/25 November 1914); BOA, HR.SYS., d: 2872, g: 2/9, 10, 11, 17 (21 Receb 1334/24 May 1916).

regions of Samsun, Bafra, Çarşamba, Terme, Ünye and Sinop, their leaders, the area of action and respective activities were reported. What attracts attention here was the crucial role played by the Armenian bands to plan and coordinate the activities in the region for a common cause. Specifically, the activities of Artin (Vanlı) and Antranik, two of the most eminent Armenian brigands, in Samsun and Trabzon, should have given the Ottoman authorities an explicit message about the matriculation of these bands into Russian strategy.²¹⁴

Ömer Fevzi was correct to distinguish the bands derived from committees in pursuit of certain political and national aims from the first group. He wrote his book in a period when various bands founded by various committees ran wild in the Balkans. Greek, Serbian and Albanian Committees, as well as the IMRO completed their jobs using bands that they formed on the basis of militants recruited both from military and civil society. They were equipped, armed, fed, and sometimes sheltered by the villagers. In a sense, the bands provided one of the most significant bases for the committees.

Neither the members of the CUP nor of the SO were unfamiliar with the terms, “committee” and “band”. In the post-war proceedings, the court-martial board was concerned about the implication of the “band” and posed a question in this direction to Cevad Bey, Central Commander of Dersaadet: “What do you imply by the term, “band”? Is it correct to name a detachment, a platoon, or a troop that belongs to the Ministry of War and Army?” The answer provided by Cevad Bey was hardly satisfactory: “This might be one of

²¹⁴ Ahmet Tetik, “Çeteler, Venizelos ve Patrikhane” *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Pontus Sorunu*, ed. Veysel Usta (Ankara: Serander, 2007), 211-214.

the failures of the Ministry of War. In the orders received from the Ministry of War, it took place exactly the same way. Some were called bands, others were called volunteer troops.”²¹⁵ The chief justice asked the same question to Atif Bey, another member of the SO Supervisory Council, and in return received an answer that unfolded the structural features of an SO band: “Sometimes they are referred to as bands, sometimes as platoons. Then we, between us, call their directors, chiefs, and the council they founded committee.”²¹⁶

The point Atif Bey drew attention to highlights a tradition about the origins of the SO. Conscious choices and initiatives that had been made to eliminate the obstacles on the road to the revolution, long-desired and projected by the CUP, unconsciously laid the foundations of the most basic mode of action in the SO, the unconventional warfare by the use of armed bands. These bands and, of course, self-sacrificing organizations, once used to open both the way to the governance of the country, and political channels that sometimes came to a deadlock after the proclamation of the Constitution, no doubt acquired political qualification. From this it is quite clear that CUP bands that were used both to grab power and impose its own ideology by overthrowing the existing political authority, bear a striking resemblance to the second group of *çetes* that were organized around a certain ideology and objective, meaning, the *çetes* in pursuit of national and political objectives.

²¹⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 65-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

²¹⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 86-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

The SO bands, on the other hand, represent a formation aimed at supporting the state's war strategy within the military field. The inclusion of volunteers recruited from a host of various sources in the SO, such as men who did not reach draft age, brigands, deserters, prisoners, detainees, and suspects, does not alter this conclusion. As the present study will partially elaborate, the SO bands were designed as a sort of small and mobile military unit recruited legally from a series of different sources, to facilitate the movement capacity of the major divisions of the army by preceding the general march; to infiltrate enemy territory; to weaken the enemy's ability and morale to fight in military and semi-military operations by unconventional methods like sabotage, raids, incursions, and demonstration attacks; to act as a reinforcement, as well as forming the principal force alongside volunteer battalions and detachments where there were no forces at the level of a headquarter.²¹⁷

As a matter of fact, while the inventors of the brigandage in the CUP were Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir and Dr. Nazım, it was Enver who, having experienced its limits in Tripolitania and Balkan Wars, appropriated it for the Ottoman Empire as a systematic organization during his ministerial office. Although the bands of both the CUP and the SO resemble each other in terms of the tactics and techniques used in operations, as well as the human resources utilized, they represent two completely distinct organizations in terms of their objectives and usage area. The presence of the state support

²¹⁷ Among the meanings of this word derived from Albanian, Şemseddin Sami counts the "company, crew, team", "military company, battalion", and refers to different meanings of the "brigand (çeteci)"; first, "soldier passing forward with a band, vanguard soldier", the others, "marauder", "lowlife". Şemseddin Sami, *Kâmûs-ı Türki* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2002), 506-507.

behind the SO would encapsulate a much more complex and different structure from the CUP bands in terms of its scope, force, benefits, constraints, logistics, and combat methods.

It should also be noted that even though the SO bands could be differentiated, the usage or the misuse of the “band” or overestimation of this term in the literature narrowly confines the SO. In this context, addressing the sources of negative association on the band in general, and the SO bands in particular, might eliminate confusion.

Discarding the elasticity of the term “band”, plays an important role in the formation of this negative association. Ignoring this distinction disregards the actual work of the SO band. Although it will be discussed in detail in Chapter II, it should be briefly noted at this point that the illegal activities that the SO itself occasionally embarked upon which sometimes amounted to massacre, are also responsible for the formation of this negative perception. It is, however, an undeniable fact that the most important source that profiled this approach is the proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal of 1919-1920.

It is true that these investigations offer serious and reliable information on the administrative and operational structure of the SO. Nonetheless, one should pay attention to certain points in order to configure the present level of knowledge on the SO, and for the conclusions that could be drawn from these investigations to be healthier. For if one is to give credence to the ordinance, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the SO is an organization formed by the convicts released from the prisons and deemed responsible with doing the “dirty” work of the CUP, and that it is the SO’s

Supervisory Council that prepares the ground for the “homicidal actions” (*harekat-ı cinayetkarane*) of these bands and charged with secretly carrying out the orders received from the Central Committee of the CUP. According to the court board, the SO bands, with the support of various people involved without discrimination of gender or sect, in the “massacre of population, seizure of goods and money and burning down of buildings and corpses, molestation of honor, torture and conduct of turpitudes”. In this context, a portion of the victims were Turks and the most significant portion was Armenians.²¹⁸

In other words, the court implied that the SO was founded to harm through the use of bands under a legal pattern, and within the context of this trial to annihilate the problematic minorities upon the secret order it received from the CUP. This methodologically problematic definition actually tars the SO bands with the same brush of the brigand bands or bands in pursuit of political objectives by oversimplifying its complex nature. Such a description of the SO bands, no doubt, was limited to exclusive concentration on one operational base of the SO, and accordingly missing, if not misleading. The legitimacy of this definition requires further justification that would inevitably involve questions such as whether the activities against the Armenian or Greek population were really the key and singular components of the SO bands.

If that is the case, then it would be true that such activities alone could characterize and define the nature of the SO bands. If not, one risks ignoring the multi-faceted features of the bands, one of the most important

²¹⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337, No. 3540, s. 5-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 April 1919).

determinants of the SO. As will be partially elaborated in the present study, the complex nature of the SO bands cannot be fully understood in isolation from its operational experiences both within the boundaries of Anatolia and elsewhere such as Bulgaria, India, Afghanistan, Iran, Tunisia, and Libya. In other words, comprehension of the SO through the study of the bands at its command to fully grasp what it really was and what it did, requires far more geographical width and historical depth than the narrow approaches applied so far.²¹⁹

Employment of the term, *çete* as the essential epistemic guide, on the basis of these tribunals, to defining the SO, on the other hand, fails to historicize the SO's operational units other than that of *çetes* (also volunteer battalions and detachments within this context) that might be named as special and auxiliary forces. Therefore, they could play a role in averting the fundamental questions that can developed over *çetes*.

The court board, concerned more with the illegal activities the SO involved in rather than its overall activities, laid continual stress on the militants recruited into the SO's operational units. This particular attention of the court board can be said to create a blind spot for the critique of the methods for the formation of the SO bands, and might lead researchers into misunderstanding more often than insight, such as the faulty and misleading explanation that almost all the SO bands were made up only of prisoners and brigands pardoned. The SO, undoubtedly, benefitted from the prisoners

²¹⁹ As a matter of fact, the dossiers maintained by the Translation and Composition Branch of the successor of the SO, the Office for Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Şarkiye Dairesi*, OEA), constitute conclusive evidence for the given geo-strategic depth: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Tripoli, Egypt, Iran, Baluchistan, India, Afghanistan, Bukhara, Khiva, Southern Caucasus, Northern Caucasus, Crimea, and Zionism. ATASE, BDH; topics dealt by the Translation and Composition Branch of the OEA, F: 1844, D: 72, I: 10.

released and the brigands pardoned.²²⁰ However, this does not legitimize neglecting the SO bands formed by the employment of various other methods and sources, such as the initiatives of governors and regional governors²²¹, the National Defense Society²²², the CUP and Germany, as well as voluntary applications²²³ and the recruitment of deserters and draft-dodgers. Nor is it enough to demonstrate that the number of units formed by the employment of prisoners and brigands had the highest ratio among the SO bands.

Qualifying the SO militants as “bloodthirsty” and “murderers” by the court board is essentially related to this approach. Given the trial’s context in which such statements were made, the court might have felt justified in making such judicial interpretations. At the same time, researchers can easily detect the overgeneralizations herein as the legitimacy of this argument requires further justification that should before all else provide at least a statistical database indicating both the ratio of the total number of prisoners released during the First World War to the ratio of the prisoners employed in the SO, and the range of the types of crimes that the SO militants perpetrated. Unfortunately, neither the court board nor any historian has thus far directed their efforts to that end.

²²⁰ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Province of İstanbul to the Ministry of Interior (24 Teşrin-i sani 1330/7 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/17.

²²¹ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Subgovernorate of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior (18 Teşrin-i sani 1330/1 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/9.

²²² ATASE, BDH: from the Executive Board of Central Committee of the National Defense Society to Halil Bey, Central Commander (4 Kanun-i evvel 1330/17 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/48.

²²³ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Province of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/6.

This approach, on the other hand, removes the difference between various penalty institutions such as prison (*hapishane*), public prison (*umumi hapishane*), detention house (*tevkifhane*), jail (*mapus*), and between the judicial definitions such as convict, suspected, and detainee. Hence, the penalties of a jail convict imprisoned for three days and a prison convict confined to hard labor for more than two years, or the penalties of a convict and a suspect can easily become one and the same without knowing the type of crimes in both of the examples. It should further be noted that this approach might make the geographical width of the SO's theater of operations and its strategic depth invisible due to both the construction of the argument on the basis of fragmentary and mostly controversial data concerning specifically eastern and southeastern Anatolia, and undesirable overgeneralizations about the general characteristics of the SO on the basis of this information.

In sum, "intelligence" and "band" might serve as useful tools for the comprehension and interpretation of the SO, so long as they are used within their own definition and context. The international and domestic environment in which the SO has been discussed seems to offer, however, no incentive to treat the subject reasonably. It is thus not a coincidence that some researchers who are inclined to eulogize the cadres who served the state and adopt a similar ideology and romantic approach toward the SO, have generally employed the term "intelligence", whereas some other experts with a contrary motivation have opted for the term, "band" to comprehend the subject. If not, it would be rare to detect contemporary political and ideological currents and concerns in SO narratives. On one hand standard

quotes and epic narratives unduly flatter the SO, while on the other, formulaic and repetitive criticisms illogically deprecate the organization. Oftentimes the leanings of any given work are not apparent at first glance, but upon closer inspection, the deep and widespread nature of bias concerning the SO is clear. The subject should be freed of the baggage that has so long weighed it down and saved from the quagmire in which it is currently mired among the two camps of Turkish intelligentsia and, of course, of the historiography of the recent past. In other words, the SO should be a subject of history before being a subject of politics and law. Undoubtedly, insisting on the present preoccupation with historical romanticism at the expense of historical consciousness would only lead the SO narratives to assume a more ahistorical character, denying any shades of gray.

CHAPTER III

WHAT IS THE SPECIAL ORGANIZATION?

Chapter One was devoted to the determination and analysis of various trends that emerged in the study of the SO out of the terms, “intelligence”, and “band”. In this context, it was mentioned that the SO definitions created from these two most decisive conceptual tools have not been arrived at systematically, and bear considerable uncertainty and are ultimately unsatisfactory. This approach, as noted earlier, raises certain difficulties in delimiting the scope of the subject. This scope problem does the groundwork for the inclusion of matters that are not properly related to the SO in the study of the SO or vice versa. In other words, despite a series of gracious attempts, the SO has maintained its place in the literature as an organization hitherto not properly defined.

This does not necessarily mean that the roles played by these terms in understanding the SO and structuring the accumulation of knowledge on the subject have no value. As discussed in Chapter One, it is possible to draw more sound conclusions on the SO by rendering these epistemic tools more useful. Notwithstanding, this chapter argues that the most effective way to understand and make sense of the SO is closely related to the

conceptualization of the term, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, because the relation between this term and its referent considerably facilitates, compared to other conceptual tools, both to produce a simple definitional model of the SO and delimit its scope. Although this might seem like a mere game of words at first glance, it is anticipated to move experts one step closer to the essence of the matter.

The first subject that will be touched upon in this chapter will be the analysis of the operational features of the SO through the conceptualization of the term, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”. Secondly, the essential factors that made it convenient to set this unconventional warfare organization in motion in the First World War will be briefly discussed. Since those factors are closely related to the period roughly between 1911 and August 1914, the period that can be defined as the phase of formation and experience, this discussion will pave the way for the analysis of significant developments preceding the foundation of the SO. Accordingly, this chapter might also be partially regarded as the continuation of the foundation discussions detailed in Chapter One. The third section is devoted to the practical benefits expected from the SO by the Ottoman ruling elite. However, as will clearly emerge later on, those expectations always brought with them certain limitations on the maneuvers of the SO, and remained as the weakest aspects of the organization until its closure. In this context, firstly, logistical activities and limitations of the SO as a manifestation of the will to gain victory at little cost will be analyzed generally by adhering to examples drawn from the SO activities in Libya. Secondly, military expectations and limitations will be discussed. The last section tightly connected to the previous, details human

resources of the SO and its limitations. This will eventually necessitate touching briefly on the formation methods of the SO operational units and their indiscipline.

3.1 Operational Features of the SO

Of the two lexical constituents of the phrase, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, more important is the latter part, that is the adjective, “Mahsusa” (special), qualifying the noun, “Teşkilat” (organization). This adjective, by which the particular signification of the organization is denoted, evokes its paired opposite adjectives such as ordinary, unspecialized, common, and regular. Such antonym adjectives, when associated with the first constituent of the phrase, reveal another subconscious phrase with the opposite meaning, like that of a “regular organization”. This phrase or image that specifies the place where the SO is derived in our minds relates to the confrontation of two regular forces, or of two armies that are almost equal in strength. In other words, forces that can be called the opposite of the SO underscore in our minds the conventional image of warfare, according to which a war takes place between two organized political units and each of the regular belligerent forces has access to certain and mostly similar coercive means, resources and determined operational practices as well as various channels, through which manpower is mobilized.

In other words, although the SO has been taken simply as a proper name in the literature, even the phrase itself suggests that the SO points to a

formation outside the standards. It is possible to adduce examples supporting that the term SO originally connoted a mode of action rather than the proper name of an organization. In his detailed analysis of the First Suez Campaign (1915), Captain Dukakinzade Feridun, whose works were used as textbooks in the War Academy during the early Republican period, notes that Mümtaz Bey (İzmitli), Aide de Camp of Enver Paşa, was sent “to Syria for the purpose of raising a special organization from the Bedouins”.²²⁴ Referring to the Temporary Government of Western Thrace, Cemal Paşa, Naval Minister and the Commander of the Fourth Army, mentions that he persuaded the Supreme Military Command and the government to accept the principle of condoning the actions of a semi-official special organization beyond the river Meriç.²²⁵ Addressing his duty in the SO during the post-war trials, Atif Bey (Kamçıl), a member of the Supervisory Council of the SO, states that, “a desire had been shown to get together as a special organization and serve the country in that way, and we accepted it.”²²⁶ In a similar vein, Arif Cemil, speaking of a decision taken during the meeting held in the quarters of the Central Committee of the CUP on the day of the proclamation of the general mobilization for the First World War, expresses that, “this decision, whether we join the Great War or not, was aimed at the establishment of a special organization to facilitate the future movements of our armies on enemy territories.”²²⁷

²²⁴ Feridun Dukakinzade, *Filistin Cebhesi* (İstanbul: Askeri Akademiler Kumandanlığı Matbaası, 1927), 27.

²²⁵ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat* (İstanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1996), 53.

²²⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

²²⁷ A. Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” *Vakit Gazetesi*, November 2, 1933.

The salient point in all four examples is evident: the SO signifies a formation, a mode of action outside military standards, rather than a proper name or an institutionalized organization. This mode of action evolved into an organization that came to be called by a proper name. Compared to its previous usage, the phrase gained a more analytical meaning with the proclamation of the general mobilization; it would now point to three essential characteristics that would explicitly clarify the true identity of the SO: to the special military formation that functioned as a sort of unconventional warfare organization, to the special mission this formation was charged with or to the special purpose this formation was directed at, and finally to the special position it occupied within the military-civilian bureaucracy. The Ittihadists, mentioning the SO, were most probably specifying these features of the organization. Though detailed in Chapter Three, it must be now maintained that none of the phrases such as Hafi Teşkilat, Şube-i Mahsusa, Umur-i Şarkiye Dairesi, Umur-i Aktar-i Şarkiye, Kalem-i Şarkiye or Umum-i Şarkiye Müdüriyeti were used, save for exceptional practices, in the place of the SO. In other words, the Ottoman ruling elite in their formal correspondences did not use any alternative names other than the SO, which emphasized the three features mentioned above.

Therefore, what was the difference of the mode of action carried out by the SO from the activities of the regular forces? It should be immediately noted that there was never a balance of power in the SO mode of action. The SO mode of action can be said to have occurred at points where the opponents had significantly unequal capabilities, whether in terms of manpower, logistical opportunities, or arms and armament. For example, the

emergence of the SO forces on the Black Sea coastline and Çoruh river basin might take on a meaning in this respect.

In peacetime, the Lazistan (Black Sea coastline) was guarded by the border battalion of Hopa, while the Çoruh river basin was defended by the border battalions of Sarıgöl, Milo and Hut, the headquarters of which was located in Keskim (Yusufeli). Contrary to this, with the commencement of the Russo-Ottoman War on the Eastern Front on November 1, 1914, the Russian forces in Batum consisted of the 264th Infantry Regiment of the 66th Infantry Division (four battalions), the 1st Koban Plaston Battalion, the 25th Border Battalion, an engineering battalion, a battery of eight guns, and a cavalry company. Although the duty of the Russian forces at Batum at the beginning of the war was to defend this fortified location, their superiority vis-à-vis the Ottoman forces was evident. Since the Third Army was unable to send forces to this region, the Ottoman rulers endeavored to compensate this imbalance by deploying gendarme units (Trabzon Gendarme Regiment) and voluntary troops that would participate in the war under the orders of the SO.²²⁸

Rıza Bey, who came to Trabzon in August 1914 in order to conduct the military operations in the region, began mustering forces for the SO alongside the existing border troops and the Trabzon Gendarme Regiment.²²⁹ By September 18, the number of the guerillas and boatmen

²²⁸ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, vol. I (Ankara: T. C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, 1993), 599-600; Polat Safi, "I. Dünya Savaşı ve Milli Mücadele döneminde Artvin" in *19 ve 20. Yüzyıl Belgelerinde Artvin: Göğe Komşu Topraklar*, ed. Polat Safi (Ankara: Artvin Valiliği, 2007), 76.

²²⁹ Rıza Bey, who came to Trabzon in August 1914, remained in his post until March 1915 when he fell ill. Rıza Bey did not denote the name of his illness but stated that the doctor who examined him had said that he would have to receive treatment in a state of rest and in a place with dry climate. BOA, DH. ŞFR; copy of the telegram from Cemal Azmi Bey, Governor of Trabzon, to the Ministry of the Interior, received from Rıza Bey (22/23 Şubat 1330/7-8 March 1915), D: 464, G: 34. However, it is known that Rıza Bey was at

recruited for the SO was about 600.²³⁰ This number reached 1000 by October 23. The SO guerillas, increasing in number day by day, were eventually organized under the command of Rıza Bey into the SO Regiment, composed of three battalions with a total of 1465 volunteers. On December 14, there were three officers and 3000 volunteers under the command of Rıza, Nail, and Ramiz Beys.

Since the SO mode of action envisaged that the forces carrying out this action would always be lower than that of the adversary, its aim had never been to defeat or strike a blow to the encountering army. If the forces mustered by Rıza Bey had been sufficient, he would not have requested from Süleyman Askeri, the director of the SO, a division consisting of an infantry regiment, a company of mountain guns, and several machine guns in order to capture Batum.²³¹ Indeed, the capture of Batum was significant for the

loggerheads with both Stange and Nail Beys. BOA, DH. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from Cemal Azmi Bey, Governor of Trabzon, to Talat Bey, Minister of the Interior (3 Şubat 1330/16 February 1915), D: 461, G: 78. With the departure of Rıza Bey from Trabzon, the command of the regular troops passed to Stange Bey and the command of the SO forces to Nail and Ramiz Beys. BOA, DH. ŞFR.; copy of the telegram from Cemal Azmi Bey, Governor of Trabzon, to the Ministry of the Interior, received from Rıza Bey (22/23 February 1330/7-8 March 1915), D: 464, G: 34. Following Rıza Bey's departure from Trabzon, the Ministry of War appointed in his place Staff Captain (Ali) Rıza Bey. BOA. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from Talat Bey, Minister of the Interior, to the Province of Trabzon (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915), D: 50, G: 195.

²³⁰ Rıza Bey needed boats and motorboats particularly for carrying arms, ammunition and raiding bands to the Russian coast. For example, Cevad Bey, Central Commander, speaks of the SO motorboats named Akçaabad and Rize that sailed from Trabzon to Dersaadet under the command of the naval officer Cemal Bey, the official of transport. BOA. ŞFR.; telegram from Central Commander, Cevad Bey, to the District Governorate of Giresun (20 Temmuz 1331/2 August 1915), D: 54/A, G: 222. These boats and motorboats were also used for the delivery of military wares to be made from the west to the SO. For a few examples see; BOA.ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from Ali Osman Bey, Regional governor of Bolu, to the Ministry of the Interior (28 Şubat 1330/13 March 1915), D: 464, G: 129; BOA, ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from Necmi Bey, Regional governor of Canik, to the Ministry of the Interior (1 Mart 1331/14 March 1915), D: 465, G: 7; BOA. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from Ali Osman Bey, regional governor of Bolu, to the Ministry of the Interior (1 Mart 1331/14 March 1915); D: 465, G: 16.

²³¹ Sarısaman, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 499-513.

campaign of Sarıkamış, which was to be undertaken by the Third Army; for the capture during the advance of the Third Army towards Kars-Ardahan would seriously facilitate that campaign and provide an important base of operations. However, since it was proven to be impossible to hinder the activities of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, a land-based operation was envisaged. If the Office of the Supreme Military Command had believed that Batum could be occupied with the forces under Rıza Bey's command, it would not have considered transferring forces from Istanbul to the region (the Stange detachment).²³² Thus, both the Office of the Supreme Military Command and Rıza Bey himself were aware that they would not be able to take such a heavily fortified place as Batum with the forces under their command. As a matter of fact, Halil Bey, the Dersaadet Central Commander, reminded Rıza Bey of his tasks in a telegram. These tasks were the establishment of revolutionary organizations in the Muslim-settled parts of the Caucasus, harassment of the Russian forces by transferring guerrilla forces acquainted with the region from the lands between Kars and Batum, the conduct of reconnaissance activities, and if possible, sabotaging the Batum-Poti railway.²³³ What was demanded of Rıza Bey was in a sense to blunt and attrite the will to resist or fighting capabilities of the army, rather than targeting against its physical capabilities.

The reason the SO forces were almost always fewer in number than the enemy forces and represented only a small section of the regular units they were attached to was partially due to this. For example, the SO unit

²³² *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 600-601.

²³³ Sadık Sarısamam, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 510.

under Stange Bey's command during his capture of Ardahan (December 29, 1914) was only 1000-1500 strong. These forces must have been the band of Bahaeddin Şakir Bey,²³⁴ which was on the defensive against the Russians in the region between Ardanuç and Ardahan, and that of Yakup Cemil Bey in the vicinity of Ardahan.²³⁵ In fact, it is stressed in a telegram sent on December 22, 1914 from the Command of the 10th Army Corps that the

²³⁴ According to Fevzi Çakmak, the volunteers under Bahaeddin Şakir and Yakup Cemil Beys were around 1250 fighters. Fevzi Çakmak, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Doğu Cephesi* (yay. Ahmet Tetik) (Ankara: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2005), 80. According to Ali İhsan Sabis, on the other hand, the number of Bahaeddin Şakir Bey's forces totalled 1436, 1120 of them fighters and 316 non-fighters. Ali İhsan Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım Birinci Dünya Harbi*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: 1990), 363. Although it seems at first sight that the numbers given by these two different authors do not agree, in fact they coincide exactly. For according to the standard history of the First World War published by the Turkish General Staff, the number of Bahaeddin Şakir Bey's platoon was 671 privates and 9 officers, and that of Yakup Cemil's platoon was 450 fighters. *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 601, 608. In consideration of this, the force under Yakup Cemil must be counted part of Bahaeddin Şakir Bey's forces. For the commander of the bands that took part in Stange Bey's capture of Ardahan was Bahaeddin Şakir Bey. And the number of the two forces, save for the officers, add up to 1121. For this reason, it can be said that the information given by Fevzi Çakmak and especially Ali İhsan Sabis are both pretty correct.

²³⁵ Yakup Cemil's platoon, which had set out from İstanbul, must have arrived at Trabzon in the second week of December 1914 at the latest. The number of troops of the platoon as it took part in the capture of Ardahan was around 450; its mission was to advance via Artvin and Ardahan towards the railway between Kars and Tiflis. *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 601. Sudi Bey, deputy of Lazistan, was also included in this force as an active element. Indeed he submitted to the SO a notebook of personal records including the names, paternal names and birth places of the 163 troops dispatched from İstanbul with Yakup Cemil Bey. The notebook must have been submitted to the SO after the capture of Ardahan. For it has been noted under the record of a Mekteb-i Askeriye student called Samim bin Hamid that he had fallen martyr in the battle of Ardahan. ATASE, BDH; the notebook of personal records entitled "Teşrin-i Sani [1]330 nihayesinde Yakub Cemil Bey'le sevk edilen efradın Mebus Sudi Bey tarafından gönderilen bir kısım efradın defteridir" (probably the end of December 1914), F: 1828, D: 3, I: 1-1/5. As for the state officials and Mekteb-i Askeriye students who could be considered relatively more qualified than the fighters, these were given a document stating that they had been dispatched with Yakup Cemil Bey. ATASE, BDH; the notebook of personal records entitled "Teşrin-i Sani [1]330 nihayesinde Yakub Cemil Bey'le sevk edilen efradın Mebus Sudi Bey tarafından gönderilen bir kısım efradın defteridir" (probably the end of December 1914), F: 1828, D: 3, I: 1-1/5a. According to Arif Cemil, however, the number of Yakup Cemil's platoon transferred from İstanbul was 2000 fighters. Here it seems that Arif Cemil gave the number that Yakup Cemil's platoon would only reach 6-7 months later. For a fighting force of 2000 amounted to an SO regiment of four battalions and Yakup Cemil would probably have to wait until June 1915 to become the commander of an SO regiment. As a matter of fact, while Yakup Cemil signed a letter dated 10 June 1915 that he wrote to the SO as "Commander of the Platoons in the Region of Batum," he signed another letter dated 2 July 1915 as "Commander of the SO regiment." See respectively: ATASE, BDH; telegram from Dersaadet Central Command to Yakup Cemil Bey (24 Mayıs 1331/6 June 1915) and from Yakup Cemil Bey to the SO (28 Mayıs 1331/10 June 1915), F: 1830, D: 10, I: 3; ATASE, BDH; telegram from Yakup Cemil Bey to the SO (19 Haziran 1331/2 July 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 1/33.

detachments of Bahaeddin Şakir and Yakup Cemil, along with the Milo Border Battalion, were subordinated to Stange Bey's command.²³⁶

Directly related to these points was the SO's avoidance of decisive strategic encounters, in which it was apparently deemed to be defeated. For instance, the force of the Lake Van Southern Detachment, under the command of Yakup Cemil Bey, consisted of an SO regiment divided into four battalions and the 24th Regular Cavalry Regiment.²³⁷ In comparison, the Russian forces that took the offensive against this detachment on November 28, 1915 consisted of six infantry battalions and three cavalry regiments. The Russians, by this attack, must have planned to stop the harassments of Yakup Cemil's detachment, to penetrate between the Third and Sixth Ottoman armies, and hereby to reduce the pressure of the Sixth Ottoman

²³⁶ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 602. The most detailed narrative about the actions of the SO operational units during Ardahan's capture belongs to Arif Cemil. Arif Cemil must have made use in this narrative of a no longer extant memoirs book of Captain İzzet Bey, from the Battalion of Artvin, who had been sent for reconnaissance duty by Bahaeddin Şakir Bey during the capture of Ardahan, or of reportage made with this man. This narrative especially gives information about the last clashes in Ardahan as well as on the fate of the five hundred wounded left in the region during the Russian siege. This information can be checked and indeed some of the information given by İzzet Bey coincides with the information given by Bahaeddin Şakir in a petition he wrote to the SO. It seems that the wounded left in the region were placed in an old Russian hospital at Ardahan. When the Russians fully invaded the city, however, this hospital was stormed as well and most of the wounded were killed in the first clash. The survivors were then sent via Kars to Tiflis and placed in Gorgicenov Red Cross Hospital. Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa," December 31, 1933; January 1, 1934; January 3, 1934; January 5, 1934; January 6, 1934; January 7, 1934. Captain İzzet Bey's fate was shared by Captain Nihad Efendi of the Gendarmerie, who had been wounded in the bely during the Russian siege. Previously in the SO battalions in Erzurum under Bahaeddin Şakir's command, Nihad Efendi had then served during the capture of Ardahan as the commander of the Artvin Battalion which included İzzet Efendi as well. However, it is uncertain whether Nihad Efendi was eventually as lucky as İzzet Efendi, who was able to flee to İran via Turkistan. ATASE, BDH; telegram from Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir to the SO (9 Teşrin-i Sani 1331/22 November 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/23.

²³⁷ While Yakup Cemil was captain in the Third Army Corps, 24th regiment, 2nd Battalion, 5th Company, he was discharged from the army on 22 Kanun-i Evvel 1328/4 January 1913 because of his involvement in politics. After the general mobilization he joined TM and was promoted to Reserve Major on account of his distinguished services in the region of Lazistan. ATASE, BDH; correspondence from the Ministry of War Directorate of Personnel Affairs to Dersaadet Central Command (5 Haziran 1331/18 June 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 4/4.

army on the routed English forces in Iraq. The attack resulted in a heavy defeat for the detachment and its number of active troops rapidly decreased to about 600.²³⁸ Another Russian attack mounted on February 16, 1915 against a scattered SO force of 1500-2000 strong under the command of Captain Halil Bey and the Milo Border Battalion, produced a similar result, and the SO regiment retreated in a state of disarray. The Russian forces at Ardanuç consisted of at least three infantry and two cavalry regiments as well as an Armenian artillery battalion.²³⁹

Instead of direct contact, the SO concentrated on reconnoitering to discover and strike the weak points of the enemy. This concludes that the attacks directed at the enemy in the SO mode of action had as their primary aim a psychological effect rather than physical destruction. It would be explanatory in this context to evaluate the duties of the SO during the First Canal Campaign. The SO forces forming the forward echelons of the diversionary columns of the Eighth Corps, which was to enforce the planned attack on the Canal, were under the command of Major Mümtaz Bey²⁴⁰ and Captain Eşref (Kuşçubaşı) Bey. According to the order given to Mümtaz and his attendants, the frontier (although the Sinai Desert was Egyptian territory it was not occupied by the British) was to be crossed after the declaration of

²³⁸ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 866-867. That there was a SO regiment of four battalions under Yakup Cemil Bey's command in Van Lake Southern Platoon is confirmed by the testimony of Captain Halil Bey, doctor of the fourth battalion of Yakup Cemil's SO platoon, who informed the center that the commander of the battalion, Ahmet İzzet Bey, had been severely wounded, taken to Diyarbakır hospital and died. ATASE, BDH; F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/91.

²³⁹ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 607-608.

²⁴⁰ Mümtaz Bey, the commander of the SO troops attached to the 4th Army, was appointed following the establishment of the 4th Army on 6 September 1914 as the Urban (Arabs) Commander on 9 September. ATASE, BDH; F: 126, D: 590, F: 21/2.

the war. Subsequently, all the wells on the way of Refah-Elariş-Elkantara, Hafirülavce-Biri Hasana-İsmailiye and Akabe-Kalatünnahl-Süveyş were immediately to be occupied and protected. In conformity with this, British forces in the Sinai that had already evacuated, except a few gendarmes in Elariş and Kalatünnahl, were to be cleared away by surprise attacks. Pro-British Arabs were also to be compelled to take side with Turks and the transportation and communication facilities with Egypt were to be cut off.²⁴¹

While the SO units were engaged in the activities referred to above, Britain bombarded Akabe on November 1, 1914, as a war action in advance of the declaration of war, which came four days later.²⁴² This incident led to the invalidation of the order dated October 7, and a new one was issued by the Commandership of the Eighth Corps to Mümtaz Bey, now in Birüssebi, on November 2.²⁴³ According to the new order, Elariş was to be occupied by the forces under the direct command of Mümtaz Bey, and Kalatünnahl by Eşref Bey. Subsequently, these forces were to begin marching toward the Canal as soon as the main detachments of the right left flanks set themselves up at these points. Then, they were to exhaust the forces protecting the Canal by organizing demonstrations and surprise attacks (preferably at night) against the cannons, as well as by shooting the sentries stationed across the Canal. They were also expected to cut off Canal traffic

²⁴¹ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi-Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar*, Vol. IV, p. I (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih Yayınları, 1979), 123.

²⁴² ATASE, BDH: F: 4130, D: H1, F: 70.

²⁴³ ATASE, BDH: F: 4130, D: H1, I: 71. Also see; Muzaffer, "Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi Çerçevesi İçinde Birinci Kanal Akını" *Askeri Mecmua* 92 (1934): 8, 19.

by sinking vessels or another method.²⁴⁴ Multiple attempts were to be made in order to enable Urban (Arabs) to cross the Canal. Seeing as there were no bridges connecting the two sides of the Canal, the SO units had to heavily rely on pontoons and sail boats.²⁴⁵ Having successfully crossed the Canal, these urban detachments were also expected to destroy the telegraph and railroad lines bound to İsmailiye as well taking prisoners from the British army officers.²⁴⁶

The aim was obvious: to increase the cost of success to the British through calling out the SO, which thereby attempted to break the superior physical power of the enemy and its will to fight by protracting the struggle over a long period of time. Another point evident herein is that there was no combat zone for the SO in the strict sense of the term. This is why such attrition operations were launched in the form of successive tactical strikes from every direction rather than of heavy blows launched by the regular

²⁴⁴ The most important issue for the Commandership was to close the Canal to the traffic. The best way for that was to sink the dredgers vertical to the navigation route in the middle of the Canal. Another way was to shoot the shipmaster and the maritime pilot or the steersman of the British vessels in the twisted places of the Canal so that the ship would strike aground or directly crash into the land. Also mines could be laid on the Canal and ships en route could be sunk by torpedoes. ATASE, BDH: F: 1836, D: 35, I: 3. To this end, fixed torpedoes were agreed to be sent to Hasan Efendi on 3 October, which were to be transported into Egypt and fired from the western side of the Canal to cut the sea traffic in the Canal off. ATASE, BDH: F: 1836, D: 35, I: 8/12. Such missions could be maintained only by making continuous attempts and settling along the coast line of the Canal. Dukakinzade Feridun, *Filistin Cebhesi*, 26. Mümtaz Bey and his company were also charged with this duty. *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi-Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar*, 124.

²⁴⁵ Behçet, *Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi* (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1930), 4.

²⁴⁶ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi-Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar*, 123-124. Mahmut Nedim mentions that adequate information could not be provided on the water supplies as a result of these reconnaissance facilities. In addition, it was not predicted that the anchored ships on the Canal would form a firewall. Şükrü Mahmut Nedim, *Filistin Savaşı, 1914- 1918* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1995), 18-19.

forces, and exposes the reason why the center of gravity in the SO mode of action varied from that of the regular Ottoman forces.

Related to this was the SO's resort to unconventional warfare techniques such as raids, inroads, ambushes, surprise attacks, harassment, terror, hit and run, and sabotage. Such appeals, however, could only score local successes. Thus it was through raids that Rıza Bey was able to capture Artvin (November 22, 1914) and Murgul and Borçka (November 22).²⁴⁷ Exploitation of the elements of flexibility and freedom in tactics, speed as well as of surprise seems to have enabled the SO to exist everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The activities of the Desert Commandership, founded subsequent to the First Canal Campaign, on the Sinai-Palestinian Front, may serve as an example in respect to shedding light on such kinds of SO operations that differed sharply from those undertaken by the regular armies.

The Desert Commandership was formed during the first half of March 1915 when the Fourth Army was reorganized under the command of Colonel Kress von Kressenstein, former chief of the staff of the Eighth Corps. The SO units left in the region after the First Canal campaign were incorporated to this commandership, which was composed of three regiments and two field artillery batteries along with a special task company.²⁴⁸ Its primary mission

²⁴⁷ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 600.

²⁴⁸ As understood from a petition written by a first year student in school of Dar al-Khilafah from the community of Northern Turks of Kazan, volunteer units attached to the SO were demobilized subsequent to the first campaign. ATASE, BDH: from HARRAS bin Bahaeddin to the SO (8 Şubat 1332/1 February 1917); F: 1857, D: 132, I: 1/13. However, both the quality and quantity of the operations conducted by the Desert Commandership as well as the quality of its forces at least approves that a part of the SO forces stayed in the desert. As a matter of fact, the volunteers under the command of Selami and Nurettin Beys were involved in the right flank detachment under the command of Musa Kazım Bey, and Eşref Bey's

was to direct the attempts of harassment against the Canal. This mission was expected to serve two purposes, the first of which was to protect and conceal the preparations for the second campaign against Egypt.²⁴⁹ More important was to detain the British forces along the Canal and in Egypt.²⁵⁰ The Gallipoli Campaign had begun, and so the Canal was constantly to be harassed in order to prevent the British from dispatching forces easily from Egypt to Gallipoli. To this end, a number of attacks against the Canal were conducted. In these operations, in which the SO units were incorporated, governmental buildings were bombed, water and oil wells, as well as railroad lines, were destroyed, anisole pigment was thrown into wells to make people believe that the water resources were poisoned, mines and fixed torpedoes were laid on

volunteers composed of men from Trablusgarp and Cirsassian cavalry regiment were attached to the central flank detachment. For a detailed narration of the 8th Corps, see; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi-Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar*, 280-284.

²⁴⁹ Liman von Saders, *Türkiye'de Beş Yıl*, (İstanbul: Burçak Yayınevi, 1968), 135; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi*, 265-268; Winstone, H. V. F., *The Diaries of Parker Pasha*, (London-Melbourne-New York: Quartet Books, 1983), 81.

²⁵⁰ The telegram sent by Enver Paşa to the 4th Army Command might be illuminating at this point: "...Su ve erzak esbabından dolayı ordunun beyan buyurulan hututa kadar çekilmesi zaruri bile olsa gene mümkün olan vesaitle Kanal'ın mütemadiyen tehdidine çalışılması lazımdır. Harekâtın sükûnet devresi esnasında topçu ile beraber ufak müfrezeleri Kanal'a kadar göndererek seyri seferi menetmeye muvaffak olacağınızdan eminim. Bu kabil teşebbüsler fevkalade mühimdir." Ali Fuad Erden, *Paris'ten Tih Sahrasına*, (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1949), 173-174. In response to this telegram, Cemal Pasha guaranteed that the forces deployed along the Canal and the traffic would be disturbed as soon as the mobile columns got started to operate. Enver Pasha then also suggests that the second campaign should be launched only if the victory seems definite. Otherwise, it would have demoralising effect on the Islamic world: "4. Ordu Kumandanlığına [23 Kanun-i Sani 1330] / Kanal taarruzunda ordunun muvaffak olamaması bütün alem-i İslam üzerinde suitesir yapacağından kanala, ancak muvaffakiyet ihtimali muhakkak derecede görülürse taarruz edilmelidir. Binaenaleyh kati muvaffakiyet temin edecek vesait hazırlanıncaya kadar İngilizlerin kanal üzerindeki kuvvetlerini karşınızda tutmaklığınız ve kanaldan vapurların geçmesini tatil ile iktifa etmeğliğiniz maksadı temin eder." Ali Fuad Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Suriye Hatıraları*, Alpay Kabacalı (haz.), (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2003), 66-67; Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım: Birinci Dünya Harbi*, 341.

the Canal, raids were carried out and ambushes were laid by the small portable detachments against the British forces.²⁵¹

Such modes of action differing greatly from the techniques of the regular armies accompanied the conclusion of the SO's impression as an offensive power. It should be kept in mind that such offensives were quite often tactical, for the SO was in fact a defensive organization in strategic terms. It is possible to observe this in almost every step of the SO operations. For example, in a cipher sent from the SO to Rıza Bey, Commander of the Detachments of Batum Area, it is stated: "What is expected of you is to reconnoiter as well as to harass as much as possible Russian military operations, by advancing in small bands consisting of individuals from the region between Batum and Kars, who are knowledgeable of the terrain inside the Caucasus".²⁵² Similarly, the first article of the regulation of the Caucasus Revolutionary Committee states that the task of the SO units in Erzurum, Trabzon and Van was "to hamper the military operations of Russia."²⁵³ The situation was not much different from that in the regions far from the center.

In Libya, for example, small operational units under the SO commanders, 15-20 strong each, continuously interrupted the telegraph communications of the British in Sellum with the east.²⁵⁴ In the joint Ottoman-

²⁵¹ For the details of those operations conducted between the first and second Canal campaigns, see; Safi, "*The Ottoman Special Organization*", 74-83.

²⁵² ATASE, BDH; cipher from Rıza Bey to Halil Bey (15 Teşrin-i Sani 1330/28 November 1914); F: 249, D: 1036, I: 29; cited by Vahdet Keleşyılmaz "Kafkas Harekatinin Perde Arkası", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, s. 47, (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Haziran 2000), 379-380.

²⁵³ Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,", November 8, 1933.

²⁵⁴ Hamit Pehlivanlı, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Kuzey Afrika'da, 1914-1918", 431-432; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi: Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleleri ve Libya Harekatı, 1914-1918*,

German operations conducted in this region deprived of regular army support, ships were attempted to be sunk, torpedoed from time to time, and raids were carried out. Essentially, the SO was designed to exploit both military and psychological effects that could be attained by attack and surprise. Hence, the psychological effect can be said to have played a decisive part in the SO activities due to the negative effects of limited physical capabilities.

Governed by this military aim, the SO mode of operation could not be fought in the expectation of a decisive result or victory. Reviewing the example of the Sinai-Palestine front, it should be known that the total number of the SO forces who were charged with securing the flanks of the army, concealing the route of the main expeditionary force as well as infiltrating Egypt during the First Canal Campaign was 1600; around 1000 under the command of Major Mümtaz Bey, Enver Pasha's aide de camp, and the rest under Captain Eşref Bey (Kuşçubaşı).²⁵⁵ Even if these units by the aid of the Eighth Army Corps had crossed the Suez Canal, which acted as a natural barrier for Britain against incursions, they would not have been able to stand their ground against the 100,000-strong regular British armed forces.

Similarly, the SO-Senusi forces comprising of three to four thousand-strong that advanced via the Siva oasis into Egypt did not have any chance

Vol. 6 (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih Yayınları, 1978), 644.

²⁵⁵ Besides the aforementioned 1600 volunteers, the SO mustered another 2500 volunteers on the Sinai-Palestine front. For these volunteer units, see; Behçet, *Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi* (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1930), 8; Ali Fuad Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Suriye Hatıraları*, 56; Ziya Şakir, *Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare ettik? 1914-1918*, (İstanbul: Muallim Fuat Gücüyener Anadolu Türk Kitap Deposu, 1944), 201; Cemil Çelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Sina Filistin Cephesinde Birinci Kanal Seferi*, unpublished MA thesis, (Aydın: Aydın Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü-Tarih Anabilim Dalı, 1999), 76-77; Muzaffer, "Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi Çerçevesi İçinde Birinci Kanal Akını", 14.

of success against the British. The Africa Groups Command had been only recently established under the command of Enver Pasha's brother Nuri Bey (Killigil), with the purpose of coming to grips with the Italians in Tripoli and the British regular forces in Fizan. Comprised almost exceptionally of the members of the Senusi order, including a very limited number of Ottoman officers generally as commanders, this force was divided into nine infantry battalions and a command center.²⁵⁶ For this reason, the occupation of Sellum in November, the subsequent capture of Seydi Barani and Mersa Matruh, and finally of the Siva oasis in mid-December can only be regarded as local successes on the part of the SO-Senusi forces.²⁵⁷ However, the fact that the British recovered from these losses and deployed large forces under General Payton in the Western Desert, and that in February they defeated the SO-Senusi forces in Elakakir, to the west of Matruh, would suffice to prove that the SO forces could not score a decisive military success through their operations.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ The cadre of the Africa Groups Command were as follows: Full General: *Fahri Ferik* Nuri (Killigil) Pasha, Second in command: Cafer el-Askeri Pasha (Bagdatlı), the commander of the *hassa* battalion: Defdefi (Senusi), the commander of the *numune* battalion: Captain Emin, the commander of the 2nd *numune* battalion: lieutenant Muhtar (Trablusgarplı), the commander of the Bir-i Vaar battalion: Giritli Nedim, the commander of the 1st battalion: Abdullah Timsik, the commander of the 2nd battalion: Captain Galip, the commander of the 3rd battalion: unspecified, the commander of the *münif* battalion: unspecified, the commander of the artillery battalion: Captain Ziya, the commander of the quarters formation: staff captain Tarık. *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi: Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleeri ve Libya Harekatı, 1914-1918*, 112.

²⁵⁷ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi: Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleeri ve Libya Harekatı*, 649-674; ATASE, BDH: from the Africa Groups Command to the Ministry of War; F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/178.

²⁵⁸ Nuri Bey, commander of the Africa Groups Command, managed to withdraw after the battle of el-Akakir but Cafer el-Askeri and his men were captured. On 24 March, the British took back the control of Sellum, forcing Seyyid Ahmed to retreat to the south, to the oasis of Farfara where loyal Senusi tribes lived. ATASE, BDH: cipher to the first aide-de-camp of the Office of the Supreme Military Command; F: 1863, D: 153, I: 32.

All this does not necessarily mean that the SO could not assist at all in obtaining decisive results. However, in order for this to happen, the SO had to be attached to the general conduct and organization of the war. Precisely endeavoring to do so, the Ottoman ruling elite integrated the SO into the war strategy of the Ottoman Empire, the only context by which the mission of the SO can be clarified.

The SO and its successor, the OEA, were designed first and foremost as strategic organizations charged with serving one of the two tiers of the Ottoman war strategy, namely to set up a military force of the Muslims of the East to be used against the Entente Powers.²⁵⁹ Since the other tier was based on principles linked to “internal progress” (*dâhilî terakkiyât*), such as the preservation of the existing borders, abolition of the capitulations and independence in administration,²⁶⁰ it would not be wrong to argue that the SO was one of the units that represented the “outward” part of this two-tiered strategy. No doubt, seeking support for the Caliphate among the Muslim-Turkish population settled in the colonies of the Entente powers was an indispensable part of the jihad rhetoric. Nevertheless, it was also equally clear that this task could not be carried out solely by a pure intelligence organization. Plans had to be developed to infiltrate enemy territory, to surprise them by raids, to warn the Ottoman armies in advance about their numbers and movements, to instigate the local population against the colonial authorities in order to stir up a spirit of resistance and then use the forces assembled for the purposes of Ottoman war strategy, or in the worst

²⁵⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/1, 13/2.

²⁶⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13

circumstances, to harass the enemy forces by various means so that they would not be able to transfer any forces to the European war scene. The SO was precisely meant to serve such plans.

This brief task definition specified for the SO, on the other hand, suggests that the SO, in regard to command and control, was the product of central planning. But this subjection to central planning should not mislead the experts to a false conclusion, as the SO heavily relied on decentralized operations. Whereas the regular Ottoman army used the principle of assembly, the SO operated fundamentally on the principle of dispersion.

As clearly seen, operational pattern of the SO differs profoundly from than that of the regular army. This pattern varied with the size of the enemy, capabilities and numbers of the volunteers, the level of the relation to the regular army, demographic and physical conditions of the terrain, as well as the financial power of the organization. It should, however, be noted at this point that the SO activities transformed into the pattern of some sort of regular warfare in regions where it was able to secure for an extended period of time. To this end, the SO would have to secure the support of local communities so that it should not have to protect itself from the enemy threats.

The establishment of the Africa Groups Command under the supervision of the OEA was a reflection of this. Due to the experiences of the self-sacrificing officers in Libya and close ties they had established with the Senusi leaders, as well as the OEA's control over the inflow and distribution of money, armaments, and equipment during the First World War, Libya, though under blockade by Italy from the east and Britain from the west,

turned into a permanent base for the SO units. In this way, the SO would have both reached numerical strength and not been compelled to protect its own rear in case of a retreat to its base.²⁶¹ In spite of this, the SO units in the region would never amount to a division.

Although the SO shared certain common features with the regular armies, its dissimilarities, however, were more striking and decisive than its likenesses. One fundamental difference in this respect is directly related to the military inadequacies of the SO. In order to compensate for its lack of human resources, the SO attempted in various ways to ensure the volunteer support required to sustain the armed struggle. This would also serve the Ottoman ruling class well. All in all, the SO would rally support for the war strategy of the Ottoman Empire, both exploiting the human resources within and out of the country, thus, the war would attain a more total character.

The fact that the CUP had tested such operations for many years in different regions appears to be the most important factor that made the implementation of this organization serviceable. In this context, it was detailed in Chapter One that the reorganization period of the CUP between

²⁶¹ While the offensive against Egypt was being planned, the SO began to muster men from south and west. In addition to this, contacts of Evlad-ı Ali tribe that spread along the coastline of İskenderiye and Sellum became effective. For example, on 1 July 1915, Seyyid Ahmed informed the Supreme Command that he had 500 recruits from Evlad-ı Ali tribe. ATASE, BDH: from Seyyid Ahmed to the Ministry of War; F: 1863, D: 153, I: 3/3. Thanks to the efforts of Seyyid Harun, a prominent Senusi who lived among the Evlad-ı Ali tribe, and Muhammed Bey Cibril, those contacts were effectively used in driving the tribes inside the Egyptian territory during the invasion. Jafar Pasha Al-Askari, *a Soldier's Story, From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq: The Memoirs of Jafar Pasha Al-Askari*, (eds.) William Facey and Najdat Fathi Safwat, (London: Arabian Publishing, 2003), 66-69. The Africa Groups Command was also remarkably reinforced by deserters from the Egyptian Coastguard as well as local population. *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi: Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleeri ve Libya Harekatı*, 648; cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (6 Eylül 1330/19 September 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/44; from Dersaadet Central Command to the SO (14 Kanun-i evvel 1330/27 December 1914); F: 1829, D: 7, I: 1/62; to the Dersaadet Central Command (16 Kanun-i evvel 1330/29 December 1914); F: 1829, D: 7, I: 1/64; to the Dersaadet Central Command (3 Kanun-i sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 1829, D: 7, I: 1/80.

1906 and 1908 represented the preparatory phase of the most fundamental structural elements that would come into being in the SO, such as secrecy and underground action, revolutionary elements, the organization of bands, and self-sacrificing units. On the other hand, the Tripolitanian War, the Second Balkan War, and the period from that point until August 1914 can be considered as the phase of experience and formation for the SO.

Even though the foundational charts of the SO that will be examined in the next chapter arouse the impression that the organization was set up in haste, the experience gained in this period must have inculcated in Enver Bey a good deal of self-confidence in institutionalizing this organization. This period bears a particular importance in respect to its representing the shift of the bands from political activism to that of military activism. This should not be taken to mean that the CUP, which considered revolutionism as a sort of “preservative activism”, had deviated from its aim.²⁶² On the contrary, the bands that were established in this period, too, were clearly mobilized on the ideological ground of saving the Empire. However, the fact that the CUP emerged as the sole owner of the state through its activities from 1908-1913 caused a change in both the enemies faced by the bands and in the purposes for which the bands themselves were used. This factor prepared the ground for the emergence of a different structure, with military characteristics in the foreground, which would be regarded as a solution for the political and military strategies developed against international political crises. This is an important factor that renders it necessary to distinguish this experience and formation period of the SO from the previous one. Indeed the

²⁶² Şükrü Hanioglu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Zihniyet, Siyaset ve Tarih* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006), 257-258.

architect of the structure that emerged within this period was not Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir or Dr. Nazım, but Enver Pasha, the founder of the SO, who happened to be the only Minister of War the SO recognized from its foundation to its disbanding. Hence, the period between 1911 and August 1914 can be considered as a phase in which the bands set up generally by the military cadre of the CUP, as well as the mode of operations that they carried out came to turn into a military formation.

As early as the Tripolitanian War, Enver Bey seems to have regarded the revolutionism they once used to topple Abdülhamid from the throne as a mean of instigating the Muslims living in the Italian colonies of Africa to revolt. In this way, the personnel who were to constitute the cadre of the SO would have tested the possibility of the formation of a resistance movement against a foreign enemy by controlling and mustering the local civilian populations in an area far removed from the center. In a sense, the SO was laying the foundations of its methods of struggle that would be most clearly seen during the First World War.

Evidence of this is a letter, which Enver Bey wrote while he was still in Thessaloniki, to his lady friend in Germany. It is understood from the letter that Enver Bey intended to conduct guerilla warfare in Libya. According to him, the Italians, by their modern battleships could easily capture the coastline. The formation of bands from local people under the command of Ottoman officers could cause the struggle to be protracted. In Enver Bey's plans, these bands would wear out the enemy by keeping close to and

constantly harassing the enemy. Especially small groups detached from the main reservations would be suddenly attacked and rendered harmless.²⁶³

This striking force was considered support to the few Ottoman military forces previously stationed in the region²⁶⁴, and its formation was conditioned not only by the use of the political doctrine's political incentives, but also by the exploitation of enmity and hatred of the enemy against each other. Enver Bey's being the Caliph's son-in-law helped solve many problems, but it would be of little use unless the intense hostility of the Libyans towards the Italians could be put to use. Enver Bey's views on this point are clear enough:

“Nos morts ou nos blessés ne nous affaiblissent pas parce qu'il y a la toujours un frère ou un fils ou un père pour ramasser le fusil et remplacer le mort et venger avec fanatisme la victime. Vous comprenez donc quel élément de force incroyable j'ai entre les mains-les Italiens peuvent a'amuser pendant des années a nous faire la guerre, s'ils ne nous laissent notre pays. Si je vous dis par ex. qu'entre les blessés il y a un enfant de 9 ans qui suivait son père dans le combat, - il a été atteint par une balle au bras droit et quand même il na pas gardé le lit,- vous voyez donc comme la nouvelle génération se prépare a la résistance!”²⁶⁵

It was relatively inexpensive to form and operate this striking force.²⁶⁶ It had to cost little in any case, for Enver Bey would not begin to receive financial support from the state until a few months had passed after his

²⁶³ EJP; Selanik, 4 September 1911, no. 38.

²⁶⁴ The 42nd Independent Division was established with its center in Tripoli during the reform of the Ottoman land forces in 1910. Although under normal conditions this division had to be 7518-strong, the actual number of the soldiers in it (at Tripoli and Benghazi) was around 4080 in May 1911. Apart from this force there were two battalions of gendarmerie (with nine squads) in Tripoli, but these were dispersed all over the region. The CUP officers who arrived in the region, about fifty in number, immediately set about mustering locals (*urban* or *mücahid*) to establish new fighting forces that would bolster the fighting power and determination of the army. *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi: Osmanlı Devri Osmanlı-İtalyan Harbi (1911-1912)* (Ankara: ATASE Yayınları, 1981), 48-50, 55, 60-61.

²⁶⁵ EJP; 19 February 1912, No. 38. Ayrıca bkz: EJP; 18 July 1912, No. 39.

²⁶⁶ EJP; Zaviye-i Magara, 23 November 1911, No. 38; EJP; Biru'l-Habel, 28 November 1911, No. 38; EJP, 13 January 1912, No. 38.

arrival in Tripoli. The Ottoman government, however, sent only 25,000 liras per month to Enver Bey to feed an entire army.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the Libyan mujahids taking part in the resistance were bringing their own arms and ammunition.²⁶⁸ Supply from the enemy was an often used method in times of shortages of arms and ammunition.²⁶⁹ Enver Bey remarked that in a short time he would no longer need military materials shipped from the homeland.²⁷⁰

Enver Bey was able to maintain his struggle for approximately a year with the bands he had established. The positive impression that the Arab bands left on Enver Bey in the meantime are beyond all debate. Enver Bey tested the limits of a resistance movement embraced by the local people, and managed to identify the extent of the psychological influence that such a local movement could exert on the enemy. In a letter from November 1911, for example, he described with praise how the Italians feared Arab bands of only 10-100 men,²⁷¹ and further, how the Italian reserve forces rose against the war that was prolonged, due to the activities of Arab bands.²⁷²

In fact it was also a novelty for Enver Bey himself to organize the resistance movement in Libya. For as we have seen in the preceding chapter, although Enver Bey had established some bands before and on the

²⁶⁷ EJP; Ayne'l-Mansur, 24 December 1911, No. 38.

²⁶⁸ EJP; Biru'l-Habel, 28 November 1911, No. 38;

²⁶⁹ EJP; Ayne'l-Mansur , 9 December 1911 (should be 9 January 1912), No. 38; EJP; the camp before Derne, 5 March 1912, No. 39; EJP; Biru'l-Habel, 28 November 1911, No. 38.

²⁷⁰ EJP; 17 June 1912, No. 39.

²⁷¹ EJP, 13 January 1912, No. 38.

²⁷² EJP; Zaviye-i Martuba, 19 November 1911, No. 38.

eve of 1908, he had spent most of his time to this point in pursuing them. Thus, in the two years following his appointment as the inspector of the Ohrid and Kırçova districts of Manastir, he had taken part in 54 band battles.²⁷³ He would assume similar duties during the Albanian revolt of 1911. In a sense, the CUP officers, both by fighting the revolutionary groups in the Balkans and being affected by them through other means of contact than battle, had learned the intricacies of guerilla warfare. However, for Enver Bey, Libya represented quite a novel thing in which bands were formed, not chased, and organized as the most important tier of the military strategy adopted against an enemy with incomparably greater resources than his own.

With the commencement of the Balkan Wars, the Ottoman officers who had previously gone through Greece and Egypt into Tripoli had begun to return to Rumelia. The officers who had served in Libya would now take part in the Second Balkan War. As a proper name signifying an unconventional warfare organization, the phrase, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa", must have been widely used firstly in this period. It is possible to obtain information confirming the *de facto* existence of the SO by this period.

For example, the correspondence of the Military Passports Center in Istanbul to investigate the identity and reliability of a certain Cihângirzâde İbrahim and his brother Hasan, as well as of a certain Mustafa Beyzâde Sâdık, his brother Hamid and his associate Hasan Efendi, who had all requested permission to travel to Kars, confirms the conclusion that the SO carried out paramilitary activities throughout the Balkan War in support of the regular army. In the correspondence, it was stated that Cihângirzâde İbrahim,

²⁷³ Cengiz, *Enver Paşa'nın Anıları*, 56.

commander of the Mujahidin Cavalry Regiment, had been a member of the SO active in Rumelia during the Balkan War and in Van and Baghdad at the beginning of World War I.²⁷⁴ Similarly, in his petition to Dersaadet Central Command, Çerkes Mehmed Nuri, a staff sergeant in the SO, states that, “I have been serving in the SO for three years”. The date of the letter is October 9, 1915.²⁷⁵

A journal published in 1914 by the National Defense Society where a summary account of its activities from February 1, 1913 - February 1, 1914 is given, also confirms that the SO was in the field during the Balkan Wars. According to the journal, about 2000 volunteers collected by the National Defense Society were enlisted to the SO during the Balkan War. Given under the command of Halil Bey, the second director of the SO after its official establishment, Captain Nail Bey, who would later become the responsible secretary (*katib-i mesul*) of Istanbul and delegate of Trabzon, brothers Hacı Sami and Eşref Bey (Kuşçubaşı), Safer Fevzi Bey, Captain Arslan and Captain Çürüksulu Ziya Bey, these forces appear to have rendered useful services in the battles of Kumburgaz, Bolayır, Bigados, Yalos, Kalıkrata,²⁷⁶ Çöplüce, Karaburun, Darboğaz and Çatalca. Considering the support the

²⁷⁴ After World War I, Cihangirzade İbrahim Bey (İbrahim Aydın) was to become President of Cenub-i Garbi Kafkasya Hükümet-i Muvakkata-i Milliyesi. BOA, DH.EUM.SSM.: from Istanbul Military Passport Center to the OEA (21 Ağustos 1334/21 August 1918); D: 29, G: 64.

²⁷⁵ It would not be wrong to believe that the author of the petition had slightly adjusted its date. Still, it can be used as evidence that the SO was present during the Balkan wars. ATASE, BDH; correspondence from Sergeant Major Mehmed Nuri of the SO to the Dersaadet Central Command, (26 Eylül 1331/9 October 1915), F: 1831, D: 19, I: 4/17.

²⁷⁶ In a letter he wrote to a lady friend in Germany, Enver Bey relates how, after he had stopped the Bulgars in a clash in Kalıkrata, the platoons sent for pursuit continually harassed them and the platoon of volunteers scored some modest successes. The platoon of volunteers mentioned here must refer to some of the TM volunteer units during the Second Balkan War. EJP; Kalikratia, 2 April 1913, No. 40.

National Defense Society provided the SO during the First World War in mustering volunteers, procuring provisions, and other logistic tasks, this early example of collaboration should not be surprising.²⁷⁷

Though actually active in the field during the Balkan Wars, the SO was officially founded, as mentioned earlier, on November 30, 1913.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, its activities between this date and August 1914, when it was attached to the Ministry of War, still remain a black hole in literature. For this reason, it would be useful to have a closer look at the elections of December 1913 held in Bulgaria, which represented both one of the first official activities of the SO and a diplomatic expansion that proved quite important on account of its results. This is expected both to offer clues into the dark period between the aforementioned dates, and to reveal that the experience gained by the SO within this region proved to be a powerful driving force that moved it to become active in other regions on the eve of the First World War.

The Bulgarian attack on Serbian positions on June 29, 1913 would start the Second Balkan War, as well as shattering the fragile Balkan policy of Danev, the Bulgarian premier. Fighting desperately against much of the remainder of the Balkans, the coalition of Serbia, Greece, and Romania, Bulgaria would also have the misfortune of witnessing the recovery of Edirne by the Ottomans. This failure, coupled with the lack of enthusiasm on the part of Russia to save Bulgaria, led to the resignation of Danev on July 13, 1913. Determined to make fundamental changes in Bulgarian policy, Tsar

²⁷⁷ *Müdâfaa-i Milliyye Cemiyeti Mecmuası*, 19-20. Detailed information on the relations between the NDS and SO will be provided in Chapter Two.

²⁷⁸ ATASE, BDH; report beginning with "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ahiren Umur-i Şarkiye namı alan ve müteakib tarihte ilga edilen dairenin esbab-ı teşkili", undated: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

Ferdinand first turned to Democrat and Russophile leader Alexander Malinov to form a broad-based coalition government. Failure of this attempt seems to have been, to a great extent, the basis of Ottoman-Bulgarian rapprochement in general, and the reactivation of the SO units in the region in particular, for five days after Danev had resigned, Tsar Ferdinand ratified the formation of an Austrophile-wide coalition government by the Stambuvolist leader, Radoslavov, which would totally mean the abandonment of Bulgaria's Russophile policy for the next 21 years.²⁷⁹

Without any exception, everyone in the coalition was liberal. Vasil Radoslavov was the leader of Liberal Party, Nikola Genadiev, the leader of the National Liberals, and Dimitur Tonchev was the leader of the Young Liberal Party. Having been backed up by the Tsar on July 16, the coalition witnessed the reoccupation of Edirne by the Ottoman army, taking advantage of the Bulgarian defeat at the hands of the Serbs and Greeks.²⁸⁰ Making matters worse for Bulgaria, the Ottoman army did not stop the advance, and marching toward the old Bulgarian-Ottoman frontier, took Mustafa Pasha on August 7. In the end, Bulgaria had to initiate direct negotiations with Constantinople. But just then, an unexpected development occurred and the SO units advanced into Western Thrace. Furthermore, they established a provisional government there, the Provisional Government of Western

²⁷⁹ Richard C. Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War* (New York: East European Monographs, Boulder, 1996), 236-241.

²⁸⁰ The SO units also took part in the recovery of Edirne alongside with Enver Bey. The most important of these was the band of Eşref Bey (Kuşçubaşı), who had set out from İstanbul and proved themselves useful during the fight. Hüsamettin Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, Semih Nafiz Tansu (haz.), (İstanbul: Sebil Yayınevi, 1996), 97.

Thrace (Garbi Trakya Hükümet-i Muvakkatesi).²⁸¹ The predominance of Turkish elements in the area in question further strengthened the position of the Ottomans in peace talks, while putting the Bulgarian government on the spot, unwilling to lose the territories gained in the First Balkan War. The Ottomans finally consented to leave Western Thrace to the Bulgarians and signed the protocol to the treaty on September 17. Meanwhile, Ottoman-Bulgarian alliance talks also began, but proved elusive due to the Bulgarian reservations, and finally, the Treaty of Constantinople was signed on September 29, 1913 without concluding a formal alliance between the two powers.²⁸² According to the treaty, the Ottoman irregular troops, that is the SO forces, was to leave Western Thrace by October 25, which would mean the end of the provisional government established by the SO units, de facto at that time. The Bulgarians completed the occupation of the region on October 30.²⁸³

It seems that Süleyman Askeri and some of his comrades returned to Istanbul after the occupation of the region, which would culminate in the official foundation of the SO on November 30, 1913, essentially qualifying as a legal organization dealing with matters concerning Western Thrace and Macedonia.

²⁸¹ For detailed information on the Provisional Government of Western Thrace, see; Nevzat Gündoğ, *1913 Garbi Trakya Hükümet-i Müstakilesi* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı), 1987); Cemal Kutay, *1913'de Garbi Trakya'da İlk Türk Cumhuriyeti* (İstanbul: Ercan, 1962); Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi, Balkan Savaşları*, vol. II, p. II (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet, 1999), 470-482; Süleyman Kocabaş, *Son Haçlı Seferi Balkan Harbi, 1912-1913 Avrupa Türkiye'sinin Kaybı* (İstanbul: Vatan Yayınları, 2000), 226-230.

²⁸² Richard C. Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War*, 251-259.

²⁸³ The occupation of Western Thrace did not proceed smoothly. The muslim population of the region became the victims of what amounted to outright massacres. For more detail, see; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Batı Trakya* (İstanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Müdürlüğü, 2009), 64-81.

Formal alliance talks continued after the occupation through the month November. According to the Bulgarians, the Ottoman intention to attack Greece was the reason behind the Ottoman wish to sign a military convention with Bulgaria. Bulgaria, however, also felt compelled to maintain balance with Russia. Yet an accord, though without a binding force, was signed between the negotiating parties in November. This preliminary agreement signed by General Savov on behalf of Bulgaria, however, did not receive formal sanction in Sofia and beyond that, Nikola Zhekov, a trusted General staff officer of Ferdinand, replaced him. Compared to Savov, Zhekov was more reluctant of the intentions of the Sublime Porte. Yet a development occurred in Bulgaria in early December that would change the entire course of this reluctant relationship.

The Radoslavov government lacked a viable majority in the Subranie election held on December 7, 1913. The fact that the government obtained only 94 seats out of 204 would pave the way for scheduling a new election on March 8, 1914. Despite the vigorous election campaign waged by both sides, in the end, the Radoslavov coalition managed to form the government with a majority of 13 votes.²⁸⁴

The Radoslavov coalition managed to stay in power more through the support of Turkish population in Western Thrace than coercion and intimidation policies.²⁸⁵ In order to secure this support, the government had

²⁸⁴ Richard C. Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War*, 260-261.

²⁸⁵ Russophile parties exerted maximum efforts for the elections, since they had been thoroughly defeated in the previous elections in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the parties of the socialists and peasants considered the government more inimically than ever and regarded the Bulgarian king as their greatest enemy. The success they had achieved in the previous elections was also a factor that caused concern among government circles. For this reason, the Radoslavov government exerted all its force to suppress and even crush the opposition. "Bulgaristan'da", 25 Kanun-i Sani 1329/7 Şubat 1914, *Tanin*, 2.

taken certain measures, including a number of concessions.²⁸⁶ For instance, Colonel Astovikov of Bulgaria signed a contract with the Turkish population in the region both to secure their support and prevent the hodjas from opposing the liberals during the elections.²⁸⁷ Such measures sometimes brought along unlawful practices. According to the 7th article of the Treaty of Istanbul, for example, the population of Western Thrace was to be considered Ottoman subjects for four years.²⁸⁸ Thus, the population of the region legally could not participate in the elections. Also, the cession of Western Thrace to Bulgaria had not been formalized during the elections. Moreover, although the Bulgarian forces occupied Western Thrace de facto, it retained an impression of an autonomous region, a land devoid of both central and local administration. Nonetheless, the coalition, through the agency of the Ministry of Interior, had issued a declaration by which the entire population of Western Thrace was to be counted as Bulgarian subjects, thus securing at least the votes of the Turkish population and their influence at the elections.²⁸⁹

Radoslavov knew that he would receive a majority of the votes in the region, as the Turkish population of Western Thrace had been under the influence of Young Turks. This is why he allowed the election take place in Western Thrace predominated by Turkish elements, while postponing it for a long time in the Bulgarian-dominated area, the İstirumca region, where he

²⁸⁶ "Siyasiyyat", 10 Mart 1330/23 March 1914, *Tanin*, 1.

²⁸⁷ "İntihabat Mücadelesi", 24 Kanun-i Sani 1329/6 Şubat 1914, *Tanin*, 1-2.

²⁸⁸ For the provisions of Istanbul Treaty, see; "Emine Aşçı, Türk Basınına Göre Uluslar Arası Dengeler İçinde Bulgaristan ve Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri" (29 Eylül 1913-31 March 1914), (MA thesis, Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Anabilim Dalı, 2007), 232-240.

²⁸⁹ "Bulgar intihabat-ı cedidesi-Müslümanlar-İlkbahara doğru", 12 Kanun-i Sani 1329/25 January 1914), *Tanin*, 1.

hoped to receive a small proportion of the votes.²⁹⁰ The underlying reason behind Radoslavov's certainty of the election results in Western Thrace was his knowledge of the campaign run on behalf of the coalition by the Young Turks. This campaign seemingly was carried out by a group of SO members, remaining in the region under the command of Süleyman Askeri after the conclusion of the Treaty of Istanbul. Despite the limited knowledge of the election campaigns in the region, it appears that 16 deputies of Turkish origin, four of which from old Bulgaria were elected by the efforts of the SO.²⁹¹ For instance, Süleyman Askeri as a candidate to the Radoslavov government, offered Celal Perin, considered "an extremist member of the CUP" by the Bulgarian authorities, and thus qualifying him to be elected as a member, registered him as a Bulgarian subject in the Gümülcine Town Hall. The Turkish candidates nominated and elected in Western Thrace were as follows: Mehmet Paşa, Hüsnü Efendi, Hoca Salih Efendi, Hacı Yusuf, Salim Nuri, Kemal Hamdi, Edhem Nuri, İsmail Hakkı, Haşim Bey, Peştereli Tevfik, Hacı Saffet ve Nevrokoplu Celal (Perin).²⁹² Interfering in both foreign politics of the Ottoman Empire and the domestic politics of Bulgaria, the SO thus fulfilled its first official mission by ensuring that a government friendly to the Ottomans and pro-Habsburg stayed in power in Bulgaria.

After the Subrairie elections in March 1914 and fruitless negotiations on a formal military alliance, talks continued between Istanbul and Sofia on commercial relations. In May 1914, as the Ottoman-Greek tensions started to

²⁹⁰ "Balkanlar'da", 14 Kanun-i Sani 1329/27 January 1914, *Tanin*, 1.

²⁹¹ For a detailed narration of Celal Perin's election activities, see; *Nevrekoplu Celal Bey'in Hatıraları*, 15-38.

²⁹² "Edhem Ruhi Bey'le mülakat", 14 Mart 1330/27 March 1914, *Tanin*, 1.

increase, however, the Ottomans once again approached Bulgaria to establish a military alliance. The Bulgarians insisted on remaining neutral in case of an Ottoman-Greco war. But the Ottomans secured some trumps that could be played to force the Bulgarians for joint action against Greece and Serbia.

Leading among these was the deportation of the officers that had remained in the region from Bulgaria. When the occupation of Western Thrace was agreed upon, a handful of SO officers had been left behind to settle the possible conflicts between the Turkish and Bulgarian elements: Cemil, Halim, and Fuat (Balkan) Bey in İskeçe; lieutenant İskeçeli Arif and Sadık Bey in Gümölcine; and captain Ali Rıza Bey in Dedeağaç.²⁹³ With the deportation of Ottoman officers contrary to the articles of the treaty, a number of officers, on the order of Süleyman Askeri, formed paramilitary forces by taking to the hills. It was obvious that the Bulgarian gendarme forces, to whom the region was left, could not cope with these bands, which could otherwise easily bring the population of Western Thrace to rebellion. This was coupled with the threats of the Ottoman government that had long intended to build a military alliance with the Bulgarians.²⁹⁴ Beyond this, the occurrence of anti-Greek riots in Sofia in the same period further left the Bulgarian government in a tight spot.²⁹⁵ In the end, though still insistent to maintain complete neutrality in case of an Ottoman-Greco war, the

²⁹³ H. Bülent Demirbaş, *Batı Trakya Sorunu* (İstanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1996), 47-48; Keleşılmaz, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Kuruluşu, Başkanları ve Mustafa Kemal", 317.

²⁹⁴ According to Celal Perin, the expulsion of the Ottoman officers incensed the Ottoman government so much that it even envisaged another war with Bulgaria. Accordingly, the army was mobilized and a large force dispatched to Thrace to advance against the Bulgarian border. Celal Perin, *Nevrekoplu Celal Bey'in Hatıraları*, 37-38.

²⁹⁵ Richard C. Hall, *Bulgaria's Road to the First World War*, 261-262.

Radoslavov government had to tolerate a military agreement concluded between the SO and Bulgarian revolutionaries.²⁹⁶

This period also witnessed the appointment of Süleyman Askeri to the Office of Immigrants (*Muhacirin Müdürlüğü*) to carry out the SO activities concerning Western Thrace and Macedonia.²⁹⁷ This directorship, in a sense, functioned as a screen to veil SO activities for a short period preceding the First World War.²⁹⁸ The background of the agreement, concluded between the SO and Bulgarian-Macedonian revolutionaries, should have been sketched during this period, between June-July 1914, as the SO officers sent to Sofia (Mehmet Ali Bey, İsmail Hakkı Bey, Halil Efendi, Yahya Kaptan, İrfan Bey, Hafız Recep, etc...) in August 1914 were notified that arms and ammunitions would be supplied to them by two Bulgarian revolutionaries, Todor Aleksandrov and General Protogerov.

This agreement of joint action seems to have been the last chain of the events interconnecting the SO activities in peacetime to its activities in wartime. As a matter of fact, nearly a month after the conclusion of this agreement, the SO was transformed into another organization that would struggle to cluster in all regions considered to be part of the Ottoman war

²⁹⁶ Bıyıklıoğlu, *Trakya'da Milli Mücadele*, 87; Keleşyılmaz, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Kuruluşu, Başkanları ve Mustafa Kemal", 317.

²⁹⁷ BOA. DH.ŞFR.; telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Aydın (8 Şaban 1332/2 July 1914); D: 42, G: 184.

²⁹⁸ Süleyman Askeri was promoted to major during the evacuation of Western Thrace on 27 October 1913, and ten days later appointed as the principal of Efrad-ı Cedide Mektebi in Baghdad, where he would never go to undertake the duty, which means that he carried out his SO activities under this official title before his duty as the director of refugees (muhacirin müdürü). When Askeri was retired from his duty as principal of Efrad-ı Cedide Mektebi, his total period in this duty was denoted as 14 years, 8 months, and 17 days. PFA; D: Süleyman Askeri, No: 6108 (Askeri Tescil/Military registration). For the most detailed study on Süleyman Askeri, see; Nurettin Şimşek, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Reisi Süleyman Askeri Bey, Hayatı, Siyasi ve Askeri Faaliyetleri* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2008).

strategy. Closely related to this was the attachment of the SO to the Ministry of War and Süleyman Askeri's appointment to the directorship of the SO with the outbreak of the war. It is thus not a coincidence that the explanation made by Süleyman Askeri concerning the duties of the officers sent to Sofia represents a small sample of the duties assigned to the SO members in other regions such as Caucasia, Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa:

“Orada kurulacak olan çeteler Sırp ve Yunan arazisinde çalışacaklar. Almanların müttefiki olan ve hali hazırda Sırlara karşı harbeden Avusturya ordusuna yardım edeceklerdir. Bu yardım şu suretle olabilir: İtilaf devletleri Selanik yoluyla Sırp ordusuna yardım ediyor, cephane, silah vesaire gönderiyor. Gizli surette asker de sevk ediliyor. Çeteler Bulgaristan-Sırbistan hududunda veyahut Bulgar-Yunan hududundan Sırp ve Yunan arazisine geçecekler, bu nakliyatı sekteye uğratacaklar, bu maksatla mühim demiryolu köprülerini havaya uçuracaklardır. Bundan başka çeteler hudutlarda kargaşalık yaratarak Sırp karakollarına telaşa düşürecekler, cepheden asker çekip hududu dövmeye Sırları mecbur edecekler, velhasıl bir çetenin müttefik bir devlete yardım etmek için ne yapması mümkünse hepsini yapacaklardır.”²⁹⁹

The attention-grabbing point in this brief narration of the activities carried out by the SO, roughly from August 1911 through the second half of 1914, is that the Ottoman authorities presumed the existence of co-religionist and co-nationalist as well as of different interest groups in the areas where the SO would carry out its assigned tasks. This presumption appears to have been the second most significant factor in putting the SO into practice. For instance, such organizations as Encümen-i Nev Civanan-ı Hindistan³⁰⁰ and Seyf-i Hindistan³⁰¹, founded on the program of Har Dayal, one of the important figures of the Indian

²⁹⁹ Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” February 24, 1934.

³⁰⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 1847, D: 91, I: 1/137-139.

³⁰¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1847, D: 91, I: 1/140-141.

independence movement, and had close relations with the SO, would serve to such an end.³⁰² Regulations of both organizations might clearly prove this point. The Seyf-i Hindistan, for instance, stipulated in its regulations “not to embark upon any attempt without the consent and approval of the imperial [Ottoman] government” and defined its aim as follows:

- “A) Hindistan’daki İngiliz hakimiyetini yıkmak ve yerinde milli müstakil bir hükümet kurmaktır.
- B) Memalik-i Şarkiyye’de İngiliz nüfuzunu kırmaktır.
- C) Memalik-i Şarkiyye’de ve ba-husus Türkiye ve Hindistan arasında muhadenet ve irtibat ... tesis etmektir.
- D) Hindistan’daki anasır ve akvam arasında muhabbet ve uhuvvet icad ve takviye eylemektir.
- E) Makasid-ı milliyeye karşı çıkanların hayatlarını her vesile ile izale ve mahv eylemektir.”³⁰³

Indeed, without the existence of such groups, the SO could not urge the local communities to take up the cause of resistance against the Entente powers. Considering the central place of public opinion in the SO activities, this seems to have been the main factor that swiftly prodded the SO into action. The SO’s cooperation with the Christian Georgians to provoke the Caucasian communities against Russia and propagandize the cause of Central powers in southern Caucasia³⁰⁴ with the Şammar tribe in Arabian Peninsula,³⁰⁵ with

³⁰² For the most detailed study on the subject, see; Keleşyılmaz, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’nın Hindistan Misyonu*.

³⁰³ ATASE, BDH: F: 1847, D: 91, I: 1/140.

³⁰⁴ Prince George Matchabell, İstanbul delegate of the Georgian Committee, informed Ali Başhamba on the program of their committee. ATASE, BDH: from Prince George Matchabell to Ali Başhamba (25 Kanun-i sani 1331/7 February 1916); F: 1838, D: 45, I: 1/49.

³⁰⁵ SO made use of this tribe when Süleyman Askeri was the commander of the Iraq Area Command. The bulk of the tribe lives in Deyr-i Zor and it also has branches in Turkey. Afterwards, it would come under the command of Halil Paşa, Commander of the 6th Army. ATASE, BDH: cipher from Musul to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (19.8.33/19 October 1917); F: 1855, D: 123, I: 3/1.

the Nationalist Party (*Hizbu'l-Vatani*) in Egypt, with Senusis in Libya, and with Bulgarian revolutionaries in the Balkans, were all moves toward this end.

Accordingly, the SO can be said to have been a sort of unconventional warfare organization established to operate mostly in Entente occupied areas through seeking the support of the local population, and directed against the military, political, and economic targets with the aim of supporting the Ottoman war strategy by weakening the existing political authorities, causing chaos, and impeding military operations.

Even though it seems possible to liken the SO to a Special Forces organization in its modern form, to define it entirely as such would be misleading, as “special forces” is a term used to describe elite military units trained to carry out high-risk assignments that regular troops cannot perform. This seems to be more relevant and descriptive for units like the Italian Arditi and German Sturmtruppen. All in all, they were both some sort of Special Forces used to open the deadlock that had been created by the long war of entrenched positions. Both of them were designed to infiltrate enemy trenches, attack the weakest parts of the enemy lines, and prepare the way for a broad infantry advance. More important was that the combatants were outfitted with special armament and equipment and these units comprised of combatants subjected to special training, both physically and mentally.

The majority of the SO's forces, however, consisted of bands, its striking force, and the bands were mainly composed of the undisciplined and uneducated populace mustered from a number of different sources. The groups in the SO that could be considered special forces were generally those groups who were responsible for gathering, equipping, and supporting

the bands. Mostly educated Ottoman officers who were well-versed and experienced in guerilla warfare were charged with commanding and controlling the SO activities in various regions. For this reason, although there were groups that could be called special forces within the SO, it would be wrong to regard it as a special forces organization as a whole.

Despite this distinct character, the SO mode of action was certainly not a new concept in history. Even the Ottoman ally, Germany, adopted such a mode of action from time to time. Von Lettow-Vorbeck's activities in German East Africa, for instance, closely resembled to those of the SO in terms of purpose and mode of action.

Lettow's intent was to tie down as many British troops as possible, which would be otherwise dispatched to the Western Front. The *Schutztruppe* (German colonial forces, known as the protectorate force) under the command of Lettow, was initially composed of 260 white officers and 4,600 *askaris* or natives in 14 field companies. His attack on the city of Tanga during the early phase of the war, on November 2, 1914, cost the British 800 dead, 500 wounded, and several hundred war prisoners. Comparatively, Lettow's casualties were only 15 white officers and 54 *askari* lives. He scored another victory at Jassin on January 18, 1915, and such victories brought him hundreds of new recruits, arms, ammunition, and other supplies to maintain the war effort for an extended period of time, and provided a boost to the morale of his troops.

Organized into small guerilla bands, generally composed of 2 Europeans and 8 *askaris*, Lettow's force, by conducting operations from Mount Kilimanjaro, destroyed critical bridges, sabotaging railroads, blowing

up trains, and ambushing convoys. Lettow's guerilla-type army had reached 14,000 by late 1915, and much like the SO, his force, while attempting to mobilize East African resources, fought an uphill battle.

With these limited resources, he resisted with his guerillas almost two years against the British attacks launched in 1916 by Major General J. C. Smuts with 45,000 men, and the offensive ended in stalemate. Against the offensive of General Van Deventer, the successor of Smuts, he managed to endure until the end of the war. However, like the SO, Lettow had no reserve to draw on. His unconventional activities came to end with the European Armistice. In the end:

“At a cost of some 2,000 killed, 9,000 wounded, and 7,000 prisoners or missing, besides six or seven thousand native carriers dead (mostly from disease), he had contained 160,000 British troops besides various Portuguese and Belgian expeditions from south and west. In hunting him, the British lost an estimated 10,000 killed, 7,800 wounded, and about a thousand missing or captured in addition to nearly 50,000 native carriers dead. Belgian and Portuguese casualties amounted to 4,700.”³⁰⁶

3.2 Expectations and Realities

In transferring this formation into practice, the Ottoman ruling elite must have taken into account some practical advantages. It should be, however, kept in mind that these practical advantages always brought along certain limitations that had remained the weakest aspects of the SO to the end of war. The SO

³⁰⁶ Robert Asprey, *War in the Sahows: guerillas in history* (New York: W. Morrow, 1994), 174. For more on Lettow Vorbeck, see; *ibid.*, 172-178; Edwin P. Hoy, *Guerilla: Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck and Germany's East African Empire* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1981); Byron Farwell, *the Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (New York: W. Norton & Company, 1989).

can be regarded above all as a manifestation of the desire of achieving victory at a lower cost.

3.2.1 Logistic Activities and Their Limitations

This is the main reason why the Ministry of War used to supply the SO's logistic needs to a limited extent. It is true that the SO was occasionally provided by the Ministry of War with special equipment and arms as necessitated by the field of operations. For example, the SO units in the Sinai-Palestine front were to be provided with time bombs, wire fence scissors, revolvers, Arab swords and equipment necessary for the destruction of railways.³⁰⁷ Though dropped due to transportation and time issues, fixed torpedoes were also decided to be sent to the SO forces in the region, which were to be transported into Egypt and fired from the western side of the Canal to cut off the sea traffic.³⁰⁸ Such examples were, however, few and far between. In this context, it must not be assumed that the equipment, arms and ammunition entrusted to the operational units of the SO were much different from those given to regular troops. Each personnel in the

³⁰⁷ ATASE, BDH: cipher by Gendarme Commander Major Hasan Efendi in Jaffa (1 Teşrin-i Evvel 1330/14 October 1914); F: 1836, D: 35, I: 2/4.

³⁰⁸ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram to Hasan Efendi in Yafa (20 Eylül 1330/3 October 1914) F: 1836, D: 35, I: 3. These torpedoes were agreed to be sent to Hasan Efendi in Yafa (3 October 1914) to be transported into Egypt and fired from the western side of the Canal to cut the sea traffic off. Correspondences were made whether the torpedoes were to be fired from land or sea. ATASE, BDH: F: 1836, D: 35, I: 8/12. However, due to tight British control, it was almost impossible for the SO units to transport the torpedoes to the western side of the Canal. Transportation of the torpedoes from the desert to the Canal posed another problem. Hence, the idea of torpedoing the ships at Canal was dropped due to transportation and time troubles although it was suggested by Hasan Efendi that the mission was consigned to Eşref Bey. ATASE, BDH: F: 1836, D: 35, I: 8/15.

SO Dagestan Volunteer Battalion, with 290 combatants mustered from around Bursa,³⁰⁹ was provided with a cloak, a suit, a pair of yemens, a puttee, a headpiece, socks, underwear, a canteen, a cartridge belt, a biscuit bag, between 100-250 cartridges and a registered rifle or another weapon.³¹⁰ However, even such basic needs were barely met, and frequently no response was given to the related demands made by the SO personnel.

The fact that the SO, at least on paper, was founded on the principle of self-sufficiency is the main factor behind such limitations. This principle relieved the state treasury on the one hand, and caused the SO's logistic activities to differ sharply from that of the regular army on the other. It is possible to examine these logistic activities in four stages.

Supply from friendly sources constitutes the first stage. In this regard, the first authority that stepped in to meet the needs of the SO was the Ministry of War, and as shall be seen in detail later on, its subordinate, the Central Command. In the second place were army commands. The orders given to the army commanders were generally issued in response to the needs that emerged after the SO units were transported to the front. For example, Hasan İzzet Paşa, commander of the Third Army, reported that 3000 rifles with 500 cartridges for each had been delivered to the district of Trabzon on the order of the Office of the Supreme Military Command.³¹¹ Since it is known that there were SO units among the platoons under Rıza Bey's command in Trabzon, it might be inferred that a part of these 3000

³⁰⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1830, D: 11, I: 1/76.

³¹⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 1830, D: 11, I: 1-75.

³¹¹ ATASE, BDH; from Hasan İzzet Paşa to the Ministry of War (16 Teşrin-i sani 1330/29 November 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 8.

rifles had been transmitted to the SO forces. It was, however, not easy as in Anatolia to procure equipment and ammunition on fronts far from the central authority due to tight controls. This forced the SO members to have recourse to much more sophisticated methods. Libya might provide a good example in this respect.

The nearest center from which the Africa Groups Command could procure the provisions, arms and ammunition it was fiercely in need of both to persuade Seyyid Ahmed to attack Egypt as well as to organize the military structure of the Senusi army that was formed according to tribal bonds was the Fourth Army Command.³¹² However, it was even extremely perilous to travel from Libya to Syria, let alone receiving the help. Cafer el-Askeri, who had assumed this dangerous mission, would suffer even more difficulties in Beirut than those he encountered on his way from Libya to Syria.³¹³ Although he received a part of the required supply, 500 modified Martin flintlock³¹⁴ (a small rifle with a short barrel that shot bullets) that Enver Pasha had shipped to Cemal Pasha with the instructions to deliver them to Cafer Bey, failed to arrive. Cafer Bey had to wait for two weeks in Beirut before he could receive the rifles. The weapons that had arrived at last, however, turned out to be 500 major-caliber Martini-Henry rifles. But the 300 boxes of ammunition given

³¹² ATASE, BDH: F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/336.

³¹³ Cafer el-Askeri, along with a document certifying that he was going on pilgrimage as a Senusi brethren from Kufra, which acts as an oasis in southeastern Libya, along with two other Senusis, Seyyid Muhammed and Seyyid Mustafa el-Medeni. They were received by Seyyid Muhammed el-Hani in Iskenderiye, where they stayed for ten days. Having reached Yafa by an Italian steamer, they arrived at Jerusalem, where el-Askeri left his companions and kept going to Syria to meet with Cemal Paşa. ATASE, BDH: from Nuri Pasha to the Ministry of War (2 June 1916); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/9; Al-Askari, 60.

³¹⁴ ATASE, BDH: telegram from Enver Paşa to the 4th Army Command; F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/12.

to Cafer Bey were only suited to modified Martin rifles. In response, Cafer Bey demanded 150 boxes of ammunition fit for the Martini-Henry rifles offering to leave the existing 300 boxes in Beirut if the modified Martin rifles would not be sent. However, he could receive no response to this request.³¹⁵ This state of affairs led Cafer Bey to complain bitterly, saying, “The weather conditions are so favorable. I am in dire straits. Returning without rifles will be no good.”³¹⁶ For all that, the rifles he demanded would fail to arrive although it had been three weeks he waited in Beirut.³¹⁷ Cafer Bey’s mission lasted about two months, and finally he had to leave for the return trip to Port-Sulaiman with only part of the necessary logistic support procured.³¹⁸

Allied forces formed another channel used to supply from friendly powers. For example, German submarines were making deliveries to Libya. The first supply delivery of such was made from the port of Kiel. The material to be shipped to Libya was brought to the Austrian port of Pola on the Adriatic coast. The OEA even set up a depot there and appointed Hacı Kamil Efendi as the manager and guard of this depot who was also charged with

³¹⁵ ATASE, BDH: cipher from Cafer Bey (Beirut) to 4th Army Transportation Inspectorate (12 June 1915); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/25.

³¹⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Cafer el-Askeri (Beirut) to the Office of the First Aide-de-camp of the Ministry of War (2 Haziran 1331/15 June 1915); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/28.

³¹⁷ ATASE, BDH: from Cafer el-Askeri (Beirut) to the 4th Army Command (4 Haziran 1331/17 June 1915); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/29.

³¹⁸ Cafer el-Askeri purchased through the agency of Ahmad Paşa Şarkevi and Halil Paşa Abdul Âl a sailing ship, on which a part of the logistic support was loaded. Afterwards, el-Askeri, along with his friends Prens Adil Arslan and Naci Bey el-Asil set sail for Alanya, and thence, in about a week, to Port-Süleyman, a point 30 kilometres west of Sellum. Al-Askari, a *Soldier’s Story, From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq*, 63-64. For the details of this journey, see the memoirs of Mehmet Emin Bey, who was back then an officer engaged in the mission of el-Askeri to get equipment and Money; M. Ercan Arıkan, “Dedem Mehmet Emin Bey ve Trablusgarp Hatıraları,” *Kebikeç* 16 (2003): 165-198.

supervising the deliveries to North Africa.³¹⁹ Gazzeli Cemal, for example, who brought ten officers, money and 250 boxes of ammunitions to Bardia on November 4, 1915, arrived on a German U-35 submarine.³²⁰ Nevertheless, there would always be some limitations on the supplies received from the allied forces. It was not infrequent that the Ottoman officers to be sent to the region found themselves compelled to return from Pola to Istanbul or that the provisions and ammunition to be taken to North Africa were denied admission into the submarines.

For example, thirteen Ottoman officers who left Istanbul for Vienna around the end of 1916 hoping to arrive at the Egyptian coast thereof were denied admission into the submarines on the strict orders of the German Naval Ministry to the attaché naval in the German Embassy in Vienna. By Enver Paşa's intervention, the officers, money, and ammunition were permitted to be sent with another submarine that was to depart in three days. According to the order, the Ottoman officers were to leave on submarine 21. This submarine, however, had not been originally intended for Ottoman officers. Its mission was to deliver the arms, ammunition and money to the coast of Tripoli, sent by the German Ministry of Colonies and the Oriental Bureau to German Captain Consul Mannesman.³²¹ In other words, if the submarine had not had to cross to Africa for Mannesmann, no submarine would have been assigned to the Ottoman officers. Sure enough, conflicting interests of the Ottomans and Germans in Libya should have been effective

³¹⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1850, D: 104, I: 1.

³²⁰ Al-Askari, a *Soldier's Story, From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq*, 70.

³²¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1863, D: 153, I: 39

at this point. After spending fifteen days in Vienna, the Ottoman committee crossed to Pola where they had to wait six days for a German officer and his translator who would convoy with them. The arrival of these two would not be good news for them at all. For the German Command of the Submarine Fleet informed them that the submarine could only receive six people and therefore only four of them would get on the submarine.³²² Moreover, they were told that they could only take along money and nothing else, on account of the arms, ammunition and eight telegraph devices as well as other wares to be shipped to Mannesmann.³²³

Admittedly, among the baggage thus left behind there were useless items such as a set of music instruments, whereas the most urgent needs of the Ottomans in Africa were provisions and ammunition. It is possible to say that not only the allied forces but also the Ottoman rulers, as it is evident from the example of Cafer el-Askeri, grasped the true state of affairs in Libya. Above all, there was nobody that could play this set of instruments in Tripoli, as observed by the officer at the head of the group. Moreover, the provisions in the region were very expensive and ammunition was hard to come by, even when paid for.³²⁴

Another method of logistics used by the SO was the supply from the enemy forces, by which the SO used the arms and ammunition acquired from enemy forces during clashes. Hence, on the contrary to supply from friendly powers, supply by this method could not be acquired before the battles.

³²² ATASE, BDH: F: 1863, D: 153, I: 39/1.

³²³ ATASE, BDH: F: 1863, D: 153, I: 39/2.

³²⁴ ATASE, BDH: F: 1863, D: 153, I: 39/3.

Thus, it was a method that could be used only when the SO forces were on the front. The reason why the SO had little success in doing so was its relative lack of success on the front. For this reason, the arms and ammunition acquired by the regular troops from the enemy was now and again sent to the SO. For example, Hasan İzzet Paşa, Commander of the Third Army, wrote to Office of the Supreme Military Command that 120 rifles captured from the Russians had been handed over to Bahaeddin Şakir Bey to be distributed among members of the SO.³²⁵

A relatively easier method was the supply from neutral zones. For example, Nuri Pasha and Cafer el-Askeri would make their first delivery of ammunitions to Libya from Greece. It was understandable that Greece had thus been selected as a key point: the tight control by the Entente powers on the sea and by the English themselves on the channel had almost entirely blocked the deliveries and transit crossings to Egypt. To reduce the risks of getting caught, therefore, Nuri and Cafer Bey left Istanbul on January 6, 1915 for Greece, still neutral then, under the disguise of diplomatic couriers of the Ottoman Embassy there.³²⁶ Meeting the Ottoman Ambassador Galip Bey, through the intermediacy of the Ottoman Consul in Pire (once called Aslan port by the Ottomans), they hired a Greek smuggler's ship from a certain native of Beirut called Muhyiddin Şatila, brother of Saadeddin Şatila, to take them to Libya.³²⁷ Using this ship, they fulfilled their first mission of procuring

³²⁵ ATASE, BDH; from Hasan İzzet Paşa to the Ministry of War (16 Teşrin-i sani 1330/29 November 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 8.

³²⁶ Al-Askari, a *Soldier's Story, From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq*, 54.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

arms and ammunition. Loading the material bought from Greece on this ship, they embarked for Benghazi.³²⁸

As evident from the example above, Şatila brothers, natives of Beirut, were used to supply the SO forces in Libya with the ships they brought from the port of Pire in Greece. The Ottoman authorities were not strangers to the Şatila brothers who were thoroughly knowledgeable about the Mediterranean and its perils. Another delivery of arms and ammunition to Libya, this time from Beirut and planned for May 1915, was also to be made by the Şatila brothers. The correspondence written by Cemal Paşa to the Damascus Army Transportation Inspectorate reveals this clearly: “*Saadeddin Efendi Şatila namında bir zat Pire’den getireceği bir vapurla Beyrut’tan 500 muaddel Martin, 2000 şınayder tüfengi, 200 sandık sivri mermi, 120 sandık şınayder fişengi alacaktır...*” (a certain Saadeddin Efendi Şatila would bring a ship from Pire and load 500 Martin rifles, 2000 Schneider rifles, 200 boxes of sharp pointed bullets and 120 boxes of Schneider cartridges at Beirut...).³²⁹

Greece was one of the important regions used to supply the SO forces deployed in Libya. However, compared to the supply expeditions made by submarines launched from Austrian seaports, expeditions from this region made by steamers and sometimes sailboats proved much more dangerous.

³²⁸ During the voyage, Nuri and Cafer first touched at Crete, then went ashore on 21 February 1915 in Defne, a point lying to the Northeast of Libya between Tobruk and Sellum. They were accompanied by Muhammed Bey el-Cebeni, an agent of Benghazi origin who provided equipment for the Ottoman Army during the Tripolitanian War, and Hacı Kamil Efendi el-Bunduki (one of Nuri Bey’s friends); and welcomed on the Defne coast as guests of Manfah tribe. ATASE, BDH: F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1-336; *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi: Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleeri ve Libya Harekatı, 1914-1918*, 111; George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1969), 146; Al-Askari, a *Soldier’s Story, From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq*, 56.

³²⁹ ATASE, BDH; from the 4th Army Command to the Army Transportation Inspectorate at Damascus (*Şam Ordu Menzil Müfettişliği*) (8 Mayıs 1331/21 May 1915); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/15.

All in all, it was much more likely to encounter the enemy forces on the sea that kept the Mediterranean under control. For example, a steamboat that had set out in April 1915 from Greece for Libya with a load of rifles and ammunition was “*compelled to jettison its load on happening across British ships.*”³³⁰

The final method of logistics that the SO used, in fact found itself compelled to use, was the supply from nearby sources. In this method, provisions, arms and ammunition were generally purchased. The cash books of the SO and OEA are full of information to this effect. For example, provisions such as sugar and clothes that had to be procured from outside Libya were bought from Tunis. However, Ottoman papers were not valid in this region as the purchases in the region were generally made with French banknotes and gold currency was not in circulation. This paved the way for both hindering purchases and overpayments made by Ottoman papers, for the prevailing situation was causing the Ottoman papers to decrease in value against the French banknotes. For example, the loss of value of Ottoman currency amounted at the rate of one fourth at Gadamis.³³¹

Moreover, it sometimes proved difficult to find arms and ammunition even in return for payment. To that end, they attempted to produce them on small benches established in the region. The benches of the Senusis in al-Masaid were, however, insufficient in meeting the need. Moreover, the purchases made by the OEA were not enough to counteract the hunger that

³³⁰ ATASE, BDH; from Enver Paşa to the 4th Army Command (15 April 1915); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/10.

³³¹ ATASE, BDH; from Nuri Paşa, Commander of the Africa Groups Command, to the OEA (20 Teşrin-i evvel 1333/20 October 1917); F: 1842, D: 63, I: 1/15.

was on the rise in Libya. Due to a lack of provisions, some tribes in Alexandria had begun to surrender, which, in turn, was impeding the plans of the SO in North Africa.³³² While the SO-Senusi forces were attacking Egypt, an officer working in the Benghazi branch of the organization added after reporting the dire need of the troops for arms and ammunition that the troops' chief and urgent need was for provisions and food.³³³

Consequently, it is possible to maintain that the fact that the needs of the SO forces with regard to arms, ammunition, and provisions, were at a level far lower than those of the regular troops, brought some relief to the state finances that had to shoulder the heavy burden of war expenses. In this respect, the Ottoman rulers seem to have placed a good deal of confidence in the supply of the SO from the enemy forces and from the sources nearby, mostly the local population. In addition, volunteers who planned to join the SO units were advised to bring along their own weapons. Nevertheless, these expectations could not prevent the supply systems of the SO from being complicated and quite often ineffective. The vehicles for the emergence of this situation seems to have been, alongside the low level of state finances, the failure of the Ottoman rulers to grasp the developments in SO's field of operations, and their conflict of interest with the allied countries. This was one of the key considerations that would lead the SO to be frequently unsuccessful operationally.

³³² ATASE, BDH: telegram from the Ottoman Embassy to Athens to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (21 March 1916); F: 1849, D: 103, I: 1/67.

³³³ ATASE, BDH: from Benghazi to the Office of the First Aide-de-camp of the Ministry of War (16 Kanun-i Sani 1331/3 February 1916); F: 1849, D: 103, I: 1/44.

3.2.2 Military Expectations and Limitations

Besides lowering the costs of war, the Ottomans expected to score military benefits from the SO. This can be clearly understood from the preceding section that described in detail the differences of the SO from regular armies. However, these expectations, too, would cause the SO to be exposed to serious limitations operationally. For example, since the operations of the SO were generally conducted secretly in the form of underground operations, it must have been envisaged that this would increase the resisting power of the Ottoman army and enable them to expect maximum benefits from the principle of surprise. Due to the conditions of war, however, the SO had to become active in a short time, which, in turn, would cause its striking force, the bands, to be initially formed in limited numbers. The need for bands could be met more readily in regions close to the center, but much less so in distant regions where central authority was attenuated. This state of affairs caused the SO to remain considerably weak in terms of planning, and military activity.

On the other hand, since the SO forces operated, often secretly, in small units dispersed over wide areas, they were not terribly vulnerable to attacks from regular enemy forces, which, in turn, provided the Ottoman State with a relative advantage to sustain the First World War for a long period of time. Thanks to the SO, the Ottomans were able to wage and conduct local and limited wars, and thereby managed to exert a psychological impact, though weak, on the enemy. Such local and limited

warfare was what obliged the SO to be deployed in the rear and flank of the enemy, two of the weakest spots. The Ottomans, by this way, planned both to gather very useful intelligence as well as surrounding the enemy from deep inside. This method, if applied successfully, could form a keystone for the maneuver plans and lay the ground for successful sieges or two-way sieges of the enemy forces. The SO, however, would never be able to achieve this success. Due to the logistic problems it faced, the operations could be launched neither in a timely manner nor effectively. In other words, although the SO was supposed to carry out its operations directly, at least in principle, under enemy control, it almost always lacked the fundamental resources with which to mount these operations. Nor was the SO the kind of organization that could constantly establish new fronts to take the defensive against regular enemy forces. This way, the SO would have no choice but to end up retreating before the enemy forces.

For example, although the SO-Senusi forces scored modest successes in the first phase of the Ottoman attack on Egypt, they were defeated a short time later, in February 1915, by the British regular forces in Elakakir, where Nuri Pasha succeeded to withdraw but Cafer al-Askeri and his men fell captive. Continuing to advance, the British, by recapturing Sellum on March 24 forced Seyyid Ahmed to withdraw south, to the oasis of Farfara inhabited by the loyal Senusi tribes.³³⁴

In any case, it was difficult for the SO-Senusi forces to maintain their initial successes. Above all, the units stood in serious need of arms and

³³⁴ ATASE, BDH: cipher to the First aide-de-camp of the Office of the Supreme Military Command; F: 1863, D: 153, I: 32.

ammunition.³³⁵ According to the report of an Ottoman officer who had travelled from Sellum to Benghazi, there were no more than 50 cartridges on average for each mujahidin. Just as Mısırlı Aziz Ali had once “ruined” all the ammunition, some Arabs who procured ammunition, either due to their poverty or greed, crossed the Egyptian border to traffic it. Some Ottoman officers whose resources were the point of being depleted were trying to purchase this ammunition through their connections in Egypt, especially by the help of certain “benevolent, religious officer friends” so as to support the war efforts of the SO. This state of affairs caused the author of the report to complain bitterly, stating: “*bu kadar güçlkle tedarik edilebilen bu cephane ile hiçbir maksad hâsıl ve temin edemez* (with this ammunition, procured with that much difficulty, no aim can be realized)”.³³⁶

On the other hand, there was urgent need for the 2500 Russian rifles (with at least 500 cartridges) and five machine guns (with at least 250 boxes of ammunition) expected to be sent by the Germans. Also needed, though less urgently, were a rapid-fire mountain gun and ammunition for large-caliber Mauser rifles.³³⁷ In addition to these, the fighters were also in dire need of shoes, and fabric and baize, required for their clothing.³³⁸ Moreover, they also experienced serious difficulties in finding provisions.³³⁹ It could

³³⁵ ATASE, BDH: from the Commander of Sellum Artillery Captain ?; F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/1A.

³³⁶ ATASE, BDH: F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/2.

³³⁷ ATASE, BDH: from the officer to the Benghazi organization of the Africa Groups Command; F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/44.

³³⁸ ATASE, BDH: F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/2A.

³³⁹ ATASE, BDH: from the officer to the Benghazi organization of the Africa Groups Command (16 Kanun-i Sani 1331/29 January 1916); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/44; from the Africa

sometimes take as long as twelve days to supply the forces, since the provisions were carried on camels.³⁴⁰ Considering such needs, it might become easier to grasp the conditions under which the SO-Senusi forces attempted to occupy Egypt.

If one reason for SO's failure to procure the arms and ammunition needed was the logistic confusion described in detail above, another was the financial difficulties in which the organization found itself. Among the examples that illustrate the dire straits in which the Africa Groups Command and Senusis found themselves are their failure to purchase sufficient amount of arms, the difficulties they suffered in making even small payments to certain sheikhs and ikhwan (brotherhood) of the fighters, needed to make them continue their war efforts, and their insistence that Istanbul would pay the salaries of those officers coming to the region for six months.³⁴¹

The serious need of the SO for security on the one hand, and the necessity to operate in enemy territories on the other, always caused it to face difficulties in medical services as well as in military operations. The SO-Senusi forces during their offensive were even deprived of the telegraph devices required to establish communication with Anatolia, to keep various points of combat in touch, and to obtain intelligence.³⁴² Moreover, due to the scarcity of doctors and pharmacists, those wounded in combat had to return as far as Sellum where the Egyptian doctors around were solicited to treat

Groups Command to the Ministry of War (2 Temmuz 1332/15 July 1916); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/87.

³⁴⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/2A.

³⁴¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/2.

³⁴² ATASE, BDH: F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/1A.

the wounded in return for little payments or none at all. This state of affairs had a significant negative effect on the psychology of the fighters.³⁴³

3.2.3 Methods of the Formation of the Operational Units

In forming operational units, the SO essentially made use of seven different methods. It is possible to summarize these methods as deployment of prisoners; the initiatives of governors, subgovernors, and county administrators; voluntary applications; the initiatives of the National Defense Society and Central Committee of the CUP; drafting deserters from the army; and finally, in those regions under weak central control, setting up units by means of propaganda, promotions, gifts and money. The first six among these methods were frequently used in Anatolia, especially for supporting the operations on the Caucasian Front. But it should also be kept in mind that the units assembled through these methods were sent to other fronts as well. The final method has precedence over other methods in that it was the most frequently and longest used method by the SO, conducted up to the end of the war in a vast geography extending from North and Central Africa to Iran and India, including above all, the Sinai-Palestine front. Many of the first six methods, on the other hand, ceased to be used after the OEA became active.

³⁴³ ATASE, BDH: F: 248, D: 1031, I: 1/2.

All these methods had been developed to enable the SO to draw upon the human resources pool boundaries, of which were designated by the state. They were accordingly not independent of each other but rather tightly nested and permanent. The borders of the pool in question began with human resources that had not been drafted to the army and extended to those who lived in neutral zones, occupied Ottoman territories or colonies of the Allied Powers, and who could be instigated against the latter. These two ends of the human resources pool represented a necessity, and the seven methods outlined above represented the range of choices in between.

Indeed, the SO could not take personnel from the army due to Ottoman State's great need for regular units. In spite of scores of applications from the battalions, especially from the labor battalions (*amele taburları*), to be enrolled in the bands, it was not warrantable to put those registered to regular detachments at the disposal of the bands, unless there had been an absolute necessity.³⁴⁴ Personnel the SO received from the regular units was limited to officers, who were expected to be highly trained (though most were not) in order to command and coordinate the unconventional warfare operations.

Hence, the SO had to apply to the state's immobilized human source; that is, the male population of the state that was younger than 20 and older than 40 years old. In this context, the SO could recruit brigands from the people who were at the age of soldiery but not yet enlisted in the army for any reason whatsoever, and from the recruited individuals whose discharge

³⁴⁴ ATASE, BDH: F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/39.

or dispatching were postponed.³⁴⁵ In the SO operational units were also those who wanted to be included in the army again after deserting their detachments.³⁴⁶ Apart from the sources within the military sphere, the SO had the right to take advantage of those who were extraneous to military service, and coreligionist-ethnic and interest groups that could be agitated against the allied powers. Within this range, there were convicts released from prison, bandits, tribes who resisted state control and were exempted from military service, emigrants and refugees, orthodox and heterodox Islamic groups, doctors, engineers, journalists and politicians of Muslim or other faiths, and of course men of religion.

The seven methods in question were developed to draw upon these human resources. A thorough discussion of all the aspects of the methods used by the SO to set up its operational units, however, is beyond the scope of this research and would be the subject of another thesis. The aim of this section is rather restricted to highlighting the bureaucratic procedures involved in the establishment of the SO units, the mechanisms that resulted from such procedures, and the effects of those mechanisms on the operational and administrative features of the SO. The second part of this section will be devoted to the type of limitations imposed on the SO by the methods in question, as well as the volunteer units set up through the mechanisms to be examined in the conclusion of the section.

This section, on the other hand, argues that a more holistic view can be gained about the SO over the methods of the formation of SO operational

³⁴⁵ ATASE, BDH: F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/15.

³⁴⁶ ATASE, BDH: F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/56.

units. For it is possible to arrive at inaccurate conclusions about the SO in general if some of the methods to be examined are taken out of context and stressed unduly. Indeed it would be equally misleading to make generalizations about the SO on the basis of the methods used in the Near East as to make generalizations on the basis of the ones used in the Caucasian Front. It must be kept in mind, therefore, that all these methods constitute the parts of a larger whole, and accordingly must be studied in a comparative manner. Now let us first discuss the methods by which this striking force was formed, as well as its bureaucratic procedures, and then the mechanisms those procedures reveal.

3.2.3.1 Human Resources and Limitations

The Ottoman rulers, as stated before, attempted, with the SO, to make the war more total by spreading it to the less accessible sections of society. Having the right to draw upon a very sizeable pool of human resources, in the last analysis, the SO represented a striking force that was developed to operate in coordination with the regular armies and primarily to support them in their campaigns.³⁴⁷ Their numbers were, however, inadequate for such a large-scale war as World War I. After all, the SO was an organization that had originally been established to operate in the Balkans and therefore had to be redesigned according to the necessities of the war that had recently

³⁴⁷ According to Kemal Tahir, the SO, the striking and protector cadre of CUP, consisted of "nations who either did not want independence or who could not want independence as well as rootless people growing away from nations who wanted independence". Kemal Tahir, *Notlar/Batılama* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık), 28.

broken out. In this context, the fact that the CUP was the only master of the state apparatus could provide the SO with great potential in terms of gathering adequate striking forces.

3.2.3.1.1 Deployment of Prisoners

The bureaucratic procedures concerning the deployment of prisoners with the SO on the war fronts were comprised of a series of stages. Initially, the Ministry of Interior demanded records including the names, levels of conviction, and of accusations of the prisoners that could be sent to the combat zone. The order given by the Ministry of Interior to the subgovernorate (*mutasarrıflık*) of Canik might represent a typical example at this point: “*Bafra Habshanesi'nde ve diğer mülhakatta mevkuf olub darü'harbe sevklerini istirham edenlerden... çeteciliğe elverişli olanların esamisini bildiriniz.*”³⁴⁸

Upon the orders given to several governorates and subgovernorates, people in charge were expected to take up separating individuals for band warfare from the prisons.³⁴⁹ In this regard, it would not take much effort to

³⁴⁸ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ministry of Interior to the Subgovernorate of Canik (29 Teşrin-i sani 1330/12 December 1914), F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/34. Also see: BOA., DH.ŞFR.; cipher from the Security General Directorate to the Subgovernorate of Canik, D: 48, G: 27 (3 Kanun-i evvel 1330/16 December 1914).

³⁴⁹ BOA., DH.ŞFR.; cipher from the Security General Directorate to the Provinces of Edirne, Adana, Ankara, Aydın, Hüdavendigar, Diyarbakir, Sivas, Kastamonu, Konya, Mamuretül-aziz, and to the Subgovernorates of Urfa, İzmit, Bolu, Canik, Çatalca, Karesi, Kala-i Sultaniye, Menteşe, Teke, Kayseri, Karahisar-ı Sahib, and to the Medine-i Münevvere Guardianship, D: 49, G: 164 (17 Kanun-i sani 1330/30 January 1915). For the features of volunteers who sought to be employed in çetes for the Caucasus front, see also; BOA., DH.EUM.MTK.; telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Provinces of Edirne, Hüdavendigar, Ankara, Konya, Kastamonu, Sivas, and to the Subgovernorates of Bolu,

image that the prison staff, particularly the directors who knew in detail the convictions and accusations of the prisoners, prison wardens who had to intimately watch the daily activities and behaviors of the convicts, and finally the convicts' friends and ward heads performed key roles in the formation of the bands. The records that emerged as a result of this process, which lasted generally one to two weeks, were subsequently submitted to the Ministry of Interior. In this context, the reply sent by the province of Istanbul to the Ministry of Interior in regard to the note of the Security General Directorate might be explanatory:

“Dahiliye Nezaret-i Celilesi'ne: Devletlü efendim hazretleri, Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti'nden 19 Teşrin-i sani tarihli ve 759 numarolu tezkere-i aliyye-i nezaret-penahilerine cevabdır. Habshane-i Umumi ile İstanbul Cünha ve Cinayet Tevkifhanesi'ndeki mahbus ve mevkufinden mevaki-i harbiyeye izamlarına lüzum görülenlerin esamisini havi habshane ve tevkifhane-i mezkur müdüriyetlerince tanzim ve tevdi edilen iki kıta defter leffen takdim kılınmış ve mülhakattan alınacak defatirin de takdimi tabii bulunmuş olmağla ol babda emr ü ferman hazreti men lehü'l-emrindir.”³⁵⁰

The reason behind the submission of such records to the Ministry of Interior must be sought in the fact that the directorates of prisons and penitentiaries were under the responsibility of the Security General Directorate, which was responsible to the Ministry of Interior. As a matter of fact, these records sent to the Ministry of Interior were subsequently delivered to the Security General Directorate to be examined. For instance, a record containing the names and reasons of conviction/accusation of 48

İzmit, Çatalca, Kala-i Sultaniye, Karesi, Mentеше, Antalya, Karahisar-ı Sahib, D: 79, G: 8 (26 Teşrin-i sani 1330/9 December 1914).

³⁵⁰ ATASE, BDH: from the Province of İstanbul to the Ministry of Interior (24 Teşrin-i sani 1330/7 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/17. Also see; ATASE, BDH: from the Subgovernorate of İzmit to the Ministry of interior (21 Teşrin-i sani 1330/4 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/12; ATASE, BDH: from the Subgovernorate of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior (23 Teşrin-i sani 1330/6 December 1914), F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/16.

individuals singled out for band warfare in the Izmit prison was first sent to the Ministry of Interior, and a day later to the Security General Directorate by the Ministry of Interior:

“Dahiliye Nezaret-i Celilesi’ne: Nazır Beyefendi hazretleri, 16 Teşrin-i Sani 1330 tarihli ve 19 numarolu şifre telgrafname-i ali-i nezaret-penahileri üzerine İzmit habshanesindeki mahkuminden çetecilik için bi’t-tefrik geçende(?) izam olunmuş olan 48 neferi ber muceb-i emr esamisi ve derece-i mahkumiyet ve maznuniyetleri havi defteri leffen takdim kılındı efendim hazretleri. 25 Teşrin-i Sani 330

İzmit Mutasarrıfı (25 Teşrin-i sani 330)³⁵¹
Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti (26 Teşrin-i Sani 330)³⁵²

It should be noted at this point that Caucasia represented the main front where the prisoners and detainees were used and therefore utmost care was taken for the people in the bands to be among those who were familiar with the geographical conditions, language, and people of this region while forming the bands.³⁵³ At this point, the ciphered telegram sent by Nazım Bey, regional governor of Karesi, to the Ministry of War might be elucidative:

“C. 13 Teşrin-i Sani 330. Çetecilikte istihdama elverişli Laz, Çerkes ve Gürcülerden Merkez Mülhakat Liva Habshanelerinde, Bandırma Divan-ı Harbi Örfiyyinde 41 ve yine mezkur afvlara mensub hariçte 42 kişi cem’an sevk emrine amade 86 kişi mevcuddur. Bu mikdarın birkaç güne kadar 120’ye iblağı mamul olduğu gibi Türk ve Kürtlerden bu sıfatı haiz olanlar kabul edildiği ve bizzat icab eden mahallere azimetle fiilen tahkikatda bulunulduğu ve sevkiyatın bir müddet tehirinde bais olmadığı takdirde 200 kişi bulunacaktır...”

³⁵¹ ATASE, BDH: from the Subgovernorate of İzmit to the Ministry of Interior (25 Teşrin-i sani 1330/8 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/19.

³⁵² ATASE, BDH: to the Security General Directorate (26 Teşrin-i sani 1330/9 December 1914), F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/19a.

³⁵³ BOA., DH.EUM.MTK.; telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Provinces of Edirne, Hüdavendigar, Ankara, Konya, Kastamonu, Sivas, and to the Subgovernorates of Bolu, İzmit, Çatalca, Kala-i Sultaniye, Karesi, Menteşe, Antalya, Karahisar-ı Sahib, D: 79, G: 8 (26 Teşrin-i sani 1330/9 December 1914).

23 minh / Rıza Bey'e
Halil³⁵⁴

It seems obvious that men of Caucasian origin were given priority by the SO, while Turks and Kurds were seen as of secondary importance. The rationale behind the telegram's forward to Halil Bey by the Ministry of War, and to Rıza Bey by Halil Bey could easily be explained; as Halil Bey, uncle of Enver Paşa, besides being the Central Commander of Dersaadet acted as the second director of the SO, and captain Rıza Bey (or retired major according to another view) was one of the officers who put in process the information in the the SO headquarters in Istanbul about the bands that would be deployed on the Caucasia front, and brought such information to the Central Commandership to be confirmed and enforced.³⁵⁵

The requested characteristics (*evsaf-ı matlube*) sought in the convicts and other prisoners to be released were bravery, robustness of body, reliability in carrying out the tasks given, and of course suitability for guerilla warfare.³⁵⁶ They were also expected to be sound in health and morality.³⁵⁷ Those who possessed these characteristics were preferred over others.

³⁵⁴ ATASE, BDH: from the regional governor of Karesi to the Ministry of Interior (21 Teşrin-i sani 1330/4 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/14.

³⁵⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 66-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919); Sarısamam, "Trabzon Mintıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 517; ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Subgovernorate of Canik to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/56; ATASE, BDH: from the Regional governor of Karesi to the Ministry of War (21 Teşrin-i sani 1330/4 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/14.

³⁵⁶ BOA, DH.EUM.MTK.; telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Provinces of Edirne, Hüdavendigar, Ankara, Konya, Kastamonu, Sivas, and to the Subgovernorates of Bolu, İzmit, Çatalca, Kala-i Sultaniye, Karesi, Menteşe, Antalya, Karahisar-ı Sahib, D: 79, G: 8 (26 Teşrin-i Sani 1330/9 December 1914).

³⁵⁷ BOA, DH.HMŞ., correspondence of the Security General Directorate on the military procedures of the volunteers, D: 23, G: 115 (2 Şubat 1330/15 February 1915).

Occasionally, the names of individuals were even cited in the Cabinet of Ministers:

“Ceraim-i muhtelifeden dolayı derdest-i takip olan Mihaliçli Kazım, Kurtdereli Mehmed, Çerkesdereli Saadet, Keçidereli Receb ve Kazık Salih Hüseyin, Manyaslı Hüseyin ile Varçalı Kazım’ın gönüllü sıfatıyla Kafkasya’ya izam kılınacak çetelerde istihdam olunmak üzere şimdilik haklarındaki takibat-ı kanuniyenin tecili Dahiliye Nezareti’nin 18 Teşrin-i sani 330 tarihli tezkeresiyle işar kılındığından bahsle ol-vechile ifa-yı muktezasına dair Adliye Nezareti’nin 19 Teşrin-i sani minh ve 381 numarolu tezkeresi mütalaa olundu.”³⁵⁸

From time to time, the Security General Directorate directly requested information from the provinces about the suitability of individuals. In this context, a telegram sent to the Province of Sivas might set an example: “*Sivas mahbusini meyanında Hacı Bey namındaki zatın esbab-ı mevkufiyetinin ve çeteciliğe derece-i kabiliyetinin inbası*”.³⁵⁹

Apart from convicts and detainees, individuals who, charged with various crimes, were on the run might join the SO forces in case they expressed their willingness to go to the front lines, and proved suitable for guerilla warfare. For example, at the end of 1914, certain individuals named Kır Ali of the village of Korgan, Koduloğlu Osman, Kara Ali son of Abdullah, and Peçeli Kamil, all of whom were charged with murder and on the run, informed the Subgovernorate of Canik about their desire to be recruited for the war. Once their suitability for guerilla warfare had been confirmed, the prosecution of their crimes was postponed, and they were sent with the

³⁵⁸ BOA. MV.; proceedings of the Cabinet, D: 195, G: 28 (19 Teşrin-i sani 1330/2 December 1914). For decisions to the same effect taken for the artillery lieutenant Şinası Süleyman Efendi and, Tahir, son of Sufi Abdullah, also see; : BOA. MV.; proceedings of the Cabinet, D: 195, G: 116 (21 Kanun-i evvel 1330/3 January 1915); D: 196, G: 14 (8 Ramazan 1333/20 June 1915).

³⁵⁹ BOA. DH.ŞFR.; cipher from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Sivas, D: 48, G: 84 (7 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20 December 1914).

necessary equipment and uniforms to Trabzon to join the bands under Rıza Bey's command.³⁶⁰

Without a doubt, the temporary law issued for "the postponement of prosecutions and punishments" (*tecil-i takibat ve mücazat*) was received with great excitement among prisoners, whose petitions for amnesty occupies a large space in the archives. Generally bearing the signature of one or more prisoners on behalf of other inmates, such petitions typically included Islamist-nationalist formulations of pardon. The mediating institution in such cases between the Ministry of Interior and the prisoners were either governorates and subgovernorates³⁶¹ or the Ministry of Justice:

"Dahiliye Nezaret-i Celilesi'ne: Devletlü efendim hazretleri, ilan-ı cihad üzerine farz olan harbe iştirak ile şehid veya mücahid olmak faziletinden mahrum kalmamağı arzu ediyorlarsa da maznunen mevkufiyetleri buna mani olduğundan kendilerinin de afv-ı aliden hisse-i sened edilerek cihad-ı mukaddesten mahrum bırakılmamaları istirhamını mutazammın Haleb vilayetine tabi Ayntab tevkifhanesindeki 300 efrad namına Şemdik oğlu Mehmed ve rüfekası imzalarıyla ita kılınan arzuhal leffen irsal olmağla ol babda emr ü ferman hazreti men lehü'l-emrindir."³⁶²

It seems that individuals released from provincial prisons and sent in bands to the battlefields proved useful. It is probably for this reason that the Province of Erzurum was informed about the release of volunteers from prisons to be deployed in the Caucasus if Hafız Hakkı Paşa, Commander of

³⁶⁰ BOA., DH.ŞFR., cipher from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Trabzon, D: 48, G: 189 (15 Kanun-i evvel 1330/28 December 1914).

³⁶¹ For the cipher written from the Subgovernorate of Canik to the Ministry of Interior for the release of those who wanted to go to the war zone, see; ATASE, BDH: from the Regional governor of Canik to the Ministry of Interior (29 Teşrin-i sani 1330/12 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/33.

³⁶² ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of Justice Directorate of Penal Affairs to the Ministry of Interior, 26 Teşrin-i sani 1330/9 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/4.

the Third Army, saw fit.³⁶³ In any case, the applications from the provinces to be recruited in bands were much more than requested. Probably for this reason, the provinces were specifically asked to report only the names of those prisoners who were natives of the Caucasus and well-versed in guerilla warfare.³⁶⁴

It is, however, clear that some prisoners incompatible for release were set free contrary to the law of the postponement of prosecutions and punishments by some military and civil officials on the grounds of necessity. Nevertheless, only the administration of prisons and detention houses were undertaken by civilian officials. The warrant of arrest and release of the suspects, convicts, and detainees were of juridical matters, and hence only under the authority of judicial officials.³⁶⁵ This occasionally gave rise to conflicts between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice:

“Maznun ve mahkumlardan darülharbe sevk ve izamlarını talep edenler hakkında kanun-i mahsusuna tevfikân mahallerince müteşekkil komisyonlarca icab eden tedkikat ifa ve mazbatası tanzim ve tesyar olunarak vukubulacak işara göre muamele icra edilmesi iktiza eder iken bazı mahallerde bila istizan maznunin ve mahkuminin tahliye edilmekde oldukları muhaberat-ı cariyeden anlaşıldığı cihetle hükm-i kanuna muhalif muamelatta bulunulmamasının icab edenlere tebliği lüzumu adliye nezaret-i celilesinden ba-tezkere izbar kılınmış olmağla ana göre ifa-yı muamele olunması tamiman tebliğ olunur efendim.”³⁶⁶

³⁶³ BOA. DH.ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Erzurum, D: 48, G: 344 (31 Kanun-i evvel 1330/13 January 1915).

³⁶⁴ BOA. DH.ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Provinces of Edirne, Ankara, Aydın, Hüdavendigar, Sivas, Kastamonu, Konya, and to the Subgovernorates of İzmit, Bolu, Karesi, Kala-i Sultaniye, Menteşe, Teke, Karahisar-ı Sahib, D: 48, G: 28 (3 Kanun-i evvel 1330/16 December 1914).

³⁶⁵ BOA, DH.UMVM.; D: 123, G: 142.

³⁶⁶ BOA, DH.UMVM.; addendum to the correspondence of the Security General Directorate, dated 22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915, and numbered 1065, D: 123, G: 101 (13 Haziran 1331/26 June 1915).

3.2.3.1.2 Initiatives of Governors, Subgovernors, and County Administrators

A second method was realized by initiatives of governors, subgovernors, and county administrators. In this context, although no directive as to the formation of bands by either the Ministry of Interior or of War was found, it seems infeasible to assert that these state servants formed such units acting on their own. Nevertheless, a ciphered telegram by the subgovernorate of Bolu can prove that the Ministry of Interior issued orders to that effect for governorates and subgovernorates. The subgovernor of Bolu, Ali Osman Bey mentions in the telegram that he began to recruit guerillas for the Caucasian front upon the notification of the Ministry of Interior, and sent 193 people as the first caravan to their destination on behalf of the Central Commandership of Dersaadet.³⁶⁷

The bureaucratic process followed in this method seems similar to the one followed in the release of prisoners. Information as to the quantities and qualities of people gathered by the governors was first submitted to the Ministry of Interior, and from there to the Security General Directorate to be examined. The information, considered appropriate, was subsequently forwarded to the relevant desk of the SO.

For instance, a ciphered telegram by Necmi Bey, regional governor of Canik, dispatched to the Ministry of Interior held that a band of 500 men

³⁶⁷ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior (26 Teşrin-i sani 1330/9 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/25.

under the command of Ahmed Bey had been gathered by the initiative of county administrator of Ünye. This information communicated to Aziz Bey was delivered to Rıza Bey a day later.³⁶⁸ Similarly, it is evident from a cipher by Mazhar Bey, subgovernor of İzmit, that 170 men, 41 of whom were of İzmit prisoners under the command of Mehmet, Hilmi, and Hacı Mustafa Ağa, were recruited by the initiative of the subgovernorate, and another 30 men were ready to be dispatched in the district of Yalova.³⁶⁹

Another remarkable point here is the transfer of bands, formed by governors and subgovernors, to the front lines again by governors and subgovernors. This can be understood from a telegram dispatched by the regional governor of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior, giving information about the men to be allocated for band formation:

“Otuzu Bolu Hapishanesi’nde olmak üzere bu havaliden şimdiye kadar intihab ve kayd edilen çete efradı yüzaltmış tecavüz etdi. Bunlar şu iki üç (gün) zarfında kayd edileceklerle beraber pençşenbe günü mümkün olamazsa Cuma günü yola çıkarılacaklardır.”³⁷⁰

Once the destinations of the bands were determined, information as to the way and to the exact locality the bands would be dispatched was required from the Security General Directorate. It was Aziz Bey, in all likelihood within the knowledge of the SO, who determined the destination of the bands. As a

³⁶⁸ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of Canik to the Ministry of Interior, 7 Kanun-i evvel 1330 (20 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/56.

³⁶⁹ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of İzmit to the Ministry of Interior (21 Teşrin-i sani 1330/4 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/12. For the 45 members of the çete sent from Yalova to Dersaadet, also see; ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of İzmit to the Ministry of Interior, 24 Teşrin-i sani 1330 (7 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/13.

³⁷⁰ The word in the parantheses, “gün”, is added by me. ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior (23 Teşrin-i sani 1330/6 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/16.

matter of fact, Ahmed Müfid Bey, Vice Governor of Hüdavendigar, having equipped 50 troops to be sent for guerilla operations in the Caucasus, requested from the Ministry of Interior information about where they would be sent and how.³⁷¹ It is also assumed that a small amount of financial support was given to the families of those band members who were poor, though not regulated by law. The ciphred telegram from Ali Osman Bey, Subgovernor of Bolu (in Düzce at the time), which dwelled on the efforts of forming bands in Zonguldak, might be illustrative in this context:

“... evsaf-ı lazimeyi haiz adamlar tefrik edilmekte olub bunlardan ne kadarının sevki kabil olabileceği henüz malum değilse de şayet tedarik edilecek efrad işarı bildirilen mikdardan fazla zuhur ederse bunların kamilen sevkine ve içlerinde fakir olub ailelerine üçer beşer lira bırakmak isteyenler için mütekaffi mebalığın peyderpey toplanmakta olan iane-i harbiyeden tesviyesine müsaade buyurulması maruzdur.”³⁷²

3.2.3.1.3 Voluntary Applications

The units established through voluntary applications held an important place among the SO forces. As in the previous two methods, these applications were also transmitted to the center by governors and subgovernors. The legitimization generally put forward in the applications for the permission to establish guerilla bands was not holy war, as in the method of prisoners, but rather the enmity between Russia and the Ottoman State. For example, Rıza

³⁷¹ ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Province of Hüdavendigar to the Ministry of Interior (22 Teşrin-i sani 1330/5 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/15.

³⁷² ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Subgovernorate of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior (18 Teşrin-i sani 1330/1 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/9. Subgovernorate of Bolu was notified that the aid could be given on the same day from the “iane-i harbiye (war assistance)”. ATASE, BDH: F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/10.

Bey, son of Hamidli Halil Bey, a native of Kırşehir, applied to the *liva* of Kırşehir for permission to set up a band of 100-200 horsemen under his leadership. He expressed his purpose as “taking part in the battle fought today in the region of Caucasus with Russia, our great enemy since of old.”³⁷³ For unknown reasons this permission was denied to Rıza Bey, but his petition still reveals that although the bands joined the armies or legions and carried out their orders, they were determined to preserve their partial autonomy, and resisted any intervention from the outside on their members.³⁷⁴

Such applications were quite a few. For instance, Çürüksulu Ahmed Bey, in his application to the district of Ünye stated that he, along with 500 men under his command, wanted to adhere to the Third Army around Batum, Acara, and Çürüksu.³⁷⁵ Similarly, Midhat Bey, acting district governor of Zonguldak, by applying to the subgovernor of Bolu, Ali Osman Bey, stated that he would be able to gather five to six hundred able men from among Laz and other Muslim elements to engage in band warfare in Caucasia, if he were given 100 liras as allowance.³⁷⁶ Another telegram dispatched by Ahmed Müfid Bey, acting governor of Hüdavendigar, to the Ministry of Interior is about the employment of another Caucasian element, the Circassians:

³⁷³ ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Province of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/68.

³⁷⁴ ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Province of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/69.

³⁷⁵ ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Province of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/6.

³⁷⁶ ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Subgovernorate of Bolu to the Ministry of Interior (23 Teşrin-i sani 1330/6 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/16.

“Bu kere de bir hayli Çerkes müracaat ederek atlarını kendileri tedarik etmek üzere süvari olarak hizmete amade olduklarını beyan etmiş ve fi'l-hakika bunların istidad-ı mahsusları dolayısıyla piyadelikten ziyade süvarilikte istihdamlarından istifade edileceği tabii bulunduğundan hayvanatını kendileri tedarik etmek şartıyla bunların süvari olarak kabulü mümkün olup olmayacağıнын inbası maruzdur.”³⁷⁷

In this regard, there were also individual applications made directly to the Ministry of War, bypassing the Ministry of Interior. Then the applications were directed to the Central Commandership, and from here to the SO, if deemed appropriate. This procedure is also in line with the internal affairs of the SO. Halil and Cevad Beys, both Central Commanders of Dersaadet, presided over the SO.³⁷⁸ A petition written by a man demanding to be enrolled as a band member to the Ministry of War gives evidence of this:

“Acizleri ayn-ı asl Bayburd kazasına merbut Covaranik(?) karyesi ahalisinden olub 311 tevellüdü olub ... Dersaadet'e geldim. İmtisalim henüz silah altına alınmamış ise de bendeleri askeri hareket için heveskar bulunduğumdan çete efradı olarak kayd-ı kabülümle vatan-ı muazzezimize hizmetle feda-yı can edeceğimden şevk ü hevesümü kesr etmeyerek gönüllü olarak kayd ve kabulüme nezaret-penahilerinin sezavar buyurulmasını istida ve istirham eylerim. Ol babda emr ü ferman hazreti men lehü'l-emrindir. 3 Kanun-i Sani 330

Merkez Kumandanlığı'na tevdi kılındı
Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'ya 6/11/330
Cevad”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ As is the case with the other examples, this telegram too was forwarded to Aziz Bey. ATASE, BDH: ciphred telegram from the Province of Hüdavendigar to the Ministry of Interior (25 Teşrin-i sani 1330/8 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/18.

³⁷⁸ The question of the directors of the SO will be touched upon in the next chapter in detail. ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

³⁷⁹ The person who wrote the petition could not be read. ATASE, BDH: petition to the Ministry of War, (3 Kanun-i sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/67.

3.2.2.1.4 The Initiatives of the National Defense Society (NDS)

The initiatives of the NDS in the formation of the SO units cannot be ignored either. Founded officially on January 31, 1913, the NDS was always in close relations with the SO. To demonstrate this, it would suffice to have a look at the SO members who worked for the NDS during its initial period: Sheikh Abdülaziz Çaviş in the Aid Committee (*İane Heyeti*), Yusuf Akçura, Ömer Naci, and Ubeydullah Efendi in the Committee of the Enlightenment of Ideas (*Tenvir-i Efkar Heyeti*), and Çürüksulu Ahmed Paşa and Rıza Bey in the Committee of Volunteers (*Gönüllü Heyeti*). As stated before, the NDS was used as early as the Second Balkan War to gather popular support for the SO and recruited volunteers for it. For this purpose, Muslim emigrants in particular were targeted.³⁸⁰

The NDS carried on supplying the SO with human resources during the First World War, as well. For instance, a telegram dispatched to Halil Bey by the Samsun Branch of the NDS reports that a company of 44 volunteers from Rize was sent out to battle under the supervision of Abdulgafur Efendi. Two days later, the telegram was forwarded to Rıza Bey in Istanbul, as it was the case in most of the other instances.³⁸¹ Similarly, a report written by the responsible secretary (*katib-i mesul*) of the CUP Branch in Samsun indicates that the NDS formed three bands for the SO, two of which were recruited

³⁸⁰ Board of Physical and Military Drills (*Mümaresat-ı Bedeniye and Askeriye Heyeti*) drilled the volunteers gathered by the Board of Volunteers (*Gönüllü Heyeti*) in preparation for military service. For the time being, however, it does not seem possible to say anything certain about whether the volunteers mustered for the SO were subjected to these drills. Nazım H. Polat, *Müdafa-i Milliye Cemiyeti* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1991), 23-82.

³⁸¹ ATASE, BDH: from the administrative board of the headquarters of the National Defense Society to Halil Bey, Dersaadet Central Commander (4 Kanun-i evvel 1330/17 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/48.

from Çarşamba (63 and 65 men, respectively), and another of 70 men from Bafra. While the first band of 63 men were likely sent to Rıza Bey in Eastern Black Sea, the remaining two bands were sent later because those who already had military obligations were to be purged from the band according to the order that was received.³⁸²

3.2.3.1.5 Deserters

Deserters, who were throughout the war one of the most critical problems for the Ottoman army, are worthy of attention as another group of human resources used by the SO. Knowledge about how the SO made use of this human resources pool at the beginning of the war is quite limited. However, it is possible that by the order of the Dersaadet Central Command, the SO committees were installed in recruiting offices in certain regions, and thereby new troops were received into the organization. Whatever the details of the method, it is clear that lists of deserters who joined the SO were prepared. In order to make an entry to the records of the deserters included in those lists, those lists were directed to their respective recruiting offices by the Army Supply section (*Ordu İkmal Şubesi*).³⁸³ In this context, the only list existing today is a list of the deserters sent to serve under Bekir Bey. The information about the soldiers that such lists included were their recruiting offices, names

³⁸² ATASE, BDH: from the responsible secretary of Samsun to Dr. Nazım Bey (26 Kanun-i evvel 1330/8 January 1915; F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/49).

³⁸³ ATASE, BDH: from the Dersaadet Central Command to the Directorate of Army Supply Section (1 Kanun-i Sani 1330/14 January 1915); F: 1831, D: 16, I:3.

and birthdates, as well as the date of their recruitment. Due to the lack of adequate data, however, it is very difficult for us to estimate the ratio of the troops recruited by this method to the SO.³⁸⁴

However, it is possible to determine that by the end of 1915, when the SO bands had been disbanded, the SO was charged with gathering deserters on behalf of the army. In this context, for example, a telegram sent by Kemal Bey, Subgovernor of Karesi, to the Ministry of War reveals that a SO committee was charged by the Dersaadet Central Command with the task of returning the deserters around Balıkesir to the Fifth Army.³⁸⁵ These soldiers would be pardoned only after they were sent to the court martial, where their punishments would be arranged and determined.³⁸⁶

3.2.3.1.6 The Initiatives of the CUP

Yet another method of recruiting volunteers was practiced through the Central Committee of the CUP. It seems that this method was in use for a short time at the beginning of the war. The ordinance of the Court Martial

³⁸⁴ ATASE, BDH; from the Dersaadet Central Command to the Directorate of Army Supply Section (*Ordu İkmal Şubesi*) (1 Kanun-i Sani 133/14 January 1915), F: 1831, D: 139A, I: 3/1-3/6.

³⁸⁵ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Subgovernorate of Karesi to the Ministry of War (1 Haziran 1332/14 June 1916); F: 1831, D: 139A, I: 16/7, 16/8. Also see; BOA, DH.ŞFR: ciphered telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Aydın, D: 66, G: 67 (12 Temmuz 1332/25 July 1916).

³⁸⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Ordu Dairesi Riyaseti to the Central Command, F: 1831, D: 139A, I: 16/11a (30 Temmuz 1332).

revealed this clearly.³⁸⁷ The existence of the method was not denied by the members of the CUP under trial, either. Talat Bey, who had the least knowledge on the subject, accepted that the CUP had helped the SO when the correspondence between the two organizations on the recruitment of volunteers was read to him.³⁸⁸ Cevad Bey, another defendant, indeed denied that the SO had received any help during his directorship from the Central Committee,³⁸⁹ but still accepted that the two might have communicated before his time on the drafting and gathering of troops.³⁹⁰

The testimonies of Atıf and Midhat Şükrü Bey, as well as the evidence presented to the court may help clarify how this method was applied. It seems that Dr. Nazım was the person to discover that the CUP could be helpful in recruiting volunteers. However, this must not be understood in the sense that the SO directly corresponded with the representatives and responsible secretaries of the CUP in the provinces.³⁹¹ The individual with whom the SO directly corresponded was the Secretary General of the CUP, Midhat Şükrü Bey. On the side of the SO itself, the authority that conducted

³⁸⁷ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337, No. 3540, s. 5-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 April 1919).

³⁸⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 62-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 24 Şaban 1337, No. 3557, s. 109-110-SUP; DHÖM, Sixth Session (14 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 28 Şaban 1337, No. 3561, s. 126-SUP; DHÖM, Seventh Session (17 May 1919).

³⁸⁹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 28-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

³⁹⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 69-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

³⁹¹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 31-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 57-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

this correspondence and requested the CUP to notify its clubs on the subject was the administrative board:

“Midhat Şükrü Bey Efendi'ye,

13 Teşrin-i sani 330

Muhterem kardeşim,
İzmid, Bursa, Bandırma, Balıkesir ve daha münasib mahallerdeki katib-i mesuller vasıtasıyla mahremane olarak ber-vech-i ati hassayı haiz efradın nihayet bir iki haftaya kadar celb ve cemi imkanının bulunup bulunmadığının istilamıyla inbası mercudur.

Aziz Atif Nazım Halil”³⁹²

It is clear that Midhat Şükrü Bey sent the notifications coming from the SO to the provincial offices. This emerges from the fact that the provincial offices in question reported the results of their efforts in this direction to Central Committee. For example, in a report to the Central Committee, the Izmir branch of the CUP stated that Çeçen Hamid Ağa, a native of Bergama, could perform important services on the border with a few townsmen he would gather, and asked for permission to transfer them.³⁹³ In another telegram Rüşdü Bey, responsible secretary of the Samsun branch, reported that he had dispatched a 55-strong band under Artvinli Tufan Ağa.³⁹⁴ Another result that could be deduced from such examples is that the provincial clubs were not authorized to correspond directly with the SO. They reported the results to the CUP, and the latter in turn to the SO, for a final decision.

³⁹² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 69-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

³⁹³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 85-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

³⁹⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 73-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

However, there are serious discrepancies between the notifications sent by the CUP to its provincial branches and those sent by the Ministry of the Interior to subgovernorates. It seems that the CUP was against the use of released convicts and brigands in the SO's bands. It instead preferred the recruitment of those with "a desirable degree of bodily strength, bravery, morality and eagerness." This confusion apparent from the notifications is clearly reflected in the correspondences, and the nonplused clubs applied to the decision of the Central Committee, and the Central Committee to the decision of the SO.³⁹⁵

Neither the center nor the provincial offices of the CUP were willing to condone the use of convicts and brigands in SO's bands. However, because this was a decision that belonged to the government only, the CUP did not have any say in it. Hence, the CUP tried to look on the positive side of this decision against which they were apparently ill-disposed. This approach found clear expression in a telegram sent from the Bursa branch of the CUP to the Central Committee: "*Mahkumin ve erbab-ı firarın intihabıyla şekavetle meluf olanların dahi celb ve cemi asayiş-i memleket ve tatbik-i kavanine daha müsaïd olduğundan bu gibilerin sevki ile asayiş-i memleket dahi idame ve temin edilmiş olur.*"³⁹⁶ Thus the CUP branches seem to have accepted the recruitment and dispatch of prisoners and bandits to the front on the ground that this would help secure law and order in the provinces. Another sign of this is found in the letter written by Rahmi Bey, governor of Izmir, to the

³⁹⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 24 Şaban 1337, No. 3557, s. 97-98-SUP; DHÖM, Sixth Session (14 May 1919).

³⁹⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 24 Şaban 1337, No. 3557, s. 98-99-SUP; DHÖM, Sixth Session (14 May 1919).

Ministry of the Interior. It emerges from Rahmi Bey's report that under the guidance and command of Captain Edip Efendi a tracking squad had been established from pardoned brigands. According to Rahmi Bey's pessimistic estimate, however, this group, which was to be attached to the SO and summoned to Istanbul, would "immediately resume the brigandage again" (*derhal yine şekavete başlayacaklardır*).³⁹⁷

After the CUP clubs carried out their work amidst such a dilemma, they reported the results to the Central Committee. Midhat Şükrü Bey from the Central Committee, in turn, informed the SO about these results. The person with whom he regularly contacted on this issue was none other than Dr. Nazım. After the reports that were delivered by Dr. Nazım to the administrative board were decided upon, the volunteers assembled in each region were sent forth to their destinations.

3.2.3.1.7 The Methods Applied in Regions Far from the Center

The six methods of formation of the SO operational units briefly analyzed so far were generally used on the Caucasian front. The tight control mechanisms established by the CUP in Anatolia, thanks to its status as the only master of the state, considerably facilitated the establishment of volunteer units. It was, however, obvious that in those Ottoman territories

³⁹⁷ ATASE, BDH: telegram from Rahmi Bey, Governor of İzmir, to the Ministry of Interior (7 Teşrin-i sani 1330/20 November 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 71.

distant from the center, as well as in the colonies of the Entente powers, these methods would remain inadequate in responding to the SO's needs.

In the process from the foundation of the organization up until its abolition, the SO's struggle, for instance in regions where the majority of the populace ethno-religiously Muslim-Arabs like North Africa and Syria, in conducting a jihad propaganda that offered to unite around the caliphate and give support to the campaign against the "infidels" is closely related to this. In this way, the SO tried to win the loyalty of the Arabs, who already lived and could fall under foreign rule, and attempted to mobilize them as a single block against the existing political authorities. It sought to secure this through such tools of psychological warfare as journals, treatises, newspapers, manifests and rumors offering the local Muslims to rise and fight against the "infidels" "for the sake of the religion and the state".³⁹⁸ But merely holding on to the declaration of jihad would not meet the SO's efforts at recruiting volunteers. Such efforts should be supported by the gifts and promotions given by the sultan, and armaments and money should be delivered to masses that were

³⁹⁸ Most of the propaganda material promoting Pan-Islamism was printed in Arabic. An exception that had a more flexible approach in this respect was *Cihan-ı İslam*, which was founded under the aegis of *Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i İslamiye* that had launched Pan-Islamist propaganda already before the war. This periodical remained in existence throughout the war. Published in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, it was used to convey the Sultan-Caliph's call for jihad not only to the Muslims in the region, but to all Islam. Indeed it was through this journal that Sultan Mehmed Reşat made one of his invitations to the Egyptians to take part in jihad. Its editor was Yusuf Şetvan Bey, a member of the SO. The newspaper *al-Adl*, published in İstanbul from 1908-23 in Turkish and Arabic, also gave support to these propaganda activities by dwelling upon the injustices of the British administrations in Egypt and Sudan and the French in Algeria. In the same way, *er-Reyü'l-Amm*, issued at Damascus, tried to give support to the Ottoman army in its preparations for war by targeting Şerif Hüseyin's "treachery" and the British authorities planning an Arab revolt in the Middle East. In the editorial board of another journal published in Damascus, *Ceridetü'ş-Şark*, there was an important SO agent like Şekip Aslan beside such renowned authors of the time as Muhammed Kurd Ali and Abdülkadir Mağribi. Propaganda of this sort was also carried out by *El-Ümme*, *el-Düstur*, published in Cairo, and *el-Muayyed*, which had a much wider circulation. All three expressed the view that the only resort of the Muslims being crushed and oppressed by colonial rule was to accept the religious and political leadership of the Caliph, and stressed the need of solidarity as a single block. Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 105-123.

to be used as auxiliary forces. In addition, the SO should take advantage of the conflicts among the tribes as well as preventing the enemies in the region from manipulating such masses. In this sense, the SO's activities concerning the recruitment of volunteers in the Sinai-Palestine front before the first Canal campaign represents a good example.

As noted earlier, Mümtaz Bey was appointed as the Urban Commander on September 9, 1914³⁹⁹ following the establishment of the Fourth Army under the command of Zeki Paşa on September 6.⁴⁰⁰ Along with Mümtaz Bey, a number of military and civil officers appointed to the inspectorship of the CUP were sent to the region as well, such as Infantry officer Sapançalı Hakkı, Çorumlu Aziz, Çerkez Ziya, from the Syrian notables Abdurrahman Paşa, and Eşref Kuşçubaşı.⁴⁰¹ In this context, apart from influential figures in the region like Hilmi Musallimi, Emir Şekip Arslan, and Nurettin Bey, Sheikh Esad Şukayr Efendi who was responsible for the affairs of Arabs and Urban in the headquarters of the Fourth Army, as well as Fuad Selim Bey, Ahmed Fuad Bey, and Abdülhamid Bey, all responsible for the affairs of Egypt, might be counted in the SO's cadre in the region.⁴⁰²

The basic mission of these military and civil authorities was to obtain the support of tribal leaders in the forthcoming offensive against Egypt. Moreover, they were to win popular support and assemble auxiliary forces among Bedouins and other Arabs by distributing the caliph's proclamations of

³⁹⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 126, D: 590, I: 21/2

⁴⁰⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 126, D: 590, I: 23/22.

⁴⁰¹ Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, 108-109.

⁴⁰² Ömer Osman Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi ve Fransız Manda İdaresi Altında Suriye (1908-1938)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2004), 211; Erden, *Suriye Hatıraları*, 165.

jiħad and gifts, as well as weapons when necessary.⁴⁰³ Naturally, the need to recruit auxiliary volunteer troops for the army was a consequence of the Ottomans' failure to foresee a land-based war with Britain and resulting neglect to bring their military preparations to the required level of maturity. Indeed, the fact that the Ottoman forces dispatched for the Canal campaign numbered only around 14,000,⁴⁰⁴ while the British forces in Egypt were 100,000 strong, with the natural barrier of the Suez Canal in between, was a serious handicap for the Fourth Army.⁴⁰⁵ The SO's mission was above all to compensate for such an imbalance.

From the point of view of human resources, the tribes and their branches that could be useful for the SO were found on the two sides of the Syria-Hijaz railway, partly in Jabal Lebanon and around Latakia, 80 km to the south of Antioch, one of the important ports of Syria. Although most of these tribes were Muslim, there were some Christian tribal groups as well.⁴⁰⁶ After the proclamation of general mobilization, it was attempted at first to attach these fighting forces to the regular army. In this context, the volunteers

⁴⁰³ Behçet, *Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi*, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ Nedim, *Filistin Savaşı, 1914- 1918*, 11; Dukakinzade, *Filistin Cebhesi*, 28.

⁴⁰⁵ ATASE, BDH: cipher from the Ottoman Ambassador to Rome, Nabi Bey, to the Ministry of War (12 Kanun-i evvel 1330/25 December 1914); F: 248, D: 1031, I: 2/50.

⁴⁰⁶ The forces that the SO could use in the region were as follows: around 4000 cavalry on horse and camel as well as 5000 infantry under Şeyh Nuri Şaalan at el-Revale; urban of Aneze between Hums and Aleppo; the urban of Hums to the west of Hama (4000 fighters); to the southeast of the oasis of Damascus, around Dera Barsulharir, the urban of Beni Sahr (1100 cavalry on horse and camel, 1000 infantry); the urban of Aclun, again under Şeyh Nuri Şaalan (5000 fighters); urban of Hule (500 fighters) between Hule-Safed; the urban of Nablus at Nablus (3000 fighters); in the regions of Amman-Salt-Katrane-Kerek the urban and Circassians of Beni Sahr and Kuveytat (5000 fighters); urban of Beni Atiyye between Kerek and Akabe (2000 cavalry on camel, 200 infantry); urban of Birüssebi from Halilürrahman-Birüssebi and their southwest (7000 fighters); the Druzes of Sayda-Beyrut, Raşıya-Nasbiye and Celebi Havran; and finally, Marunites in Cebeli Lübnan and Nusayris around Latakia. *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi-Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar*, 77-78.

recruited by Mümtaz Bey and inspectors would be organized as guerilla units in the Special Staff for Recruitment of Volunteers (*Gönüllü Toplama Özel Karargahı*)⁴⁰⁷. Some would stay in Syria for a possible enemy attack, while the others were going to assist in keeping the Ottoman advance in against Egypt secure. Mümtaz Bey took a few men under his entourage to assist him in the region such as Captain İhsan (Mudanyalı), Captain Hacı Emin, and Gendarme Second Lieutenant Saib.⁴⁰⁸ Having taken along 1000 liras, a clerk, three officers, a doctor and Hakkı Bey, Mümtaz Bey left Damascus on September 27, 1914 to form voluntary and mercenary camel and cavalry platoons from the tribes and Bedouins of Birüssebi and Gazze.⁴⁰⁹

Mümtaz Bey, who established his new headquarters in Amman,⁴¹⁰ and Abdurrahman Paşa, delivered military decorations to and lavished gifts upon urban and sheiks of Maan, Dera, and Druze, and gave speeches to consolidate their loyalty to the empire. Mümtaz and Hakkı Beys created similar propaganda in Kudüs and gave gifts to the urban and Sheiks who confirmed their loyalty, whereas Abdurrahman Paşa negotiated with the Urban of Hama and Humus.

For instance, the urban Sheiks gathered in the subdistrict of Beyt-l Hayrin by Mümtaz Bey committed their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and promised to prepare 3000 camels, 2000 cavalryman, and 250 infantry.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Sina-Filistin Cephesi-Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar*, 74.

⁴⁰⁸ ATASE, BDH: F: 126, D: 590, I: 21/2. Also see; I: 21/3.

⁴⁰⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 126, D: 590, I: 21.

⁴¹⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 126, D: 590, I: 21/2.

⁴¹¹ Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi ve Fransız Manda İdaresi Altında Suriye*, 287.

However, the fact that the Arabs were generally inclined to work for the side with more power and money and sometimes served both sides at once⁴¹² was a problem difficult to overcome by the SO hindered by financial constraints. As a matter of fact, the volunteers amassed by the SO would show their loyalty to the Ottoman state more often than not by deserting its army on the eve of the campaign. This fact when combined with the failure of the Egyptian people to rebel before the campaign, contrary to the views of the Egyptian nationalists in exile, the Ottoman chance of the success would be defeated due to its numerical weakness.

Despite the logistical and financial difficulties as well as the military limitations the SO suffered from, as mentioned earlier, it managed to recruit 1600 volunteers for the main campaign force. In addition, the SO formed the following volunteer units: the Caucasian Cavalry Regiment recruited from Syria with a total number of 270 men; the Kurdish Cavalry Company with 100 men, formed by Abdurrahman Paşa and commanded by the personal clerk of Said Halim Paşa, Colonel Hilmi Musallimi; Tripoli Voluntary Detachment with 200 men, settled in Syira after the Italian-Ottoman War (1911-1912); Druze Voluntary Detachment under the command of Şekip Arslan Bey with 110 men, recruited particularly from Cebel-i Lübnan; and the Muslim-Bulgarian Detachment under the command of Nureddin Bey (later deputy of Maraş) with 270 men. Apart from those, the SO recruited 137 volunteers to dig wells, 30 to adjust pumps, and 90 to cook bread. Among those units, the Tripoli Voluntary Detachment was included in the unit of Eşref Bey, whereas the detachments of Hilmi Musallimi, Emir Şekip Arslan, and Nurettin Bey were

⁴¹² Behçet, *Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi*, 3.

attached to the Hicaz Campaign Force. If approximately 1600 Bedouins in the main campaign force are added to this number, the total number of the combatants recruited by the SO in the region amounted to almost 4000.⁴¹³

What could the bureaucratic procedures followed in the seven methods briefly considered so far reveal about the SO in general? In order to determine this, it is an inevitable necessity to point to the mechanisms resulting from these procedures. In this respect, three basic mechanisms are revealed: the first between the Ministries of War and the Interior; the second between the units within the Ministry of War itself; and the third between the SO and other departments.

In the most general sense, the Ottoman rulers regarded the collaboration between the Ministries of War and the Interior as necessary for the formation of the SO operational units. Examined in detail, this collaboration takes on a more complicated aspect with different actors coming in and out of play. The most intricate, yet enlightening example of this is the units formed of released prisoners. In order for the convicts and suspects to be used in the SO units, the Ottoman ruling elite had to integrate the Ministry of Justice to this tight and obligatory collaboration between the Ministries of War and the Interior. A three-tiered system consisting of the Ministries of War, Justice and the Interior came into being as a result. In this system, the duty of the Ministry of Justice was to postpone prosecutions and punishments. Since the Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses were

⁴¹³ Behçet, *Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi*, 8; Ali Fuad Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Suriye Hatıraları*, 56; Şakir, *Cihan Harbini Nasıl İdare ettik?*, 201; Cemil Çelik, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Sina Filistin Cephesinde Birinci Kanal Seferi*, (MA Thesis, Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü- Tarih Anabilim Dalı, 1999), 76-77; Muzaffer, "Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi Çerçevesi İçinde Birinci Kanal Akını", 14.

subjected to the Ministry of Interior, it was charged with the duty of collecting volunteers. As for the Ministry of War, it was in the position of ultimate decision-maker, since all the volunteers were attached to it through the SO. In other words, the most passive link in this chain of collaboration was the Ministry of Justice, the most active was the Ministry of the Interior, and the leading or executive link was the Ministry of War.

At this point it becomes possible to detect another kind of collaboration, a deeper level mechanism existing between the units within the Ministry of the Interior, namely, the mechanism formed between the Security General Directorate, governorates and subgovernorates, and the Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses. This collaboration represented the mechanism through which bands of prisoners were formed and released by the Ministry of the Interior. The strongest link in this chain was Security General Directorate. Recall that the Security General Directorate also played a similar key role in the formation of the bands by the initiatives of governors and subgovernors under the Ministry of the Interior. It could even be argued that most of the bands set up through the intermediacy of the Ministry of the Interior were attached to the SO via the Security General Directorate.

This state of affairs also sheds light on the obligatory and tight collaboration between the SO and the Security General Directorate. It was no mere coincidence that in the bureaucratic procedures followed to set up bands through the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior, the last stage was represented by Aziz Bey, Director of the Security General Directorate. Aziz Bey clearly emerges as the key connecting link in this collaboration. His role was also in accordance with the central administrative structure of the SO.

Indeed the next chapter details that Aziz Bey was a permanent member of the SO's administrative board, along with Süleyman Askeri, Atif Bey (Kamçıl) and Dr. Nazım.⁴¹⁴ It is thus predicable that most of the bands to be formed by the Ministry of the Interior were submitted by Aziz Bey for the approval of this board, and subsequently processed to the subordinate units of the SO. In this way, Aziz Bey's duty in the administrative board of the SO has been clarified.

Yet another general mechanism existed between the units within the Ministry of War itself. At this point, another kind of collaboration can be detected between the Ministry of War, Central Command and the SO. In this kind of collaboration the Central Command carried out the mission fulfilled in the previous example by the Security General Directorate. As a matter of fact, all voluntary applications made to governors, subgovernors, and the Ministry of War itself were passed on to the SO by the Central Command. It can even be asserted that all the bands established through these seven methods after Süleyman Askeri Bey's departure for Iraq in December 1914 were attached to the SO through the Central Command. This was a practice in accordance with the administrative structure of the SO because, as outlined in the next chapter, the Central Command was the most important means by which the Ministry of War exerted control of the SO, and Halil and Cevad Beys, the central commanders, were respectively the SO's second and third directors.

As for the relations between the SO, the NDS, and the Central Committee of the CUP that had been developed to form bands, these demonstrate above all that the SO could collaborate with all of the institutions

⁴¹⁴ Safi, "*The Ottoman Special Organization*", 127-128.

it believed could be helpful in its task. However, this collaboration was realized through various intermediaries. In other words, the administrative board of the SO was not authorized to be in direct contact with the branches of these institutions. For example, there was a clear relationship between the SO, the Central Committee of the CUP and the provincial branches of the latter. The communication between the administrative board of the SO and Central Committee of the CUP was maintained by Dr. Nazım, which seems highly probable to be the main task of Dr. Nazım in the board. Accordingly, Midhat Şükrü (Bleda) Bey, Secretary General of the Central Committee of the CUP, emerges as the person who contacted the provincial branches of the CUP on behalf of the SO. Similarly, the SO was not authorized to establish direct contact with the NDS. Instead it used either the Central Command or the Central Committee as intermediaries.

Examined briefly, these three different mechanisms also had a few common characteristics. The first of these was that all the volunteer troops collected were ultimately placed under the command of the SO. Secondly, all the volunteers collected for the SO were ultimately attached to the Ministry of War. The key post that maintained this link was the administrative board, regardless of whether the information on volunteers came from the Ministry of War or from the SO itself. After Süleyman Askeri, this post was filled by the Central Command.

As indicated before, the SO operational units set up through these methods and mechanisms were planned to give various kinds of support to Ottoman military strategy. However, it was clear that the intended degree of collaboration between the SO and the regular armies rarely materialized, and

when it did, using the SO forces did not bring the expected advantages. The basic reason behind this limitation should be sought in the general lack of discipline observed in the volunteer troops of the SO. It is true that these cases of indiscipline were usually subjected to penal law. However, it is also a fact that the SO had developed its own internal law, a law uncertain to whom it was answerable by which procedures, to discipline these troops that were very difficult to bring under control.

3.2.3.2 The Indiscipline of the Operational Units

A good example in this context is the experience of Lieutenant Veysel Efendi, commander of a SO volunteer battalion in Sivas. Lieutenant Veysel was a battalion commander selected by the SO, who had set out for Trabzon, his field of operations. Veysel Efendi, who seems to arrive Sivas by the first week of March, shot and wounded a certain Ahmed, son of Rizeli Memiş, who was a member of the third squadron, on February 23, 1330, with his pistol. According to Veysel, he had punished Ahmed on account of the signs of rebellion he had displayed. It is interesting that Veysel Efendi did not flinch from reporting this event to the SO: *“Bu sabah hareket esnasında ... alaim-i isyan görülmekle üçüncü takım efradından Rizeli Memiş oğlu Ahmed’i revolverimle cerh ve Çatalcalılardan maadasını Sivas Kumandanlığı’na teslim etdim.”*⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ “This morning, during the march, as signs of mutiny became evident... I wounded Ahmed, son of Rizeli Memiş, member of the third squadron, and turned over all the troops except the natives of Çatalca to the Command of Sivas.” ATASE, BDH; from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary

Veysel Efendi continued marching without receiving any punishment, having left the major part of his platoon at Sivas, and reported in a telegram written to the SO two days later that he had received the news that the mutineers and especially their leaders, “although they had to be punished severely, were being treated otherwise” (*şediden tecziye edilmeleri lazımgeldiği halde aksi muamele edilmekte olduğu*). His request was clear: “that the application of due treatment against the aforementioned be sped up in order to serve as an impressive example for the others” (*Diğerlerine bir ibret-i müessire teşkil etmek üzere merkuman hakkında icab eden muamelenin icrasının tesrii*).⁴¹⁶

What renders this event even more interesting is the cause of the signs of rebellion. In a telegram he sent to the SO about two weeks after the event, Rıza Bey, presumably the Commander of the Detachments of the Batum Area, stated that he had learned the real cause of the event between Lieutenant Veysel and his troops from the governor of Sivas, as well as from the vice-commander of the army corps. It had stemmed from the undisciplined actions of Bekir (Sıtkı) Bey’s platoon. It seems that the platoons of Mülazım Veysel and Bekir Bey were at Sivas by the same dates.⁴¹⁷ However, Bekir Bey’s platoon “continued their march quite freely, under no

battalion commander, to Rıza Bey of the SO (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/80.

⁴¹⁶ ATASE, BDH; from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to Rıza Bey of the SO (24 Şubat 1330/9 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/82.

⁴¹⁷ Bekir Sıtkı Bey’s battalion was at Sivas on 2 March, and at Zara on 6 March. ATASE, BDH; from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (21 Şubat 1330/6 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/78; ATASE, BDH; from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/83. Similarly, Veysel Bey’s detachment was at Sivas during the first week of March. from Veysel Bey, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/80.

order and discipline, entertaining themselves with the entrusted ammunition.” Veysel Bey, in contrast, had his platoon march in strict order and discipline. When his troops saw the freedom of Bekir Bey’s platoon, they rebelled with the demand to march in a similar manner, and in doing so made clear their rejection of Veysel Bey as commander. Finally, 163 soldiers who had led this mutiny were court-martialed at Sivas, and the resulting investigation confirmed Rıza Bey’s testimony.⁴¹⁸

It seems possible to arrive at some conclusions here about the relation between punishment and discipline in the SO. The first is that a SO commander saw himself authorized to shoot a member of his band without any fear of punishment, and indeed received no punishment at all. For this reason, it can be observed that with such expressions as “severe punishment” and “due treatment to serve as an impressive example for the others,” Veysel Bey was referring not to Ottoman penal law, but rather to the sanctions prescribed by the unwritten law peculiar to the bands making up the SO’s striking force.

A telegram sent by the administrative board to Bahaeddin Şakir might demonstrate that this method of punishment was an established practice in the SO: “*Galatalı Halil’in komitece tecziyesi matlubdur*”.⁴¹⁹ Galatalı Halil was a band commander and the grounds of his punishment were cowardice and extortion of money.⁴²⁰ In other words, the task of punishing a crime

⁴¹⁸ ATASE, BDH; telegram from the Province of Sivas to the SO (19/20 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/81.

⁴¹⁹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 67-SUP; DHÖM, fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁴²⁰ ATASE, BDH; F: 249, D: 1036, I: 1/90; cited by Sarısamancıoğlu, “Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri”, 507.

committed by a SO member was entrusted to another commander of the SO. This was the reason why Veysel Bey wrote to the SO for the punishment of the leaders of the rebels in his band.

However, the fact that the arms and ammunition divested of the 163 combatants in question were sent to Veysel Bey, and they were tried in the court-martial established in nearly a week is a clear sign that disobedience or open rebellion against the commander was a legitimate reason for trial. For if the only reason had been the undisciplined actions of the bands, Bekir Bey's platoon would also have been court-martialed. Yet Bekir Bey continued his march with his platoon to join the Third Army in Erzurum.⁴²¹ This example is a demonstration of the tendencies in the internal legal system of the SO, as well as a confirmation that the SO bands were subjected to military law. This, on the other hand, puts forth that the Ministry of War authorized the SO, yet regarded insubordination as a cause of punishment, while overlooking the indiscipline.

With such undisciplined and hard-to-control actions, the SO operational units gave the impression of a loose federation. The fact that the SO failed to meet the expectations was due to this indiscipline they displayed on the march, as well as to their occasional tendency for illegal actions that disrupted law and order. In fact it is difficult to assert that this was a general tendency of all the SO forces. However, it was not rare that the SO units dispatched to the front from Anatolia, in particular, performed such acts on the march and committed various sorts of crimes. For example, Azmi Bey,

⁴²¹ On the order of 3rd Army Command received while he was in Erzurum on 26 March, Bekir bey with his 530 men moved via İspir. ATASE, BDH; from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (25 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/91.

Governor of Konya, reported in a ciphered telegram addressed to the Ministry of the Interior, that certain members of a SO battalion advancing through the region on the way to their destination, committed theft.

One of these individuals, whose guilt was sufficient proof, was detained and taken before the court, but the other culprits could not be found. Azmi Bey, who complained about this indiscipline and feared a possible proliferation of crimes in the future, informed the provinces on the route of this battalion to take preventive measures.⁴²²

It was not only thefts that caused such discontent among military and civil authorities. It seems that there were other SO members who were involved in more serious crimes such as extortion and murder. For example, according to the information given by Atif Bey, Governor of Ankara, a SO unit dispatched to serve on the Caucasian border had begun to commit crimes like extortion and murder on their way after setting out from Ankara.⁴²³ Punishing such crimes committed by the SO members caused a considerable waste of time and effort for the Ottoman administration, as the culprits had to be caught first and then tried. Apparently, those caught were tried by court-martial. For example, a certain Mustafa, son of İbrahim of the Hacılohre family, killed three men and wounded one in the tents of the Aydınlı Tribe in Zile, which he had attacked for the purpose of extortion.

⁴²² BOA, DH. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Governor of Konya, Azmi Bey, to the Ministry of Interior (8 Kanun-i sani 1330/21 January 1915); D: 458, G: 97.

⁴²³ BOA, DH. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Province of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (30 Mayıs 1331/12 June 1915)); D: 475, G: 35.

Because he was guilty of previous acts of murder as well, he was convicted to thirty years of hard labor, double the usual punishment.⁴²⁴

Though rarely, the culprits of such crimes could be pardoned. It seems that this method of pardoning emerged, particularly when deserters applied to the SO to be permitted to join the SO again. For example, Mustafa of the village of Kundak, who had deserted his SO unit deployed in Lazistan, while embarking on brigandage with 40 bandits he had gathered around himself, was pursued by the gendarme forces of Fatsa and killed them in the ensuing clash. Subsequently, the bandits went to the District Governorship of Ordu and expressed their desire to return to their forces. Cemal Azmi Bey, Governor of Trabzon, considered it more logical to use this group, which was so disruptive of internal law and order, to defend the country on the front lines. He pointed out that the shortcomings of the gendarmerie of Fatsa, in terms of numbers and methods, would not ever allow them to destroy the whole group. So he requested the Ministry of the Interior to grant them a pardon and permission to join the SO forces in Trabzon.⁴²⁵ With the intervention of Talat Bey, Minister of the Interior, the expected pardon was issued in one week:

“Kundakkaryeli Mustafa oğulları ve rüfekasının Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ile darü'l-harbe sevkleri münasip görülmüş olduğundan keyfiyet adliyeye yazılmıştır. Oraca lazım gelen muamelenin ifa ve Adliye Nezaretiyle bi'l-muhabere haklarında tecil-i takibat kararı istihsal ve neticenin inbası.”⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ BOA, İ. HB., imperial decree (9 Kanun-i evvel 1331/22 December 1915); D: 179, G: 1334/S-093.

⁴²⁵ BOA, DH. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Governor of Trabzon, Cemal Azmi Bey, to the Ministry of Interior (3 Kanun-i evvel 1331/16 December 1915); D: 505, G: 82.

⁴²⁶ BOA, DH. ŞFR.; response telegram from the Ministry of Interior to the Province of Trabzon (9/10 Kanun-i sani 1331/22-23 January 1916); D: 60, G: 88.

As we have seen in the example of Veysel Bey's band, solving the cases of disorder within the SO was relatively easy. However, it is difficult to say the same for the deserters of the SO. The number of the SO members who vanished into blue was significant. For example, Azmi Bey, Governor of Konya, wrote in a telegram addressed to the Ministry of the Interior that a certain "Hasan, son of Halil from Biga, convicted of murder, had left his arms and ammunition at Ulukışla and escaped from the battalion with his uniform and cloak," adding that he had corresponded with the authorities concerned for the arrest of this man.⁴²⁷

The dispatch of platoons to pursue fugitives was not only a financial burden for the state, but also a wasted effort for the provinces in a time of war. For example, a certain Osman, son of Ahmed from Radovish, together with his friend, had extorted fifty 100 lira banknotes from a butler in Edirne. Zekeriya Bey, Governor of Edessa, informed the Ministry of the Interior that these two had begun to be pursued.⁴²⁸ Similarly, platoons had been dispatched to track down Hüseyin Çavuş of İştib of the abolished SO and his three companions who had been imprisoned, escaped from prison, and then committed a new crime.⁴²⁹

As indicated before, those captured were normally punished, save for occasional exceptions. For example, the court proved Ruşen, son of Ali, and Hüseyin, son of Alasakal, fugitive SO members, guilty of the charge of

⁴²⁷ BOA, DH: ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Governor of Konya, Azmi Bey, to the Ministry of Interior (3 Kanun-i Sani 1330/16 January 1915); D: 458, G: 16.

⁴²⁸ BOA, DH: ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Governor of Edirne, Zekeriya Bey, to the Ministry of Interior (31 Ağustos? 1334/31 August? 1918); D: 593, G: 156.

⁴²⁹ Those individuals seized bread and cheese of shepherd Tanaş in the Üsküp pasture of Kırkkilise. BOA, DH: ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Governor of Edirne, Zekeriya Bey, to the Ministry of Interior (3 Eylül 1334/3 September 1918); D: 594, G: 65.

attacking some villages and extortion, upon which they were condemned to fifteen years of hard labor by the Directorate of the Affairs of the Law Courts (*Umur-i Mehakim Müdüriyeti*) of the Ministry of War.⁴³⁰ However, sometimes clashes with fugitive SO members became inevitable. In such a clash, one of two SO fugitives, who, disguised as gendarmes, had indulged in brigandage in the district of Selmanlı, was shot dead (Halil İbrahim from the village of Bala) and the other captured alive (Bazlak Mehmed, son of Veli Ağa).⁴³¹

As highlighted before, it is difficult to assert that such crimes represented a general tendency of the SO bands. However, the fact that some members of these bands were involved in crimes did cause the populace to grow afraid of them, as much as they were afraid of brigands. Apparently some bandits growing aware of this carried out illegal activities disguised as SO commanders. For example, a lieutenant named Refet introduced himself as Eşref Bey (most probably Kuşçubaşı) and, together with 200 bandits under his command, committed robberies in the villages and towns between Urfa and Harran. The Security General Directorate wrote to the Office of Supreme Military Command for this band to be caught and punished, and orders were issued to the province of Diyarbakır for the necessary measures to be taken.⁴³²

There were two main reasons behind the emergence of this indiscipline and disorder in the SO. First, it must be defined that the human

⁴³⁰ BOA, DH. ŞFR.; letter of the Ministry of War, Directorate of the Affairs of Law Courts (8 May? 1916); D: 170, G: 111.

⁴³¹ BOA, DH. ŞFR.; telegram from the lieutenant governor of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (15 Kanun-i evvel 1331/28 December 1915); D: 15, G: 64.

⁴³² BOA, DH. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Diyarbakır (3 Haziran 1331/16 June 1915); 54, G: 32.

resources pool drawn upon by the SO was very large. Especially in those SO units set up in regions close to the center, it was a widespread practice to make use of bandits as well as of prisoners. It can be asserted that people of such sort were a serious factor behind the lack of discipline and order that occasionally afflicted the SO. The other factor, at least as important as the previous one, should be sought in the fact that there were never a sufficient number of officers at the head of the SO forces. For example, only five officers had been appointed by the Ministry of War for the 3000 SO troops under the command of Rıza Bey at Trabzon, and with so few officers it was not easy to keep even a regular force under discipline, let alone a band of volunteers. In order to make use of this force, therefore, it proved necessary to direct the bands by dividing them into smaller groups. This is why Rıza Bey frequently found himself compelled to request officers from Istanbul.⁴³³

The lack of order and discipline gave rise to serious conflicts between the SO and the army. The army commanders avoided common operations with the SO forces, apparently believing that their participation would bring more harm than good. For not only the volunteer troops, but sometimes also the commanders of SO, assumed an insubordinate attitude. Vehip Pasha, for example, had been so discontented with Bahaeddin Şakir's wayward actions that he even attempted to imprison him.⁴³⁴ Kress von Kressenstein, Chief of Staff of the Eighth Army Corps, was convinced that Major Mümtaz Bey, Urban Commander and the Chief of SO Forces on the Sinai-Palestine front,

⁴³³ ATASE, BDH; F: 249, D: 1036, I: 16/2; cited by Sarısamancıoğlu, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 507.

⁴³⁴ Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa," January 23, 1934.

was not qualified enough for such an important post.⁴³⁵ This state of affairs not only weakened the SO in the operational sense, but also prevented it from receiving the support it needed from the regular armies. For example, the command of the Third Army did not allow its officers to be appointed to the SO forces.⁴³⁶ The future battles would confirm the rightfulness of the army commanders, and indicate that it was the tendency of desertion if any common characteristic was to be realized in the SO detachments.

Thus during the First Canal Campaign, Major Mümtaz Bey's thousand-strong platoon of volunteers prevented the enemy, to a certain extent, from outflanking the battalions to the left.⁴³⁷ However, during the ensuing attack, their number dropped to 400 due to desertion.⁴³⁸ After the fall of Borçka, the SO forces under Rıza Bey's command suddenly dropped in number from 3000 to 1200.⁴³⁹ Similarly, the Voluntary Osmancık Battalion formed by the SO, as well as a battalion of nearly 17,000 Arab and Kurdish mujahidin, which had been set up by the SO's methods and placed under Süleyman Akeri in Iraq, scored some successes on the local scale.⁴⁴⁰ However, the fact that such forces could be kept under discipline with only the greatest efforts

⁴³⁵ Baron Kress Von Kressenstein, *Türklerle beraber Süveyş kanalına*, (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1943), 34.

⁴³⁶ Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa," February 7, 1934.

⁴³⁷ Muzaffer, "Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi Çerçevesi İçinde Birinci Kanal Akını", 29-30.

⁴³⁸ Behçet, *Büyük Harpte Mısır Seferi*, 26.

⁴³⁹ While the force of the aforementioned SO platoon was, by 23 October 1914, a thousand, it turned soon afterwards into a regiment of 1465 men, composed of 3 battalions. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Harp Tarihi Encümeni, "General Maslofski'nin Umumi Harpte Kafkas Cephesi Eseri'nin Tenkidi" (Ankara: 1935); cited by Sarısamancıoğlu, "Trabzon Mintıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 512-515.

⁴⁴⁰ ATASE, BDH; telegram from the Iraq Area Command to the Ministry of War (3 Kanun-i Sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 193, D: 816, I: 10.

was revealed by Süleyman Askerî's temporary departure from the front after his wounding in the battle of Kurna. The clearest evidence for this is supplied by a telegram written on the subject by Süleyman Nazif, Governor of Baghdad:

“Basra mıntıkasındaki ahvâl-i harbiyyenin şu son günlerde lehimize bir şekl-i müsâid alması sırf Süleyman Askerî Beyin eser-i gayret ve dehâsıdır ve oradaki kuvâ-yî nizâmiyye ve muâvinemizin ruh-i mihveri de yine Süleyman Askerî Beydir. Mecerûhiyeti neûzü-b-illâh bir felâkete müncer veya ve eyyâm-ı marazî-i mümtedd olursa bizim için ta'mîri müşkil bir felâket olur. Çünkü Basra havâlîsinde ve hatta Bağdad ve Musul'la menâtık-ı mücâviresinde teşkilât-ı muntazâma ile vücûda getirilmiş ve erkân ve efrâdı silsile-i merâtib ile rabt ve tanzîm olunmuş bir kuvvetimiz yoktur. Askerî Bey herhangi bir sebep ve sûretle ayrılırsa bunlar düşmanı ve her şeyi îka' ederek bir[bir]lerine düşerler, hâl ve mevki' pek mühimdir.”⁴⁴¹

This state of affairs did not change even after Süleyman Askerî's return. During the operation of Şuayyibe most of the volunteer troops deserted and a group of the remainder retreated north.⁴⁴²

In summary, it can be asserted that the phrase “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” can serve as a more useful epistemic tool in understanding the SO than the terms “intelligence” and “band”. However, this does not necessarily mean that the roles played by these terms in understanding the SO and structuring the accumulation of knowledge on the subject have no value. A comparison of the intelligence missions of the SO with those of other intelligence units in the Ottoman State (especially the Second Branch), may render the term intelligence go beyond being a hollow term and prove useful for historians. In

⁴⁴¹ ATASE, BDH; ciphered telegram from the Province of Bagdad to the Security General Directorate (9 Kanun-i Sani 1330/22 January 1915); F: 193, D: 816, I: 16/2.

⁴⁴² Stoddard, “The Ottoman Government and the Arabs”, 125-127.

this way, one can understand what the SO was not, and thereby come one step closer to the essence of the matter.

The “band” on the other hand, is clearly a much more useful term, which can drive historians closer to the target than “intelligence”. As is understood in this chapter on the operational characteristics of the SO, what the SO performed was in the last analysis is a kind of band warfare. However, the fact that the term “band” has, since the time of the CUP, stood on a slippery political and legal ground, and frequently been a matter of debate in international and internal political crises (sometimes justifiably), empties the content of the term, and produces serious problems in historical analyses and narratives. If the term “band” is considered in its original context, peculiar to the time of the SO and the CUP, it will clearly shed light on the operational characteristics of the SO. However, the dangers naturally accompanying the term must always be kept in mind. In the current context, for example, using the term “band” might not fully define the difference between revolutionary warfare from unconventional warfare, for band warfare constituted one of the main tools of the CUP in national and international crises. Therefore, there is the risk of overlooking the difference between the period of 1906-1908, when guerilla-band warfare was of a political character and mostly used in political developments in the interior, and the period 1911-1914, when band warfare was turned into a military activism. Furthermore, although the term “band” signifies the most important component of the SO’s striking force, it also makes it considerably difficult to discern auxiliary units, such as the officers who could be regarded as a kind of special force included within this striking force, as well as the agents,

informers, and propaganda units. More importantly, it remains inadequate in defining the SO's purpose and role in the functioning of the military and civil bureaucracy.

The phrase "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa", on the other hand, turns out to be both the description of the unconventional warfare activism that began to emerge in the initial period of experimentation and formation, and the proper name for the organization that fit this description. At this point, the phrase "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa" provides very important clues that explain difference between the band warfare used between the years 1906-1908 as a means of revolution, and the band warfare used after 1911 in the context of military strategy, on the other. For although band warfare, the most basic form of operations practiced by the SO, originated first within the context of revolutionary warfare during 1906-1908, the band warfare used in support of military strategy eventually would gain meaning by the phrase "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa". This phrase represents both an activism in which the band warfare occupied a certain place in support of military strategy, and in which the band warfare occupied a certain place alongside with other elements, and embodies the name of an organization that carried out operations on this basis. In attempting to understand the SO, attention must be focused on how it was used in the context of which strategy, without overlooking the empirical relationship between the periods 1906-1908 and 1911-1914. This is the most important characteristic signified by the phrase, "Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa", but it is not limited with this.

Secondly, the phrase, SO, signifies the fact that this organization was coupled and incumbent with a special mission that had been clarified by the

developments from the War of Tripoli up to the eve of World War I. The basic mission of the SO, which encompassed a part of the Ottoman military strategy that could perhaps be regarded as “romantic”, was to assist the Ottoman army by trying to foil the military strategies of the Entente powers. The SO had recourse to two essential methods to accomplish this mission. On the one hand, as observed in the fronts of the Caucasus, Sinai-Palestine and Iraq, it directly supported the regular armies on the battlefield by the combatants it gathered mostly from the domestic sources. On the other hand, it attempted to instigate interest groups of Turkish-Muslim stock or other beliefs and origins beyond the frontline found in enemy-occupied zones like Egypt, partly occupied zones like Libya, and neutral countries like Iran, against the Entente Powers. Band warfare represented one of the most important means used by the SO to accomplish this mission, though by no means the only one. The SO’s close contacts with emigrants and refugees, as well as its intelligence and propaganda related activities, were indeed some of the other means it drew upon to realize the mission in question. Such means, used to establish operational units, also had independent importance in achieving the ends of the mission. These independent effects, however, would only come to the fore in the period of the OEA.

Though examined at length in the Third Chapter, it must be briefly emphasized that the phrase “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, in addition to these two features, pointed to the fact that the organization had a special place in the functioning of the military and civil bureaucracy. For this reason, when defining the SO it is critical to recall the close relation between the phrase “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” and the nature of the organization. It must not be

overlooked that this construction emerged as a term that pointed to the essential characteristics of the organization during its period of existence. By adhering to the concepts and categories produced by the Ottomans in a specific period and context would be the most helpful approach for grasping the nature of the SO and making sense of the historical evidence gathered about it. The argument put forward here is also supported by the fact that as long as the SO preserved these three characteristics, it was never called by any other name than “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa.” Indeed this name was changed only after the SO lost two of its three special characteristics, when guerilla-band warfare, its most important kind of operation, was abolished with the central cadre that conducted it, and when the special position it had enjoyed within the military-civil bureaucracy came to an end. By November 1915, the name of the organization, which had thus been deprived of its structural characteristics, was changed to the OEA. The transformation of these characteristics will be addressed in the Third Chapter. Prior to that, the administrative structure of the SO deserves attention, the third special characteristic signified by the construction of “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, as well as at the central and provincial structure of the organization.

CHAPTER IV

ADMINISTRATIVE FEATURES OF THE SPECIAL ORGANIZATION

In Chapter Two, the formation of the SO, which bore a military qualification and operated like an unconventional warfare organization, and its special mission, were touched upon through an analysis of the phrase, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”. The aim of the current chapter is to consider the third feature exhibited by the SO; precisely, the place that the SO occupied in the military-civilian bureaucracy and its central administrative structure therein. In sum, this chapter will detail the final fundamental feature that determines what the SO actually was.

The subject will be initially approached through an introduction into the world of phrases that are alleged to have been used interchangeably with the SO. This discussion will clarify that the Ottoman ruling class did not use any expression, which underlines the aforementioned three features, interchangeably with the SO in official documents. Hence all the phrases alleged to have been used synonymously with the SO, such as Secret Organization (*Hafi Teşkilat*), Special Branch (*Şube-i Mahsusa*), Office for Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Şarkîye Dairesi*), Department for the Affairs of

Eastern Countries (*Idare-i Umur-i Aktariye*), or Department of Eastern Affairs (*Kalem-i Şarkiye*) can be said to amount to no more than allegations. Yet dealing with such diverse expressions may aid in clarifying the SO's place in the bureaucracy. On the other hand, it may alert researchers to certain problems associated with semantics and methodology ensuing in the literature from such expressions.

The following section is devoted to the closure of the SO, to illustrate the structural, operational, and administrative changes that took place during the transition period from the SO to the OEA. Since the termination of the SO band organization was the most important step of this process, basic arguments as to when, how, and why the band organization was abolished will be briefly discussed in this section. In the ensuing four sections, the central command of the SO will be evaluated from the outbreak of the First World War to May 1915, when it was replaced by the OEA, with particular reference to the SO's Supervisory Council, its directors, Central Command, and its branches.

4.1 An Introduction to the World of Phrases Ascribed to the SO

The SO, as a phrase, takes many different forms in official correspondences. In the past, it had no uniform or well-established usage. Yet all the forms indicate that it was organized as an official directorate: "Supreme Directorate of the Special Organization" (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Riyaset-i Aliyyesi*)⁴⁴³,

⁴⁴³ ATASE, BDH: from Osmançık Voluntary Battalion to the SO (27 Haziran 1331/10 July 1915); F: 1830, D: 10; I: 2/18.

“Directorate of the Special Organization Administration” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa İdare Riyaseti*)⁴⁴⁴, “Supreme Service of the Special Organization” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Memuriyet-i Aliyyesi*)⁴⁴⁵, “The Special Organization Office” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Dairesi*),⁴⁴⁶ and “The Special Organization Service” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Memurluğu*)⁴⁴⁷. “The Supreme Directorate of the Council of the Special Organization” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Komisyonu Riyaset-i Valasına*)⁴⁴⁸, on the other hand, serves as an expression providing insight into the central structure of the organization, as the SO had a “Supervisory Council” (*heyet-i idare*) headed by a director general.⁴⁴⁹

Apart from these, such expressions as “Dersaadet Central Command, the Special Organization Service” (*Dersaadet Merkez Kumandanlığı Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Memurluğu*)⁴⁵⁰ or “The Special Organization Service attached to the Dersaadet Central Command, Ministry of War” (*Harbiye Nezareti'nde Merkez Kumandanlığı'na merbut Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Memurluğu*)⁴⁵¹ are also contained in official correspondence. Though located in the Ministry of War and attached to the Dersaadet Central Command, the SO mentioned as such

⁴⁴⁴ ATASE, BDH: from Sarayköy Recruitment Office to the SO; F: 1838, D: 44, I: 1/42.

⁴⁴⁵ ATASE, BDH: Surgeon of the 1st regiment, 4th Battalion in Yakup Cemil Bey Detachment to the SO; F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/91.

⁴⁴⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Kadıköy Office of Military Police to Üsküdar Office of Military Police; F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/27.

⁴⁴⁷ ATASE, BDH: from Deputy Lieutenant Governor of Gelibolu to the SO (26 April 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/16.

⁴⁴⁸ ATASE, BDH: F: 1828, D: 140, I: 1/34.

⁴⁴⁹ A telegram, for example, dispatched by Süleyman Askeri to Major Hasan Efendi in Yafa gives a clue to the existence of this council. ATASE, BDH: F: 1836, D: 35, I: 2/1.

⁴⁵⁰ ATASE, BDH: from district governorate of Orhangazi to Dersaadet Central Command (5 Eylül 1331/18 September 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/22.

⁴⁵¹ ATASE, BDH: from Chief of Gönen Branch of National Defense Society to Dersaadet Central Command; F: 1829, D: 8, I: 1/26.

should not be considered an independent unit from the SO's central command in Nur-i Osmaniye; for the Central Commanders, in addition to their casual duties, also assumed the directorship of the SO immediately after the departure of Süleyman Askeri, the first director of the SO for Iraq.

In official correspondence, the SO was generally abbreviated as "The Special Organization" (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*).⁴⁵² It is also clear that it was sometimes called "The Organization" (*Teşkilat*).⁴⁵³ Cevad Bey, the third director of the SO, for instance, preferred from time to time to use the expression, "Cevad, Servant of the Organization" (*Teşkilat memuru Cevad*)⁴⁵⁴ to undersign, rather than the expression he frequently used, "Lieutenant Colonel Cevad, Servant of the Special Organization" (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'ya memur kaymakam Cevad*).⁴⁵⁵ Similarly, in a number of correspondences forwarded to Rıza Bey, "to Rıza Bey in the Organization" (*Teşkilat'da Rıza Bey'e*)⁴⁵⁶ was used instead of "Rıza Bey, in the Special Organization" (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'da Rıza Bey'e*).

Though named as such by the Ottoman ruling class, a number of different phrases thought to have been used interchangeably with the SO

⁴⁵² ATASE, BDH; from shipping master of Samsun to Dersaadet Central Command (19 Temmuz 1332); F: 1841, D: 61, I: 7/1; from Dersaadet Central Command to the SO (29 Haziran 1331/12 July 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 2/27.

⁴⁵³ ATASE, BDH: from Office of Military Police in Dersaadet Central Command to the SO; F: 1831, D: 19, I: 4/1.

⁴⁵⁴ ATASE, BDH: from Cevad Bey to the Directorate of Military Guesthouse (11 Kanun-i sani 1331/24 January 1916); F: 1829, D: 6, I: 1/8.

⁴⁵⁵ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to district governorate of Orhangazi (22 Ağustos 1331/4 September 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/22.

⁴⁵⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to Rıza Bey in the SO (4 Teşrin-i evvel 1330/17 September 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/2.

have entered into the literature. In other words, experts have not yet reached a consensus even on the name of the SO.

For example, the SO was called, according to one researcher, “secret organization” (*hafi teşkilat*) in official documents. It should first be mentioned that if the Ottomans used such a phrase in official documents, they would most probably formulize it as “teşkilat-ı hafiyye” in accordance with the requirements of phrase construction in the Ottoman Turkish language. Secondly, if this phrase had been used during the reign of Abdulhamid II, it would have pointed to a secret police organization or a network of informants. *Teşkilat-ı hafiyye*, however, was an expression that could refer to, besides secrecy, illegitimacy within the period and context it was used. As a matter of fact, Ittihadists in the post-war court-trials were questioned as to whether the CUP had a secret organization.⁴⁵⁷ It is possible to ascertain that the prosecution saw the SO as the answer to this question, and in this way they were seeking to prove it to be illegitimate. Ittihadists, on the contrary, attempted to attach formality and legitimacy to the organization by answering the question negatively without any exception and consistently stating that the SO was attached to the Ministry of War.

Similarly, while attempts by the members of the Greek Red Cross (*Salib-i Ahmer*) to make a secret organization through recruiting youth was mentioned in a memorandum published during the National Struggle period, concerning the activities of the Red Cross Council in Ayvalık, it actually

⁴⁵⁷ Abdullah Muradođlu, “Elli devletin temelinde Teşkilat’ın harcı var,” *Yeni Şafak*, November 14, 2005.

referred to the secrecy, illegality and illegitimacy of the conducted activity.⁴⁵⁸

It is also understood from the first clause of the duty regulations of the military police organization, established in attachment to the Ottoman General Staff during the National Struggle period, so as to prevent espionage and other clandestine activities and counteract, that “teşkilat-ı hafiyye” was fundamentally an expression generally used to express organized activities considered secret, illegal, and illegitimate under the law in force.⁴⁵⁹

Hence, the claim that the secret organization was used interchangeably with the SO remains weak even before any logical deduction. As a matter of fact, the author fails to provide any reference for the claim. It is, however, probable that the phrase was borrowed from a memoir, which could not be identified, and the authenticity of which might be simply dubious. A far stronger probability is that the phrase used by Tarık Zafer Tunaya was distorted; for Tunaya states that, “this was shown as evidence of the SO being not a ‘secret’ organization” and actually says the exact opposite of what is claimed.⁴⁶⁰ Above all, no such expression as “hafi teşkilat” or “teşkilat-ı hafiyye” has thus far been encountered in the official documents used as source material by various historians. If such an expression is encountered by future researchers, it would perhaps be more incisive to take the evidence to include such possibilities as that the phrase might point a different organization different in terms of its structure and

⁴⁵⁸ BOA, DH.KMS.: memorandum from the Ministry of Interiors to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (28 Mayıs 1335/28 May 1919); G: 53-4/5, D: 7-10.

⁴⁵⁹ ATASE, İSH; F: 956, D: 21, I: 2; 41-43; cited by Mesut Aydın, “Milli Mücadele Döneminde Anadolu’da Giriş ve Çıkışları Kontrol Altında Tutan Kuruluşlar,” *Atatürk Yolu, Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol. 5 (1990): 21-47.

⁴⁶⁰ Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 341.

nature other than the SO, or that it might not be a refined expression but a misuse.

Another major claim holds that the SO was referred to as “The Special Branch” (*Şube-i Mahsusa*) in official documents. This claim is more serious than the previous one, and difficult to contend with, as it was raised on the basis of the memoirs by Kazım Karabekir, the head of the Ottoman General Staff Intelligence Directorate at the beginning of the First World War.⁴⁶¹ It should, however, be immediately noted that Karabekir does not state that the SO was referred to as the Special Branch, but holds that it transformed, with the commencement of the war, into the Special Branch, which was headed by Ömer Fevzi Bey in peace time. According to Karabekir, Ömer Fevzi was followed by Süleyman Askeri and Hüsamettin Ertürk after the transformation of the office was completed, and with the declaration of mobilization, the office concentrated its activities on Iran and Afghanistan.⁴⁶²

Karabekir appears to predicate his short narration of the SO on a number of shaky conclusions, and a number of misinterpretations that might arise from this narration should be dispelled. Firstly, Ömer Fevzi never headed the SO, either in wartime or in peacetime. The only piece of information relating Ömer Fevzi to the Special Branch is that the Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay) Bey Expedition, prepared to go through Iran into Afghanistan, was formed in Istanbul by Major Ömer Fevzi Bey, who was then “servant to

⁴⁶¹ See for a conference on intelligence by Kazım Karabekir on the basis of his experience during the First World War; Kazım Karabekir, *Erkan-ı Harbiye Vezâifinden İstihbarat* (İstanbul: Erkan-ı Harbiye Mektebi matbaası, 1 Kanun-i evvel 1339/1 December 1923).

⁴⁶² Karabekir, *Birinci Cihan Harbine Nasıl Girdik*, 250-251.

the eastern Special Branch” (*şark şube-i mahsusasına memur*).⁴⁶³ Considering this phrase, Ömer Fevzi could only have been the head of a division which was charged with the eastern affairs of the Special Branch, but not directly the Special Branch itself. Thanks to a lack of data on the structure of the Special Branch, however, any analysis on the basis of this phrase would inevitably be speculative. From the official foundation of the office, November 30, 1913 up until December 14, 1914, it was Süleyman Askeri who directed the SO.⁴⁶⁴ Similarly, Hüsamettin Ertürk had never been the director of the SO. The period Karabekir ascribed to the directorship of Ertürk covers the three years following the appointment of Süleyman Askeri as the commander of Iraq Area Command.⁴⁶⁵ The names of the SO directors during this period along with their handover dates are clearly provided in the source materials.⁴⁶⁶ Although he undertook critical responsibilities as an important member of the SO, the highest position Ertürk could attain was his commissioning to be responsible for the liquidation of the SO.⁴⁶⁷ In addition, though it is known that the SO conducted activities in Iran and Afghanistan following the declaration of mobilization, Karabekir makes no mention of the main base of operations where the SO consumed much of its energy and resources, such as North Africa and the Caucasus.

⁴⁶³ ATASE, BDH: F: 3610, D: 297/30, I: 001-02; cited by Barış Metin, “Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda İran Coğrafyasında Etnik, Dini ve Siyasi Nüfuz Mücadeleleri”, 49.

⁴⁶⁴ ATASE, BDH: unsigned and undated record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁴⁶⁵ For the appointment of Süleyman Askeri to the Iraq Area Command as the Governor of Basra and 38th Division Commander; ATASE, BDH: F: 3603, D: 3, I: 28; F: 3603, F: 3, I: 17/5 and 28/3.

⁴⁶⁶ ATASE, BDH: unsigned and undated record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁴⁶⁷ ATASE, BDH: F: 1869, 5: 127, I: 177/15.

The fact that the head of the Intelligence Directorate left so many points in two paragraphs to be corrected might lead one to suspect something more sinister than mere ignorance of the SO, and thus raise a few speculative questions concerning whether Karabekir distorts the facts intentionally. Notwithstanding, Karabekir's claim about the SO should be taken into account, as it provides a clear view of the position the SO occupied in bureaucracy.

It is indeed possible to reach information that satisfies Karabekir's claim about the Special Branch. Almost all registers of the Special Branch pertaining to the First World War are concerned in one way or another with the SO and OEA. Indeed, the records in this branch are composed of a compilation of correspondence, telegrams, and orders exchanged between the SO headquarters and the Ministry of War, and between the administration of the SO and its different departments and field agents. The series also contain original letters exchanged between the Ministry of War and Berlin relating to the SO, as well as tables of appointments and promotions, identification accounts, and records pertaining to the personal dealings of the SO members.

In addition, documents clarifying if the Special Branch was a lower or superior echelon of the SO are yet to be found. Accordingly, although adequate authoritative information is lacking, it still appears possible to claim that the Special Branch became the SO itself with the commencement of the war. In other words, the Special Branch should have been transformed into the SO and its directors should have begun to head the Special Branch along with the SO itself after the declaration of mobilization. This conclusion, which

can be corrected by scholars who will have the advantage of accessing different original documents in future, also provides a direct answer to the important problem of why the name of the SO is not mentioned in the foundational and organizational charts of the Ministry of War. But as a researcher who has not witnessed in the source materials that the Special Branch was used as a phrase instead of the SO, I shall content myself with claiming that the SO was substituted instead of the Special Branch in the military bureaucracy and not addressed as Special Branch.

Another puzzling and baseless claim as to the naming of the SO is found in a quasi-official document. Written on behalf of the Committee of the Caucasus Union (*Kafkas İttihad Cemiyeti*), the petition includes a demand by lawyer Said (Mehmet Said), a member of the committee, Cemal Sami (Marşan), and Ömer Midhat (Maan) Beys to be sent to Circassia.⁴⁶⁸ But it was addressed, instead of the SO, to the “Supreme Directorate of the Special Organization of the [Office for] Eastern Affairs” (*Umur-i Şarkıye Teşkilat-ı Mahsusası Müdüriyet-i Aliyyesi'ne*).⁴⁶⁹ Considering this phrase, one can easily regard the SO as a subdivision of the OEA. In opposition to this, Vahdet Keleşyılmaz uses the phrase, “Department for Eastern Affairs of the Special Organization” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Umur-i Şarkıye Dairesi*).⁴⁷⁰ Considering this phrase, it becomes possible to reach a deduction that the OEA was a

⁴⁶⁸ Mehmet Said Bey was the legal counselor (*adli müşavir*) of the 49th division, Cemal Sami Bey, the reserve cavalry lieutenant appointed as aerial observer of the 7th Airplane Company in Su Şehri, and Ömer Bey, according to his complete tag, “Magan Kanbolat Beyzade Ömer Midhat Bey, resident of Şişli.” ATASE, BDH: personal records undated and unsigned; F: 1840, D: 51, I: 1/9. ATASE, BDH: personal records undated and unsigned; F: 1840, D: 51, I: 1/9.

⁴⁶⁹ ATASE, BDH: from the Committee of Caucasus Union to OEA; F: 1840, D: 51, I: 1/11.

⁴⁷⁰ For similar expressions, see; Keleşyılmaz, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Hindistan Misyonu*, 70, 78, 79, 82, 121.

subdivision of the SO, charged with overseeing its eastern affairs. In other words, either the SO was subordinated to a recently established organization called the OEA, or the OEA grew into a subdivision of the SO.

Turning to the literature with the aim of having an idea about the veracity of these two confusing assertions would bring a third claim into question. Unconditionally accepted in the literature, this account holds that the SO and OEA represented exactly the same office and their names were used interchangeably. The researchers encountering both phrases in the documents might contend themselves with harboring no doubts about their theory's applicability to the subject of the SO. Nevertheless, this account, too, tends to result in misguidance more often than insight, thus leading to a seriously distorted conception of the SO.

The SO and OEA are not organizations that existed at the same time. The OEA was established after the closure of the SO and continued to exist until the end of the war. In other words, the OEA was the immediate successor of the SO, and thus represents more or less a different organization. Therefore, the Special Branch that had been transformed into the SO should have become the OEA. Moreover, the Ministry of War, in a response to the correspondence from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dispatched almost a month after the end of the war, concerning a demand of a detailed report on the SO's past activities, mentions that both the SO and OEA "were founded in attachment to the Office of the Supreme Military Command"⁴⁷¹, thus confirming, in a sense, both the distinctness of the two organizations and successive nature of the change from one to the other.

⁴⁷¹ BOA, HR. SYS.; from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Directorate of Political Affairs, Office of Important Affairs to the Ministry of War, (4 December 1918); D: 2461, G: 31.

Likewise, information as to the appointment of Captain Yusuf Efendi, an ex-member of the SO, to the Company Command of the 177th regiment in Manastır, was submitted by Dersaadet Central Command not to the SO, but OEA.⁴⁷² Reports previously transmitted by the Central Commander Cevad Bey or his second-in-command, Hayri Bey, to the SO began to be forwarded to OEA after the closure of the SO.⁴⁷³ Once the OEA was established “Major Hüsamettin [Ertürk] of the SO”⁴⁷⁴ was called “Hüsamettin of the OEA”.⁴⁷⁵ Fuat Bey (Balkan), one of the most important SO figures in the Balkans, signed his correspondences as “Fuad, Servant to the OEA” after the establishment of the OEA.⁴⁷⁶ The reports on North Africa, possibly the most important SO base of operations, were hereafter always directed to the OEA.

Examining the SO and OEA as the same organizations on the basis of a dubious premise that their names were used interchangeably, makes structural changes and their repercussions in the field that took place in the transition from the SO to the OEA invisible, thus giving rise to a misleading explanation that the change was only a matter of nomenclature. Many influences might have contributed to the formation of such an opinion, but the

⁴⁷² Yusuf (Kefan) Efendi (military serial number 318-443): 3rd Company Commander (7th Division, 21st Regiment, 1st Battalion). ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Command of Military Police Company; F: 1845, D: 78, I: 3/4.

⁴⁷³ For an example of the correspondences between Captain Mehmed Hayri, second in command in the Central Command, and SO, see; ATASE, BDH: from Haleb to Dersaadet Central Command and therefrom to SO; F: 1838, D: 44, I: 2/24.

⁴⁷⁴ ATASE, BDH: Çatalca Fortified Frontline Command to Dersaadet Central Command; F: 1838, D: 44, I: 2/29.

⁴⁷⁵ ATASE, BDH: bill signed by Hüsameddin Bey of OEA (12 Teşrin-i sani 1333/12 November 1917); F: 1843, D: 69, I: 1/13.

⁴⁷⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Fuad Bey to OEA (18 Kanun-i evvel 1333/18 December 1917); F: 1845, D: 78, I: 36 and 38.

most effective factor appears to be the customary use of the phrase, the OEA, interchangeably with the phrase, the SO.

Indeed, although the majority of the documents following the closure of the SO (May 1915) bear the name of the OEA, this office was sometimes called the SO.⁴⁷⁷ A number of correspondences by Ali Başhamba, who became the head of the OEA in May 1915, might prove explanatory. For instance, Ahmed Hasan, Ground Manager in Africa Groups Command, addressed his petition, dated February 1918, concerning a part of the salary he could not receive, “to the director of the Special Organization, Ali Başhamba Beyefendi, Dersaadet” (*Dersaadet Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Müdürü Ali Başhamba Beyefendi’ye*).⁴⁷⁸ Nonetheless, there is no doubt that during this period Başhamba presided over the OEA, not the SO. In the same way, another petition written, on June 29, 1916, by Hacı Muhammed Musa, an Indian refugee working in the rifle factory of the military plant, to the “Council of Islamic Brotherhood of India” (*Hint Uhuvvet-i İslam Encümeni*) was submitted thence, “To his Excellency Ali Efendi Başhamba in the Special Organization” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’da Saadetlü Ali Efendi Başhamba Hazretleri’ne*).⁴⁷⁹

A reproachful letter written by an Indian, Şir Muhammed Afiane, on November 23, 1916, “to his holiness, Ali [Başhamba] Beyefendi” points to the same conclusion. In the first lines of the letter, Şir Muhammed addressing Ali

⁴⁷⁷ For examples, see: ATASE, BDH: F: 1851, D: 109, I: 5/1; from Harras bin Bahaeddin, a first year student in the School of Dar al-Khilafah, to the SO (8 Şubat 1332/21 February 1917), F: 1857, D: 132, I: 1/13.

⁴⁷⁸ ATASE, BDH: from the Africa Groups Command to Ali Başhamba Bey; F: 1860, D: 143, I: 1.

⁴⁷⁹ ATASE, BDH: from Hacı Muhammed Musa to the directorate of Council of Islamic Brotherhood of India (16 Haziran 1332/29 June 1916); F: 1845, D: 76, I: 1/33.

Başhamba states that he “came hoping to see” him “a few times to the office; that is to say to the [Directorate of] Special Organization”, but to no avail. Furthermore, he was notified by the porter at his last coming that it would be more suitable for him to see Dr. Fuad Efendi.⁴⁸⁰ It is known that Dr. Fuad Efendi was the director of the India, Egypt, Afghan, and Arabia Branch of the OEA⁴⁸¹, and that the only post superior to the post of directorship of any OEA branch was that of the director general. Accordingly, though Ali Başhamba is not addressed as the director general of the SO, the letter reveals that he was indeed the individual presiding over the OEA.

This letter, on the other hand, reveals that the address of the OEA was the same as that of the SO. What was the address of the SO? According to Tarık Zafer Tunaya’s assertion, sources of which could not be identified with certainty, is the only opinion accepted in the literature. According to Tunaya, the mailing address of the SO was Şeref Street, No: 39 (across from the Tasvir-i Efkâr printing house) Cağaloğlu (Nur-i Osmaniye back then), İstanbul.⁴⁸² Though not given voice in the literature, there is another opinion held by Atıf Bey, a member of the SC. According to him, the address is true with one exception: the door number was not 39, but 32⁴⁸³ – a point also confirmed by Fuat Balkan.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ ATASE, BDH: from Şir Muhammed Afiane to Ali Başhamba (10 Teşrin-i sani 1332/23 November 1916); F: 1845, D: 76, I: 1/39.

⁴⁸¹ ATASE, BDH: unsigned and undated record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/5.

⁴⁸² Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 341.

⁴⁸³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 85-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁴⁸⁴ Martı, *İlk Türk Komitacısı Fuat Balkan’ın Hatıraları*, 10.

Although there is discordance only on the door number of the office, all of the views point to an address outside of the Ministry of War. Indeed, in a correspondence by Enver Pasha to Ali Başhamba, a member of the Council of State and the first director of the OEA, concerning the accommodation of a Muslim prisoner group of about 300 people coming from Germany, their dispatch to the war fronts, their employment in the factories, and settlement of the day-laborers (*rençber*) among them in different localities of Anatolia, it is understood that the SO center was at least not within the walls of the Ministry of War, thus not in the central building of today's Istanbul University.⁴⁸⁵

On the other hand, a telegram written from Zara by the Commander of the SO Volunteer Battalion, Bekir Sıtkı Bey, in which he conveyed that they were warmly welcomed in the region by officials, students, and public, as well as that they were aided by the district governor and the director of the National Defense Society in their board and lodging, was dispatched "to the directorate of the SO in Nur-i Osmaniye, Dersaadet" (*Dersaadet Nur-i Osmaniye'de Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Müdüriyeti'ne*).⁴⁸⁶ Considering this, it is obvious that the SO was located, as claimed, in Cağaoğlu, Istanbul.⁴⁸⁷ There are also more detailed examples showing that the address of the SO was located somewhere in Şeref Street, Nur-i Osmaniye.

⁴⁸⁵ ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War Office of Dispatches to Ali Başhamba (9 Teşrin-i sani 1331/22 November 1915); F: 1835, D: 30, I: 1/37.

⁴⁸⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 83.

⁴⁸⁷ For other examples confirming that the directorate was located in Nur-i Osmaniye, see; ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to SO (27 Şubat 1330/12 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 85; from Bekir Sıtkı to SO (18 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 88; from Bekir Sıtkı to SO (20 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 89.

The address provided in the telegram written by Süleyman Askeri, the first director of the SO, from Halepçe, however, represents by far the most conclusive example in this respect. The telegram dispatched via Diyarbakır to Hüsameddin Bey of the SO was addressed to “the house numbered 32, across from the Executive Office of the Tasvir-i Efkar on Şeref Street, in the vicinity of Nur-i Osmaniye”.⁴⁸⁸ Thus the assertions of Atıf Bey and Fuat Balkan are substantiated by official documents.

On the basis of a letter written by Şir Muhammed Afiane, it was mentioned before that the address of the SO was same as the OEA. Indeed, when a petition by Ferid Bey, one of the translators of the OEA Translation and Compilation Branch⁴⁸⁹, addressed to “Major Rıza Beyefendi in the OEA, Nur-i Osmaniye”,⁴⁹⁰ is evaluated together with another petition addressed by İsmail Hacı, most probably an official working in the same branch, to “Major Ali Rıza Bey in the OEA, Şeref Street, Dersaadet”, it turns out to be true that the address of the OEA, too, was located on Şeref Street, Cağaloğlu.⁴⁹¹ A petition written in 1918 to Hüsameddin Bey, who assumed similar duties in the OEA with the closure of the SO, however, gives the clearest insight into the subject. The address of the OEA was the same as the SO: “the house numbered 32, across from the Executive Office of the Tasvir-i Efkar in Nur-i

⁴⁸⁸ ATASE, BDH: from Süleyman Askeri Bey to the SO (4 Kanun-i sani 1330/17 January 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/6.

⁴⁸⁹ ATASE, BDH: duties and qualification records of the officers working in the Translation and Compilation Branch of OEA; F: 1844, D: 72, I: 8/1.

⁴⁹⁰ (Infantry) Major (Ali) Rıza Bey was the director of the Translation and Compilation Branch of the OEA. ATASE, BDH: from Ferid Bey to OEA (1 Eylül 1334/1 September 1918); F: 1847, D: 86, I: 2.

⁴⁹¹ ATASE, BDH: from İsmail Hacı to OEA (2 Teşrin-i evvel 1334/2 October 1918); F: 1847, D: 86, I: 2/1.

Osmaniye".⁴⁹² Complete overlap of the addresses of both organizations when assessed together specifically with the examples above about Ali Başhamba, it can be more easily understood that the OEA was customarily called the SO.

Yet miscellaneous assertions as to the naming of the OEA are also available in the literature. Among them, the late Stanford Shaw's opinion clearly stands as the most speculative one. According to Shaw, Enver Pasha transferred the SO to the Ministry of War on August 5, 1914, soon after the Ottoman-German secret alliance treaty had been signed and the meeting of the Central Committee of the CUP had been held. With this transfer, the SO's name was changed to the OEA, which at the same time came to be called the Department of Eastern Affairs (*Kalem-i Şarkiye*) and/or the Department for the Affairs of Eastern Countries (*İdare-i Umur-i Aktar-i Şarkiye*).⁴⁹³

It should initially be made clear that August 5 is a relatively early date for the establishment of the OEA. The foundation date of the OEA, hitherto unspecified, could at best coincide with early May 1915, when Ali Başhamba assumed command of the organization.⁴⁹⁴ Shaw's claim, on the other hand, does not provide an answer as to which organization the SO was attached during peacetime. It is likely that Shaw reached this conclusion on the basis of information provided by Tevfik Bıyıklıoğlu as to the official foundation of

⁴⁹² ATASE, BDH: from the second wife of Commissar İbrahim Efendi who was at the court of Nuri Paşa, the brother-in-law of Enver Paşa, to Hüsameddin Bey; (25 Mayıs 1334/25 May 1918); F: 1860, D: 143, I: 18.

⁴⁹³ Stanford Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire in World War I*, Vol. I (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006), 360.

⁴⁹⁴ ATASE, BDH: undated and unsigned record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

the SO.⁴⁹⁵ However, neither Bıyıklıođlu nor the sources Shaw bases his argument upon maintains that the name of the organization was changed after the transfer of the organization to the Ministry of War. As a matter of fact, no such office as Kalem-i Őarkiye seems to have existed within the structure of the Ministry of War. Similarly, documents concerning the use of Umur-i Aktar-i Őarkiye interchangeably with the OEA or SO are yet to be encountered.

Another phrase, *Umum-i Őarkiye Mdriyeti*, which has a completely different meaning than the OEA, is alleged to have been used instead of the OEA. It is, however, highly likely that this phrase arises as a result of a misspelling.⁴⁹⁶ Actually the OEA, like the SO, has no uniform usage in official correspondence: Department of Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Őarkiye Mdriyeti*)⁴⁹⁷, Supreme Department of Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Őarkiye Mdriyet-i Aliyyesi*)⁴⁹⁸, Eastern Affairs Administration (*Umur-i Őarkiye İdaresi*)⁴⁹⁹, Office for Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Őarkiye Dairesi*)⁵⁰⁰, Department of the Office for Eastern Office (*Umur-i Őarkiye Dairesi Mdriyeti*)⁵⁰¹, or

⁴⁹⁵ Bıyıklıođlu made this inquiry from a meeting with Fuat Balkan in Karamrsel on 10 July 1953 and from a letter penned by Lieutenant Ltfi Sman, who officially joined the SO after the struggle in Western Thrace. Bıyıklıođlu, *Trakya'da Milli Mcadele*, 88.

⁴⁹⁶ Ergun Hiçyılmaz, *TeŐkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan MİT'e* (İstanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 1990), 30.

⁴⁹⁷ ATASE, BDH: from the Office of the Supreme Military Command to OEA (18 Mayıs 1334/18 May 1918); F: 1850, D: 107, I: 1/58; ATASE, BDH: from the 2nd Branch of the Office of the Supreme Military Command to OEA (9 Mayıs 1334/9 May 1918); F: 1857, D: 131, I: 1/20, 1/45.

⁴⁹⁸ ATASE, BDH: from Africa Groups Command to OEA (7 Ađustos 1334/7 August 1918); F: 1860, D: 143, I: 21.

⁴⁹⁹ ATASE, BDH: bill signed by Hsameddin Bey of OEA; F: 1841, D: 61, I: 6/9.

⁵⁰⁰ ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War to OEA (8 Kanun-i sani 1334/8 January 1918); F: 1862, D: 151, I: 1/80.

⁵⁰¹ ATASE, BDH: from Istanbul General Directorate of Police to OEA (5 TeŐrin-i evvel 1332/18 October 1916); F: 1850, D: 107, I: 1/28; ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of Interior

Department of Eastern Affairs Administration (*Umur-i Şarkkiye İdaresi Müdüriyeti*)⁵⁰². Whatever the official name of the organization may have been or whatever it may have been called, these examples indicates that the OEA, much like the SO, was organized as an official department or office. Its name was generally abbreviated to Eastern Affairs (*Umur-i Şarkkiye*). For example, Fuat Balkan, a member of the OEA conducting activities in Drama, signed his correspondences with the OEA as, “Fuad, Servant to the Eastern Affairs” (*Umur-i Şarkkiye’ye memur Fuad*).⁵⁰³ In the same way, an order from the Staff Operations to the OEA was addressed not to the official name of the organization but to the “Eastern Affairs”.⁵⁰⁴

4.2 Institutional Continuity, Structural Change: Closure of the SO

Seeing as the OEA was customarily referred to as the SO, when, why and how was the SO abolished? First, it should be noted that the organization officially abolished on October 30, 1918 was the OEA, not the SO. This is confirmed by all official documents found in the court records. If the

Security General Directorate to OEA (24 Ağustos 1334/24 August 1918); F: 1854, D: 120, I: 1/185; ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War Directorate of Personal Affairs to OEA (19 Kanun-i Sani 1334/19 January 1918); F: 1859, D: 140, I: 2/11. ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War Directorate of Personal Affairs to OEA; F: 1856, D: 128, I: 1/43.

⁵⁰² ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War Directorate of Personal Affairs to OEA (19 Kanun-i Sani 1334/19 January 1918); F: 1859, D: 140, I: 2/11.

⁵⁰³ ATASE, BDH: from Fuad Bey to OEA (27 Teşrin-i sani 1333/27 November 1917), F: 1845, D: 78, I: 43.

⁵⁰⁴ ATASE, BDH: from the General Staff Operations’ Branch to OEA (26 March 1918); F: 1854, D: 120, I: 1/245a.

organization abolished was the SO, then “the abolished SO” should have been referred to in the documents. “The abolished OEA”, however, is stressed in the orders written both by Cevad Pasha, Chief of General Staff, to the Istanbul Guardianship, and by İsmet Bey (İnönü), Undersecretary of the Ministry of War, to the Central Command.⁵⁰⁵ Reference to the OEA in relation to the abolition of the organization in a trial in which the SO was subjected to investigation actually confirms the transition from the SO to the OEA, as the court board’s silence against the documents which were adduced as proof of the abolition of the organization can be read as evidence that they had been aware of the transition. But as noted earlier, though successively established, they were not the same organizations or the difference between them was not a simple matter of nomenclature. During this transition period, two distinct yet interconnected structural changes occurred. The first and the most important was the gradual termination of the band organization, which had been the most distinct and essential operational feature of the SO. Such a change would have repercussions through the administrative hierarchy of the SO, and the SC would be eliminated.

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, indiscipline of the bands was by far the most important factor behind the termination of the SO band organization. There were three fundamental reasons that set the stage for this indiscipline. Above all, human resources of the SO constituted an unstable force, difficult to control and hard to put to positive use. A second factor, related to the first, was that this force was most probably not subjected to any military training. There is the indication that the SO forces passed

⁵⁰⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 68-69-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

through only a week-long training before going into combat areas at the square of the Ministry of War. Accordingly there is the ground to doubt if the SO forces formed outside of Istanbul had been subjected to any training before going into combat zones.⁵⁰⁶ Also regulations for the military training of the SO forces have yet to be encountered. The third and final reason was the low quantity and quality of the SO officers who were mostly inefficient in controlling the force in hand.

This indiscipline was obviously making it quite difficult for the armies to cooperate with the SO. Commanders, aware of the fact that the SO forces would likely yield fruitless results, usually abstained from military cooperation. Failure of the SO forces, too, partially emanated from this indiscipline. Termination of the band organization due to its failure to satisfy the expectations would also ease the burden on the state. On the other hand, this would be used by Enver Pasha to settle the repercussions on the SO of the dispute between the military and civil wings of the CUP. Thus, Enver Pasha appears to have solved two issues with one single action.

Indeed, the CUP appears to have returned to take revenge within the committee itself following the military coup, known as the Storming of the Sublime Porte (*Bab-ı Ali Baskını*) on January 23, 1913. The appointment of

⁵⁰⁶ According to Ahmet Refik, many bands were sent to Anatolia from Istanbul at the beginning of the war. Refik maintains that those bands that were sent off to the Caucasian front by the SO were trained at the square of the Ministry of War for a week. Notwithstanding, Refik does not give any information into the details of the training. Ahmet Refik, *İki Komite İki Kıtıl* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Orhaniye, 1919), 23. In addition, a photograph published in the *Harb-i Umumi Panoraması*, which is captioned as "While the volunteer Special Organization battalions, having finished their training, were heading from the Ministry of War towards the combat zone" (*Gönüllü Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa taburları ikmal-i talim etdikten sonra Harbiye Nezareti'nden mevki-i harbe müteveccihen hareket ederken*) also indicates that the SO forces, at least the ones formed in Istanbul and/or those that stopped by Istanbul were subjected to a short training program. See Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti, *Album de la Guerre Generale (Harb-i Umumi Panoraması)* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Ahmed İhsan ve Şürekası, 1914), 15.

Enver Bey as the Minister of War almost a year later can give an idea of the extent of this internal feud. A group of fedais, who called themselves the “Ten Blessed Companions” (*Aşere-i Mübeşşere*) and were mostly future members of the SO, had Enver Bey appointed as the Minister of War despite Talat Bey’s resistance.⁵⁰⁷ The reason behind this tension was related to Enver’s intention to achieve a military autocracy on the one hand, and Talat and his cadre’s aim to shape the CUP free of the military pressure that had long weighed it down on the other.

This tension would also make its presence felt in the period when the SO was activated for the First World War. Arif Cemil maintains that according to Enver Bey, the CUP would languish in case his supporters in the committee joined the SO, thus making it easier for him to reach the goal he dreamed of. But this project would also serve Talat’s purpose; for, the participation of the military cadre of the CUP in the SO would mean purging the committee without any effort, and he could make decisions more freely about the future of the committee. In other words, “two goals completely opposite one another” would converge at the SO’s foundation.⁵⁰⁸

This silent agreement clearly revealed itself in the meeting, held in early August 1914, where the SO’s attachment to the Ministry of War was concluded. It is not clear where this meeting was held, but regardless of whether the meeting was held in the Central Committee of the CUP or elsewhere, it is obvious that all CUP leaders attended. The very first connection between the CUP and SO seems to have emerged during the

⁵⁰⁷ Among the group were important SO members like Süleyman Askeri, Mümtaz Bey (İzmitli), Sapançalı Hakkı and Yakup Cemil. Fethi Okyar, *Üç Devirde Bir Adam*, 201.

⁵⁰⁸ Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” November 2, 1933.

conversion of the SO from a semi-official organization into an official one. The content of the meeting is unknown but a short glance at the changes in the SO following the meeting can enable us to predict the decisions made in the same meeting.

It should first be stated that the SO was commissioned and attached to the Ministry of War following this meeting. However, the decision of the Council of Ministers has yet to be encountered. Similarly, although the SO is claimed to have been institutionalized by an imperial decree, this claim, too, is unfounded.⁵⁰⁹ Accordingly it would not be wrong to state that the institutionalization of the SO followed quite an extraordinary and secret pattern. The fact that there was no constitutional and cabinet control over the SO is also extraordinary and secretive. After all, no one from the cabinet could dare to exercise any sort of control over the SO, as the CUP was the supervisor of the Party of Union and Progress or because it formed the substructure of the same party.

The workload of the SO, too, seems to have changed after this meeting. It was transformed from an organization concerned with only Western Thrace and Macedonian affairs, into another, authorized to conduct activities in all regions and considered to be the part of Ottoman war strategy. A second and equally important change stimulated by the attainment of this strategic depth was the expansion in the administrative structure and cadre of the SO. Ceasing to be a regional organization directed solely by Süleyman Askeri from October 30, 1913 until August 1914, the SO had attained a different level of organizational structure with the inclusion of a supervisory

⁵⁰⁹ Atif Bey rejects that an imperial decree was issued for the foundation of the SO. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 85-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

council, and began to exert a far-reaching influence, having been authorized to conduct activities in a host of various regions.

Considering this, the institutionalization of the SO, the determination of the control mechanism over it, the identification of its field of duty, and finally the identification of its administrative organization all can be said to have been perceived as an internal problem of the CUP and resolved as a result of consultations and possibly conciliations in this meeting. A second conclusion might be the influence and decisiveness that Enver Pasha exerted over all the decisions as the most prominent figure for the strategy of war. It can be hence concluded that the meeting followed a course in the form of ensuring consent and support of other CUP leaders by Enver Pasha.

In a sense, the said tension did not make its presence heavily known in the center. The situation on the front was, however, slightly more complicated. The termination of the band organization subsequent to the disastrous Sarıkamış operation might indicate that the problem made itself most clearly manifest on the Caucasus front. Indeed, such figures as Bahaeddin Şakir and Nail Beys in the region seems to have conducted activities not simply and solely in the name of the SO, but more in the name of the CUP, and resented and blatantly objected against the military control over the SO.

In this context, the letter sent by Rıza and Nail Beys to Bahaedin Şakir and Hilmi Beys in Erzurum concerning the SO activities in Trabzon region might serve as an example. Particularly the postscript by Nail Bey at the end of the letter is salient: "Nevertheless, this work cannot be executed much in the way we desire without bombs. We appealed to the Central Committee to

send bombs. It [the appeal] would be supported if you write, too. In case the bombs arrive, Allah is completely with us and then we will drop them at the very head of the enemies, brothers.”⁵¹⁰ Rıza and Nail Beys could not procure the bombs necessary for the execution of their plans from the SO, as it may be understood, and for that reason they tried to impinge on the SO through the Central Committee. This attitude stemmed from the conflict between the operation the SO wanted them to conduct and the operation they wanted to develop primarily on their own.

Rıza and Nail Beys clearly became possessed by illusions that could not be realized. For instance, Rıza Bey, in his letter, proposed to attack Russia both by land and water. He further adds that in the event of permission from Istanbul, he would begin marching into the interior regions. Although the general mobilization was declared, the Ottoman State did not yet participate in the war, thus making it at least theoretically impossible for Rıza Bey to start this operation. Secondly, he had only 150 guns on hand to be distributed among his force of 600 men. More importantly, the duties of the SO units on the Caucasus frontier were clearly defined in the orders from the SO’s center, and Rıza Bey’s dreams did not coincide with them.

Bahaeddin Şakir’s situation was no different than that of his comrade, Rıza Bey. Most probably because of his position in the CUP as a decision-maker, Şakir did not exhibit any willingness to obey the orders from both the SO and the army. However, he was not entirely wayward, as he made constant efforts to call out to the Minister of the Interior, Talat Pasha, for assistance. Nevertheless, Talat cannot be said to have appreciated Şakir’s

⁵¹⁰ Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” November 11, 1933.

ideas, as he gives the impression of putting him off in his correspondences with Şakir.⁵¹¹ Talat should have been aware of the fact that the SO could not perform its activities without the support of Enver and the Ministry of War, the most powerful control mechanism of the state at that time, thanks to the commencement of the war. This being the case, Enver did not abstain from taking revenge on those people by terminating the band organization subsequent to the Sarıkamış operation.

It is understood from an official document read in the court-martial after the war that the Ministry of War decided to abolish the band organization by an order issued on February 3, 1915. According to the order given to the I, II, III, IV, V Corps, Izmir Area Command, and army commands: since the band organization was abolished, bands, the organization of which was completed and whose place of duty was determined, that is, those who were ready in terms of personnel and equipment at least at the level of company or battalion, along with those who fought under a completed organization, would be distributed, according to their level of military training, to troops in the field and reserve battalion where they could get basic military training. Furthermore, due to the same reason, no transactions were to be performed on the 2,267 prisoners who had previously been decided to be released. It is mentioned that they could be sent to the front lines only after the introduction of a law concerning their recruitment into the armies.⁵¹²

⁵¹¹ Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa," November 13, 1933.

⁵¹² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 29-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

This order, on the one hand, made the band organization cease to exist. On the other, it brought the bands, the organization of which was completed and those in the front lines under the control of the army. This would necessitate the reorganization of the SO units in a way that was similar to the regular forces. Accordingly, Enver Pasha understood nearly six months after the outbreak of the war that no benefit would be obtained from this force.

It should also be noted that it is possible to see practices pertaining to the termination of the bands, before the order issued on February 3, 1915. In this respect, a telegram dispatched from the Governorate of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior on January 20, 1915 might serve as an example. In the telegram, the Ministry of Interior is informed of an application for the formation of band of 100 to 200 men under the command of Rıza Bey (Reji süvari kolbaşısı), son of Hamidli Halil Bey, and the permission of the Ministry is requested. From the petition drawn up by Rıza Bey, it is clearly understood that he demanded to work under the command of the Third Army in the Caucasus.⁵¹³ However, the Ministry of Interior did not grant permission for the formation of the band and the postscript in the same reply confirms that the band organization began to be abolished at least two weeks before the formal declaration of the order: “protocol for the termination of the [band] organization” (*teşkilata nihayet verilmesi için mazbata*).⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ ATASE, BDH: petition from Hamidli Rıza Bey to the sub-governorate of Kırşehir (3 Kanun-i Sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/69.

⁵¹⁴ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the Governorate of Ankara to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i Sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/68.

Such practices continued after the formal issue of the order. For instance, from a petition dispatched to the Ministry of War from a man named Geyverdereli(?) Mehmed, who mentions to have been a part of the band organization in the Balkan Wars, it is understood that Mehmed had recently applied for the formation of a band. Mehmed submitted a register to the Ministry of War including the names of deserters, detainees, and draft evaders. According to Mehmed, deserters joined the band but the remaining detainees and draft evaders were not dispatched. For this reason, he requests permission for the dispatch of all the men written in the register. Mehmed's band was one organization of which was not completed and not dispatched to its pre-arranged region. The Ministry of War forwarded the petition to the SO in three days and the SO in response mentioned that such an organization "is refrained hereafter" (*artık sarf-ı nazar edildiği*) and if necessary should be called to arms.⁵¹⁵

Considering the first example, the Ottoman State did not grant permission for band formation from the third week of January 1915 onwards, at best. The second example, on the other hand, draws attention to the fact that the band organization, which was not completed, were not sent off to the front lines, and if deemed necessary, were to be called to arms. In this context, an exceptional example was cited in the mentioned order, dated January 3, 1915. The order speaks of the preparation of a detachment of 531 men and its send off to the pre-arranged locale after its deficiencies were replenished. Though the name of the detachment was not specified, it is most likely the Bekir Sıtkı Bey Detachment, as his detachment was in Kayseri

⁵¹⁵ ATASE, BDH: petition from Geyverdereli(?) Mehmed ?zade to the Ministry of War (16 Kanun-i Sani 1330/29 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/70.

almost three weeks after the order had been issued.⁵¹⁶ Also, the total number of the detachment at İspir was 530,⁵¹⁷ although it had been 580 in Sivas.⁵¹⁸

Following the termination of the band organization, the SC, which essentially administered matters concerning bands, was eliminated in the middle of May 1915. This date coincides with both the date Ali Başhamba took authority over the leading position in the organization and of the transition from the SO to the OEA.⁵¹⁹ In fact, Atif Bey in his testimony states that: “We disbanded at the end of April, [3]31. On that date, Ali Bey [Başhamba] of Algeria [actually of Tunisia] was appointed by Enver Pasha, the Minister of War. He was appointed with salary, that is to say, as an official; we were present voluntarily. Then our duty in the council came to an end.”⁵²⁰ The SC will be detailed in the next section.

Implementation of the order, dated January 3, in the field can be followed to a certain extent. In the Caucasian front, for instance, Rıza, Nail and Bahaeddin Şakir Beys’ laying down their offices in the SO was one of the important developments ensuing that order. With the departure of those figures from the region, General Staff Captain Ali Rıza Bey was appointed by the Ministry of War to take the command of the SO units. This was an important development, as Ali Rıza Bey was sent to the region to give order

⁵¹⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (11 Şubat 1330/24 February 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/75.

⁵¹⁷ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (25 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/91.

⁵¹⁸ ATASE, BDH: from Sivas Branch of National Defense Society to the SO (21 Şubat 1330/6 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/78.

⁵¹⁹ ATASE, BDH: undated and unsigned record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁵²⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 31-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

and discipline to the SO units.⁵²¹ A second important development within this context was the establishment of the Lazistan Area Command, with its center in Trabzon. Brigadier Avni Pasha, Post Inspector of the Third Army, was appointed as its commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Vasıf (Kara) Bey, also from the headquarters of the Third Army as chief of staff. In this way, the Lazistan coastline became completely subjected to military organization.

The SO units including Ziya Bey, Adil Bey, and Salih Ağa battalions, the İbrahim Bey Company, and the Veysel Efendi Detachment became the mobile forces of this command, along with the 8th Infantry Regiment and the Trabzon Gendarme Regiment. Those mobile forces came under the command of the Lazistan Detachment, established as a result of an order issued on April 12, 1915, and Stange Bey was appointed as its commander. The detachment had a total of 5,978 privates by April 14 and the SO units in it amounted to 2,243. As a result of efforts of the SO Regiment Commander, Ali Rıza Bey, the SO units were subjected to regular military organization before May, and the SO was organized into a regiment composed of three battalions, one independent battalion, and a company.

The SO units can be seen in the Third Army up until mid-1916 and then they ceased to exist as their numbers decreased over time. For instance, by November 10, 1915 the SO units under the command of the Third Army were composed of eleven battalions and a company in total: a regiment of four battalions in the Van South Detachment, another three battalions in the Milo Detachment, yet another three battalions in the Lazistan Detachment, one independent battalion, and a company. Nonetheless, the

⁵²¹ BOA. ŞFR.; ciphered telegram from Talat Paşa, Minister of Interior, to the Province of Trabzon (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915), D: 50, G: 195.

only unit that was named after the SO in the Third Army on March 1, 1916 was a regiment of three battalions and an independent battalion in the Lazistan Detachment. Apart from this, there should have been, though not nominally, a small SO force in Çoruh and Van South Detachments. However, they became invisible in the structure of the detachment of which they were a part, because their numbers were doomed to decrease in time, as they do not seem to have been replenished after the order on February 3.

For instance, the Lake Van South Detachment under the command of Yakup Cemil was composed of a SO Regiment of four battalions and the 24th Regular Cavalry Regiment on November 10, 1915. With the Russian attack in the region on November 28, 1915, however, the number of the detachment diminished to 600.⁵²² The Third Army, upon this, sent the 2nd Regular Cavalry Division's Reserve Cavalry Brigade in Tatvan along with Dir and Bacirge border battalions to reinforce the detachment. The Muş Training Center (Muş Talimgahı) was also ordered to march with a detachment to assist Yakup Cemil. In early December, when Yakup Cemil was replaced with lieutenant colonel Ali Bey, the SO battalions that once had 400-500 men, with the ordinary desertions and losses, could scarcely exceed 80. The detachment was reorganized in the first week of December and the Yakup Cemil Bey SO Detachment was named 2nd Infantry Regiment of three battalions, and thus integrated into the army cadre.⁵²³

⁵²² *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 866-867. The fact that there was a SO regiment of four battalions under Yakup Cemil Bey within the Van Lake Southern Platoon is confirmed by the testimony of Captain Halil Bey, doctor of the 4th Battalion, who informed the headquarters that Ahmet İzzet Bey, commander of the same battalion, had died in the hospital of Diyarbakır after being severely wounded. ATASE, BDH: F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/91.

⁵²³ *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3. Ordu Harekatı*, 860, 866-869.

In a similar way, there should have been a SO unit that was included and thus became invisible in the Çoruh Detachment. It is hard to estimate the amount of this force. Yet it is possible to predict that the SO forces included in it were distributed among Petkir, Milo, İşhan, Hat, and Kaleboğazı border battalions, as it is not feasible to count five militia battalions as well as the Gümüşhane and Trabzon Gendarme Battalions included in the Çoruh Detachment as SO forces.⁵²⁴

Considering the battalions under the command of both Ali Rıza and Yakup Cemil, it is possible to estimate that the average number of a battalion during the second half of 1915 was approximately 450-500 men. Considering the aggregate of the Third Army in February 1916, on the other hand, it is possible that the SO was operating with only 300-350 men per battalion in the field. Based on this average calculation, the SO forces under the command of the Third Army was 5-6 thousand in the second half of 1915, whereas this number diminished to 1400 men in March 1916. Such figures or numerical information when assessed in light of the examples of the Lake Van South and Çoruh Detachments conclude that the Army had complete control of the SO after the order concerning the termination of the bands had been issued on February 3, 1915, and accordingly the remaining SO bands in the field along with those whose organization were completed and place of duty was determined were subjected to military organization. The SO, which could not compensate for its deficiency of combatants subsequent to the termination of the band organization, integrated in time as regular conscripts within the army cadres.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 145-165.

Consequently, the period preceding the closure of the SO can be said to have started in early February 1915, and came to end in the second week of May with the elimination of the Supervisory Council (SC). Hence, it is plausible that the SO survived officially from November 30, 1913 to the second week of 1915, when it was replaced with the OEA. As a matter of fact, the official documents confirm that Cevad Bey, Dersaadet Central Commander, relinquished his office between May and July 1915, and Ali Bařhamba was appointed as the director general instead. For that reason, it is possible to mark the date Ali Bařhamba came into office as the official date of the transition from the SO to the OEA.

This prompts the question of how the central command of the SO, which was closed almost ten months after the outbreak of the First World War, organized. This subject will be approached in four broad headings: the SC, directors, Central Command, and branches.

4.3 Supervisory Council of the SO

An equally important integral part of the SO, the SC possessed a secret character, almost invisible at first sight. Researchers can even count themselves fortunate to encounter, through the internal correspondences of the SO, any pertinent piece of information other than the existence of this council. Telegrams addressed, “to the Exalted Council of the Special Organization” (*Teřkilat-ı Mahsusa Komisyon-i Valasına*) might provide insight about the internal mechanism of the SO that its central command was run by

a commission. Another telegram, sent in September 1914 from Gendarme Major Hasan Efendi to Süleyman Askeri, the first director of the SO, would raise a similar doubt. This group, charged with instigating a revolt in Egypt against the British through the work of a central committee composed of three people, was ordered “to receive instructions from the Special Organization Supervisory Council through the agency of the Ministry of War” and “be subjected in every respect to the aforementioned Supervisory Council.”⁵²⁵

A report penned by Bekir Sıtkı Bey, who was in Kayseri then and occupied with preparations to proceed with his battalion to Caucasia, refers to the same point. The report requests permission to provide a voluntary unit standing ready in Balıkesir under the command of Salih Zeki Bey, borough master of İncesu, who voluntarily wanted to join the battalion and was believed to serve the cause of the battalion with his thorough knowledge of Caucasia. Though written to the Central Command, permission was required from the SC.⁵²⁶

It appears impossible, considering such examples, to come to a conclusion other than that the SO was attached to the Ministry of War and administered by a supervisory council. If the İttihadists were not court-martialed after the war, all the existing and available knowledge on the subject would be limited to this, and it would become difficult to reach any information on the structure of the SC and its members. These proceedings

⁵²⁵ ATASE, BDH: from Süleyman Askeri to Gendarme Commander Major Hasan Efendi in Yafa: F: 1836, D: 35, I: 2/1.

⁵²⁶ Cevad Bey would close the correspondence with the following question: “what is the decision of the council on this matter? (*Bu babda heyetin kararı ne merkezdedir?*)”. ATASE, BDH: from Cevad Bey to SO (18 Şubat 1330/3 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/76.

indicate that any SO analysis without understanding the SC would be erroneous, if not incomplete from the start, as it represented, after Enver Pasha, the highest post that supervised, organized, and directed the SO. The SC, in a sense, was the heart of the SO, and it was the SO operational units that supplied the blood to that heart. The SC performed key roles in a number of activities, from the formation of the operational units in cooperation with a number of governmental departments, to their dispatch to the combat zones; and from appointing their commanders to their supply of arms and equipment. It was again this body that managed the business in the central command of the SO, Nur-i Osmaniye, presided over regionally divided SO branches, and assisted in ensuring the coordination between them.

According to Atif Bey, the SC was established with the declaration of mobilization for the First World War.⁵²⁷ In other words, the SC was created shortly after the SO's attachment to the Ministry of War. Yet no written imperial order has surfaced about the creation of the SC. Atif Bey relates this to the temporary establishment of the council. Nevertheless, he tries to prove the official character of the council by stating that: "The Minister of the Interior, Grand Vizier and so forth perhaps knew about [it]". The fact that it was founded on the decision of the Council of Ministers (*Heyet-i Vükela*) also appears probable to him. However, he could not adduce any proof to justify his statements. It appears that the SC was a structure established on verbal

⁵²⁷ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

orders. As a matter of fact, Atif Bey mentions that he had been given a verbal order by Enver Pasha to work in the council.⁵²⁸

The establishment of the SC is quite unusual as is the foundation of the SO, and it is difficult to ascertain immediately the names of members of this unusual council. Considering the court martial ordinance, Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir and Dr. Nazım seem to have participated in “the supervisory council of the secret network [the SO]” (*şebeke-i hafiye encümen idaresi*). Additionally, the SC came to be composed of three persons following the departure of Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir for Erzurum, and of Rıza Bey for Trabzon⁵²⁹, a remark also confirmed by Atif Bey. However, when the chief justice delved into the question, Atif Bey made no mention of Bahaeddin Şakir and Rıza Bey, though he named all the members and duties of the SC.⁵³⁰

Did Bahaeddin Şakir and Rıza Bey participate in the SC? The answer to this question is directly relevant to the foundation date of the SO. In this respect, Atif Bey seems to be the sole information source available. According to him, the SC was established after the declaration of mobilization, and the election of its members occurred over a period of time.⁵³¹ Also, a telegram from Süleyman Askeri to Gendarme Major Hasan Efendi in early September, in addition to demonstrating the recent attachment of the SO to the Ministry of War, suggests that the SC might have

⁵²⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 85-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁵²⁹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337, No. 3540, s. 4-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 Nisan 1919).

⁵³⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵³¹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

been recently established. Otherwise, this group, charged with instigating a revolt in Egypt against the British through the work of a central committee composed of three people, would not have been particularly ordered “to receive instructions from the Special Organization Supervisory Council through the agency of the Ministry of War,” (*Harbiye Nezareti vasıtasıyla Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa heyet-i idaresinden talimat*) “and be subjected in every respect to the aforementioned supervisory council” (*ve her hususda mezkur heyet-i idareye merbut*).⁵³²

Considering this information, it becomes presumable that both the establishment of the SC and the election of its members should have coincided with the first half of August 1914. It is also worth considering the participation of Bahaeddin Şakir in the Central Committee of the Caucasus Revolutionary Society, established on October 12, 1914. Bahaeddin Şakir was precisely in Erzurum, the center of the Caucasus Revolutionary Society, during the second week of September.⁵³³ If it is accepted that a journey from Istanbul to Erzurum at that time would last almost three weeks, then the latest departure date of Bahaeddin Şakir from Istanbul would be the middle of September.⁵³⁴ This would be a very optimistic estimate because Bahaeddin Şakir, as a person who participated in the establishment of the society, should have arrived in Erzurum before September 12 and been occupied

⁵³² ATASE, BDH: from Süleyman Askeri Gendarme Commander Major Hasan Efendi in Yafa; F: 1836, D: 35, I: 2/1.

⁵³³ Sarısan, “Trabzon Mintıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri”, 500.

⁵³⁴ After the establishment of the SO, it was thought that the responsible secretaries could also prove useful in war, who were to travel via Haydarpaşa-Ankara-Sivas to Erzincan, where they were to await the orders. It took this group eighteen days to arrive at Erzincan from Istanbul. A day before their arrival, Bahaeddin Şakir Bey and the committee that accompanied him had also passed through Erzincan, traveling via the route Ereğli-Niğde-Kayseri-Sivas. Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” November 3, 1933.

with the relevant matters. Therefore, there is no reason not to trust the date provided by Arif Cemil on the departure of Bahaeddin Şakir from Istanbul. According to the narration, Bahaeddin Şakir and the accompanying group “went to Erzurum by way of Ereğli-Niğde-Kayseri-Sivas-Erzincan a few days after the commencement of the Great War.”⁵³⁵

Considering the dates of both the establishment of the SC and Bahaeddin Şakir’s departure for Erzurum, it becomes clear that he had virtually never participated in the SC, which was presumably established shortly after the declaration of mobilization during the first half of August. We also lack information if he was a member by name only. It might also, with the same reason, be said that Rıza Bey had not ever participated in the SC, either. As a matter of fact, Rıza Bey, who would be appointed as the officer in charge of the SO activities in Trabzon region, was in Trabzon as early as August.⁵³⁶ Rıza Bey, in his testimony states that subsequent to the declaration of mobilization he notified Enver Pasha of his will to attend the war and thereupon Enver Pasha sent him to Trabzon.⁵³⁷ Yet in another part of his testimony, he states that he had been in Trabzon until the mobilization.⁵³⁸ Thus it may well be that Rıza Bey had remained in Trabzon

⁵³⁵ According to the information provided by Arif Cemil, among the twenty members of this committee were Ömer Naci Bey, general inspector of the CUP, Hilmi Bey, mufti of Erzurum, Emir Haşmet, an Iranian mujahid, Çerkez Reşid, and Ruşeni Bey. Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa,” November 4, 1933.

⁵³⁶ Sarısaman, “Trabzon Mintıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri”, 497; Safi, “I. Dünya Savaşı ve Milli Mücadele döneminde Artvin”, 77.

⁵³⁷ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 50-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919). In another part of his testimony, Rıza Bey stated that he had been in Trabzon until the mobilization.

⁵³⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 59-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

until the order for mobilization was issued, then returned to Istanbul, and finally on an order by Enver Pasha went back to Trabzon again in August.⁵³⁹

However, the minutes of the court-martial obscures this picture to a certain point by giving the impression that Rıza Bey had gone and returned to Istanbul for the duration of his service in Trabzon. But Rıza Bey continued his activities in the said region against the Russians from August 1914 through March 15, 1915, when he resigned the front to others with the justification of illness.⁵⁴⁰ Perhaps Rıza Bey has been confused with another man of the same name serving in the SO's central command. Cevad Bey, while giving testimony on the personnel of the Central Command, speaks of a distinguished captain (*mümtaz yüzbaşı*) named Rıza Bey.⁵⁴¹ Another view holds that he was a retired major⁵⁴², and according to yet another he was a general staff captain.⁵⁴³ Whatever his rank might be, this Rıza Bey was one of the officers who processed the information about the bands that would be deployed on war fronts for the Central Command, and brought such information to the Dersaadet Central Command to be confirmed and enforced.⁵⁴⁴

⁵³⁹ Arif Cemil also confirms this view. According to him, Rıza Bey had arrived in Trabzon ten days before the responsible secretaries sent off in August to go to Erzurum and Trabzon. Mil, "Umumi Harpte Teşkilatı Mahsusa," November 5, 1933.

⁵⁴⁰ Sarısamam, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 517.

⁵⁴¹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁴² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

⁵⁴³ Sarısamam, "Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri", 517.

⁵⁴⁴ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the subgovernorate of Canik to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/56; ATASE, BDH: from the subgovernorate of Karesi to the Ministry of War (21 Teşrin-i sani 1330/4 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/14. This opinion is confirmed by the testimony of Cevad Bey as

Cevad Bey's testimony, too, confirms the membership of some people who were claimed in the ordinance to have participated in the SC. But like Atif Bey, Cevad Bey makes no mention of Bahaeddin Şakir and Rıza Bey as the members of SC while giving insight into the Central Command of the SO.⁵⁴⁵

It appears that Atif Bey was the first to participate in the SC. To him, Enver Pasha, with the purpose of reducing the workload of Süleyman Askeri, included him in the council.⁵⁴⁶ The court board attempted to prove Atif Bey's organic relation to the CUP rather than dwelling on the duties he performed in the SC. According to the board, Atif Bey, even though he was a member of the CUP Central Committee, went to Ankara to invite Mazhar Bey, Governor of Ankara, to cooperate with the CUP in the Armenian deportation. Midhat Şükrü Bey, in response, mentioned that Atif Bey became a member of the Central Committee after he had broken relations with the SO.⁵⁴⁷ In the same vein, Atif Bey stated that he was never authorized to go to Ankara as an official, and became a member of the Central Committee after he had been detached from the SO. He also added that his name was being confused with another man of the same name, the deputy of Burdur and lieutenant

well. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 66-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

⁵⁴⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁴⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

⁵⁴⁷ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 56-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

governor of Ankara, wherefore the board did not dwell much on the point and resumed questioning.⁵⁴⁸

Regardless, it is apparent that Atif Bey was a member of the SC. This is also confirmed by a petition Atif Bey drew up for his retirement in 1914 when he was a deputy of Çanakkale; with a slight difference, he wore his place in the SO as a badge of honor rather than an admission of criminal conduct:

“1330 (1914) senesinde Ankara Mebusu iken münzam vazife olarak Harbiye Nezareti'ne bağlı Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Merkez Heyeti azalığında... çalıştım. Buradaki hizmetimden dolayı harp madalyasıyla taltif edildiğim gibi mütarekede Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın tehcir işi ile de meşgul olduğum bahanesiyle Divan-ı Harb'e sevkedildim”.⁵⁴⁹

There is another point in the petition that arouses interest. Atif Bey mentions that five people living during those years knew of his membership in the SC. One of those was Halim Cavit Arcaç, a military officer who worked in the office of the secretary general in the Republican People's Party. Another one was Fuat Balkan, Deputy of Edirne and one of the famous activists of the SO. A far more important name was that of Hüsametdin Ertürk, who played a key role in the transition of the SO activities from the First World War to the period of National Struggle and was charged with liquidating the SO.⁵⁵⁰ The others were Halil Bey, who as Dersaadet Central

⁵⁴⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 57-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

⁵⁴⁹ PFA; D: Atif Kamçıl.

⁵⁵⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 1869, D: 127, I: 177/15.

Commander participated in the SC with Atif Bey, and Aziz Akyürek, Deputy of Erzurum when the petition was drawn up.⁵⁵¹

Another member of the SC was Aziz Bey (Akyürek).⁵⁵² It is understood that Aziz Bey was included in the SC after Atif Bey, who states that “they asked to get an officer from the Security General Directorate, too. Then Aziz Bey began to attend.”⁵⁵³ Aziz Bey was, according to Atif Bey, Deputy Director General of the Security General Directorate, whereas in his previous testimony he stated that Aziz Bey was the Director General,⁵⁵⁴ a view also confirmed by the ordinance.⁵⁵⁵ It is true that Aziz Bey served as the Director General of Security General Directorate, but it should be noted that he officially served as Deputy Manager of the political branch in the same

⁵⁵¹ PFA; D: Atif Kamçıl.

⁵⁵² He was born on May 12, 1882 in Trabzon, son of Erzurumlu Midhat Efendi, finance director (*defterdar*) of the province of Edirne, and Hanife Lebibe. In 1902 he graduated from the Imperial School of Civil Service (*Mekteb-i Mülkiye-yi Şahane*). He could speak and write French, English and Armenian. In 1903, he entered state service and was appointed as lieutenant in the Council of State Administration of Civil Affairs (*Şura-yı Devlet Mülkiye İdaresi*). In 1904, he was appointed as officer in attendance (*maiyet memuru* or prospective district governor) in the province of Edirne. In 1908, he became the district governor of Eceabat, after which he was appointed as the district governor of Lüleburgaz. Aziz Bey resigned from his post around this time and became the secretary general of the Party of Union and Progress. After three years in this position, he returned to his job as administrator. He was appointed as Security General Directorate Political Department Assistant on 6 August 1914. While he was in this position, he was charged vicariously with the procedures relating to Emniyet-i Umumiye Directorate (beginning from 19 December 1915). On 24 April 1916 he began to carry out this duty as principal. In 1918 he also became general Director of Publications. On 27 October 1918 he resigned from his duties to be appointed as commercial attaché in the Embassy of Stockholm. Because of the lack of allocated funds, however, he was unable to begin his duty there and remained in Berlin, where he passed the years of truce and struggle for national liberation. He returned to the country after the victory of the national forces at Sakarya. He became respectively regional governor of the Saruhan Sanjak, governor of İzmir, mayor of İzmir, and MP for Erzurum during the 3rd-7th terms of the Parliament. He died on 15 August 1951. Necdet Bilgi, “Saruhan Sancağı'nın Son Mutasarrıfı: Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek,” *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, Vol. 20 (July 2005): 1-18.

⁵⁵³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

⁵⁵⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁵⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337, No. 3540, s. 4-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 May 1919).

directorate while he participated in the SC. The duties of Aziz Bey have already been referenced while examining his activities in the SC in the First Chapter. Yet it is worth remembering that Aziz Bey, in particular, played a key crucial role in the attachment of operational units formed by the agency of Ministry of Interior to the SO.

Dr. Nazım was another member of the SC. In this respect, the testimony of Midhat Şükrü Bey might be confusing, as he had previously stated that Dr. Nazım participated in the SO only after receiving permission from the Central Committee.⁵⁵⁶ Additionally, according to Ziya Bey, the Central Committee, due to the diminishing workload because of the commencement of the war, gave a free hand to those who wished to render any sort of service to the country.⁵⁵⁷ Still he contradicts himself later in his testimony by stating that he did not know the association of Dr. Nazım with the SO. After a few questions, though, he confesses to Dr. Nazım's involvement in the SO along with Bahaeddin Şakir and Rıza Bey.⁵⁵⁸ The mathematical calculation between Midhat Şükrü Bey and the judge as to the number of Central Committee members involved in the SO aside, it is certain that Dr. Nazım was included in the SC. According to Atif Bey, the election of Dr. Nazım to the SC was related to his competence in such matters.⁵⁵⁹ It

⁵⁵⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 57-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

⁵⁵⁷ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 28 Şaban 1337, No. 3561, s. 123-SUP; DHÖM, Seventh Session (17 May 1919).

⁵⁵⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 28 Şaban 1337, No. 3561, s. 119-SUP; DHÖM, Seventh Session (17 May 1919).

⁵⁵⁹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

appears that Dr. Nazım participated in the SC on the request of Enver Pasha.⁵⁶⁰ Cevad Bey, as well, confirmed that Dr. Nazım had participated in the SC.⁵⁶¹ In correspondence sent to Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir from the SC concerning the punishment of an individual named Galatalı Halil, also bore the signature of Dr. Nazım along with those of other members of the SC.⁵⁶² Dr. Nazım's essential duty in the SC, as noted in the previous chapter, was to correspond with the Central Committee for the formation of bands by the provincial branches of the CUP.

The permanent members of the council were Atif, Aziz, and Dr. Nazım Beys, whereas alternate members were its directors. Among these, the membership of Halil and Cevad Beys is beyond any dispute. Süleyman Askeri's membership, however, is not evident in the court-martial ordinance.⁵⁶³ The court board made a distinct effort to question whether he was related to the Central Committee and to that effect questioned Atif and Cevad Beys. Atif Bey denied, in a solemn manner, such a relation⁵⁶⁴ while Cevad Bey mentioned that he could not even identify Süleyman Askeri.⁵⁶⁵ Midhat Şükrü Bey, in response to the same question, said that Süleyman

⁵⁶⁰ This information is given by Talat Bey. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 46-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

⁵⁶¹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁶² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 67-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁵⁶³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337, No. 3540, s. 5-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 April 1919).

⁵⁶⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

⁵⁶⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 70-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

Askeri could not have a relation to the Central Committee due to his being a soldier ever since.⁵⁶⁶ The board may have not concerned itself much with the subject due to information they had had about Süleyman Askeri's suicide following the Şuayyibe operation.⁵⁶⁷ However, because of Süleyman Askeri's being the first director of the SO, his foremost and leading position in the SC is beyond any doubt.⁵⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, in consideration of Cevad⁵⁶⁹ and Atif Beys' testimonies⁵⁷⁰, Süleyman Askeri's participation in the SC is clarified.

As is clear, permanent and alternate members of the council were all vigorous Ittihadists. Atif Bey, along with Yakup Cemil, was one of the most important self-sacrificing volunteers of the CUP, Aziz Bey once the Secretary General of the Party of Union and Progress, Dr. Nazım one of the most important decision makers of the CUP, along with Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, between 1906 and 1918. Furthermore, Enver Pasha was the true founder of the organization and the only Minister of War the SO had ever known from its foundation through its liquidation. Accordingly, the question as to the extent

⁵⁶⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 73-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁵⁶⁷ The last moments of Süleyman Askeri were related thus in the report written by the Iraq Area Command: "Askeri Bey son derece münfail olarak arabasına yalnızca bindi ve bir silah sesi duyuldu. Bu sesin etrafta olduğu ve bir şarapnel sesi zannedildi. Kolordu Kumandanı, Askeri Bey'in yanına gelerek ağzından kanlar akan mir-i muma-ileyhe vaziyetin vahametini söylemiş ve Askeri Bey cevaben sadece "Ya!" ile mukabele eyleyebilmişdi." ATASE, BDH: from the Iraq Area Command to the Office of the Supreme Military Command; (14 April 1915); F: 3603, D: 1-A, I: 2.

⁵⁶⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

⁵⁶⁹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁷⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919).

of the relation between the CUP and SO is irrelevant, as the SO was an Ittihadist organization throughout, and the activist spirit of the CUP became apparent in this organization in dynamically changing forms and conditions.

4.4 Directors of the SO

The director of the SO was the chairman of the SC. It is even plausible to maintain that the Ministry of War established control over the SO through its director, who communicated to and consulted with the Ministry of War on the decisions taken by the SC, and authorized it in accordance with the orders given by the Ministry of War.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, he was the most influential person in decisions taken by the SC, as he was the founder and first director of the SO. His permanent station was not the Ministry of War, but the SO's central quarter located in Cağaloğlu.

Nevertheless, the impact of the first director on the SC would not last long. Along with the departure of the first director for Iraq, the SC would be chaired successively by two Central Commanders of Dersaadet, whose post was located in the Ministry of War, not the TM's central headquarters. This likely hindered their efficacy on the decisions of the SC. More importantly, although the Central Commanders were rarely referred to as "the chief of the SO", they signed their own correspondence with various state departments as "officer to the SO". In conformity with their official duty, their office was

⁵⁷¹ See the testimony of Atif Bey. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 85-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

called either “Central Command, SO Office”⁵⁷² or “SO Office attached to the Central Command, Ministry of War.”⁵⁷³ That being said, although Central Commanders led the SC, it was impossible for them to be as efficient as the first chief on the decisions taken by SC. As a matter of fact, Cevad Bey, the Dersaadet Central Commander, mentioned that his duty in the SC was to put the gathered information and requirements shown to him into action in the presence of the Ministry of War and other institutions concerned. Similarly, he was charged with conveying the relevant orders given by the Ministry of War and its branches.⁵⁷⁴ In a sense, the Central Commanders took on a task, responsible merely for communication and notification of the official transactions.⁵⁷⁵

The inauguration date of Süleyman Askeri, the first chief and founder of the SO, was the official founding date of the SO, November 30, 1913.⁵⁷⁶ Süleyman Askeri, however, would not be mentioned as the chief of the SO until its incorporation in the Ministry of War soon after the declaration of mobilization, on August 2, 1914. It is equally impossible to understand that Süleyman Askeri presided over the SO by examining his enlistment records scattered throughout a number of archives. Ten days after he had been promoted to major, on October 27, 1913, he was appointed as the director to

⁵⁷² ATASE, BDH: from district governorate of Orhangazi to Dersaadet Central Command; (5 Eylül 1331/18 September 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/22.

⁵⁷³ ATASE, BDH: from Chief of Gönen Branch of National Defense Society to Dersaadet Central Command; F: 1829, D: 8, I: 1/26.

⁵⁷⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-27-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁷⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 63-64-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

⁵⁷⁶ ATASE, BDH: undated and unsigned record, F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

the Baghdad New School of Individuals on November 6, 1913.⁵⁷⁷ He would retire on a pension on June 30, 1914.⁵⁷⁸ It is remarkable that Süleyman Askeri had never been in Iraq within the aforementioned time interval. Within this approximately nine months, he was active in Western Thrace and Macedonia. Strictly speaking, the official duty of Süleyman Askeri was used to keep secret the actions he carried out in the Balkans. This either proves the unofficial status of SO then or indicates a post that had not been known to state officials.

It is further notable that while Süleyman Askeri was on official duty, he was planned to be appointed to the Directorate of Refugees and a telegram to this effect was sent to the province of Aydin: "*Erkan-ı Harbiye binbaşılılarından Süleyman Askeri Bey'in Muhacirin Müdüriyeti'ne tayini mutasavver olduğundan orada ise Dersaadet'e avdetinin mumaileyhe tebliğiyle inbası.*"⁵⁷⁹ In other words, Süleyman Askeri was expected to assume two official duties that he would never perform. Curiously enough, security authorities did not know the whereabouts of Süleyman Askeri, but conceivably believe that he might be found in Aydin. Süleyman Askeri's appointment date to the directorship of Board of Settling Tribes and Refugees preceded by one day the date he was retired on pension, July 30, 1914. He assumed the portfolio of Suad Bey, a first-class civil examiner, who

⁵⁷⁷ The total period of Süleyman Askeri on duty was indicated as 14 years, 8 months and 17 days, by the date he was retired from his position as the principal of Efrad-ı Cedide Mektebi in Baghdad. PFA; D: Süleyman Askeri, Nr: 6108 (Askeri Tescil).

⁵⁷⁸ Şimşek, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Reisi Süleyman Askeri Bey*, 124-125.

⁵⁷⁹ BOA. DH.ŞFR.; telegram from the Security General Directorate to the Province of Aydin (8 Şaban 1332/2 July 1914); D: 42, G: 184.

substituted Sıdkı Efendi, a third-grade civil examiner.⁵⁸⁰ If the official documents are indeed accurate, he retired with a pension from his nine month first duty, and another duty of one day. His ground for retirement is also interesting: Süleyman Askeri retired due to his engagement in politics.⁵⁸¹

In any case, it is obvious that he was entrusted with the task of directing the SO after he had retired. After all, his retirement date precedes the declaration of mobilization by at most a week, or the SO's incorporation to the Ministry of War. Similarly, Cevad Bey, a member of the SC, when asked the question, "What was the organization made of?" he replies, "*Bendeniz bulunduğum zamandan evvelini, ne zaman teşekkül ettiğini bilmiyorum. Süleyman Askeri Bey, Halil Bey ve ondan sonra bendeniz bulundum,*" and thus approves the first directorship of Süleyman Askeri.⁵⁸² In the further part of his statements, he mentions that Süleyman Askeri was present at the SO's foundation and that he founded it.⁵⁸³ Atıf Bey, too, testifies that Süleyman Askeri was the director of the SC⁵⁸⁴ and founded the SO.⁵⁸⁵ Midhat Şükrü, by mentioning that Bahaeddin Şakir was liable to the

⁵⁸⁰ BOA. İ.DH.; d: 1509, G: 1332/N-02 (06 Ramazan 1332/29 July 1914).

⁵⁸¹ Şimşek, *ı Mahsusa'nın Reisi Süleyman Askeri Bey*, 125.

⁵⁸² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁵⁸³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 70-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁵⁸⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 12 Şaban 1337, No. 3547, s. 48-SUP; DHÖM, Third Session (6 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 85-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁵⁸⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

SO and so to the orders of Süleyman Askeri, approves the directorship of Süleyman Askeri.⁵⁸⁶

In direct proportion to this evidence, there is consensus that Süleyman Askeri had the biggest share after Enver Pasha in the foundation of the SO and that he served as its first director. Although it was claimed that Esref Kuscubasi was the actual founder and the first chief of the SO, it has been mentioned that such claims are nothing but the results of efforts at creating a hero that do not reflect reality.⁵⁸⁷

From a telegram dispatched to Riza Bey, an important SO personnel, it is understood that Suleyman Askeri held his office until the third week of November.⁵⁸⁸ In spite of that, on the document listing the directors of the SO, the second week of November is mentioned as Suleyman Askeri's departure date for Iraq.⁵⁸⁹ To be certain, this date could signify the official date of the handover. In this case, it is conceivable that Suleyman Askeri actually held his office for one more week. However, if a calculation is made by taking into account the latest correspondence, it should be emphasized that the aforementioned document has a fallibility of almost a week. In light of that, what happened to Suleyman Askeri after the third week of November? Most likely, in the last week of November, or until his departure for Iraq, because of his appointment to the Command of Iraq and its vicinity⁵⁹⁰ with the title of

⁵⁸⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 73-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁵⁸⁷ Safi, *The Ottoman Special Organization – Teskilat-ı Mahsusa*, 137-141.

⁵⁸⁸ Vahdet Keleşyılmaz, "Kafkas Harekatı'nın Perde Arkası", 377, n. 25 and 27,.

⁵⁸⁹ ATASE, BDH: unsigned and undated record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁵⁹⁰ ATASE, BDH: from Enver Paşa to Iraq Area Command (7-8 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20-21 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 3, I: 28.

Basra Governor and the Commander of 38th Division⁵⁹¹, he must have been preoccupied with relevant military preparations.⁵⁹² He must have departed on the above date, otherwise, he would not have been seen travelling from Cerablus to Fallujah on December 9⁵⁹³, during the second week of December from Deyr-i Zor to Baghdad⁵⁹⁴, and finally arriving in Baghdad on the 21st of the same month.⁵⁹⁵

After Süleyman Askeri had been detached from the SC, the chairmanship was taken over by Halil (Kut) Bey, the uncle of Enver Pasha and the Central Commander of Dersaadet.⁵⁹⁶ This can be verified by the documents signed by “Lt. Col. Halil, Officer to the SO”.⁵⁹⁷ Cevad Bey, too, confirms the chairmanship of Halil Bey.⁵⁹⁸ Atıf Bey, as well, another member

⁵⁹¹ATASE, BDH: from 13th Corps Command to Iraq Area Command (7 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 3, I: 17/5; from the Ministry of War to Iraq Area Command (24 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 3; I: 28/3.

⁵⁹²According to Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, Suleyman Askeri, before going back to Istanbul passed through Sofia, where he met Mustafa Kemal. Mustafa Kemal told him that the government took some measures, rightly or wrongly, for the fronts. However, according to the information Mustafa Kemal got about the military build-up, the Iraqi front was unoccupied and that could be dangerous. This was why Mustafa Kemal requested from Suleyman Askeri to ask Enver Bey to send Mustafa Kemal to Iraqi front. Suleyman Askeri accepted that and headed towards Istanbul. Soon enough, Mustafa Kemal learnt that Suleyman Askeri had been dispatched to Iraq, the place where Ataturk wanted to go. Ataturk never met him after that and he asked nothing to Enver Bey about this request. There, he did not know whether Suleyman Askeri informed Enver Bey and how he was appointed. Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. III, p. I, 398n.

⁵⁹³ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War to Iraq Area Command (28 Teşrin-i Sani 1330/11 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 2, I: 1/13.

⁵⁹⁴ATASE, BDH: from the subgovernorate of Deyr-i Zor to Iraq Area Command (7 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 3, I: 28/1.

⁵⁹⁵ATASE, BDH: from Süleyman Askeri Iraq Area Command (8 Kanun-i evvel 1330/21 December 1914); F: 3603, D: 3, I: 11/22.

⁵⁹⁶ATASE, BDH: unsigned and undated record, F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁵⁹⁷ATASE, BDH: F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/95.

⁵⁹⁸*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26, 28-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919);

of the SC, in a sense confirms that Halil Bey presided over the SO for a short period by stating that Halil Bey was included in the SC after Süleyman Askeri's departure.⁵⁹⁹ Essentially, they had no choice but to admit this fact because the correspondence exchanged between Midhat Sukru Bey and the SC is quite clear about his chairmanship.⁶⁰⁰

Halil Bey was in Samsun on his return to Istanbul from Van when he learnt of the appointment of Enver Pasha as the Minister of War. For almost a year prior, he had been in Van, where he was appointed by the Grand Vizier Mahmut Şevket Pasha as the Commander of Van Gendarme Regiment to suppress the Kurdish bandits attacking the Armenians.⁶⁰¹ Upon his arrival in Istanbul, he was offered the central commandship by Enver Pasha. It is interesting that Enver Pasha, while attempting to persuade him to accept the offer, underlined that the Central Committee had expressed an opinion in the same direction about his appointment. This implies that an appointment originally considered by Enver Pasha was also submitted to the Central Committee for approval. Hence it can be said that Halil Bey became the Central Commander after having been granted approval by the Central Committee. Though his inauguration date is not known exactly, it is quite likely that he took the office around February 1914. Halil Bey mentions that

⁵⁹⁹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶⁰⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 69-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁶⁰¹ Halil Bey related that the grand vizier Sadrazam Mahmut Şevket Paşa offered the governorship of Van to Tahsin (Uzer) Bey, who accepted it on condition that Halil Bey would be appointed as commander of the gendarme regiment there. Upon this Halil Bey accepted the position in question and went to Van. Sorgun, *Halil Paşa, İttihat ve Terakki'den Cumhuriyet'e Bitmeyen Savaş*, 131.

he met with Enver Bey about the time that he became the Minister of War, and adds that he remained in office for almost a year.⁶⁰²

Halil Bey, however, would have to wait until the third week of November 1914 to formally take over, in addition to his tasks in the Central Command, the directorship of the SO.⁶⁰³ The term of office for Halil Bey was rather short. Having relayed a report to Rıza Bey on November 19, 1914 concerning the dispatch of a voluntary convoy prepared by the National Defense Society to the combat zone under the guidance of Abdulgafur Efendi⁶⁰⁴, he most likely relinquished his office during the third week of November.

Halil Bey does not make mention of the SO in his memoirs and even qualifies his duty in Central Command as one of secondary importance. Subsequently, Halil Bey took over the command of a newly reorganized division formed on the order of Enver Pasha in Istanbul, the “Halil Bey Expeditionary Force”. The initial aim of the division was to pass through Tabriz into Dagestan to incite a revolt there and expel the Russians from the shores of the Caspian Sea. With the disastrous Sarıkamış operation, however, the division was attached to the Third Army and instead the First Halil Bey Expeditionary Force was formed in Istanbul.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰² Ibid., 132-136.

⁶⁰³ ATASE, BDH: unsigned and undated record; F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁶⁰⁴ ATASE, BDH: from the National Defense Society to Dersaadet Central Commander Halil Bey (4 Kanun-i evvel 1330/17 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/48.

⁶⁰⁵ Sorgun, *Halil Paşa, İttihat ve Terakki'den Cumhuriyet'e Bitmeyen Savaş*, 137-138.

Cevad Bey later replaced Halil Bey and took over the directorship of the SO as the new Central Commander of Dersaadet.⁶⁰⁶ This is verified by the testimonies of Cevad Bey himself, and Atıf Bey,⁶⁰⁷ as well as by the ordinance of the court-martial.⁶⁰⁸ Before the declaration of mobilization, Cevad Bey had been charged with the purchase of animals in Europe and returned from Hungary when he learned that he was appointed to the Central Command in November 1914. Officially he assumed his duty in the third week of December, which also coincides with the date he began to preside over the SO.⁶⁰⁹

According to Hüsamettin Ertürk, Cevad Bey (Kızanıklı) was “one of the distinguished of the [Committee of] Union and Progress. He participated in the Storming of the Sublime Porte, overthrew the government, served as the Central Commander of Istanbul, rose to the colonelcy and having passed to Anatolia during the National Struggle, became the director of the Law Courts Office in the Ministry of National Defense.”⁶¹⁰ It was again Cevad Bey,

⁶⁰⁶*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 63-64-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

⁶⁰⁷*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶⁰⁸*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 4 Şaban 1337, No. 3540, s. 5-SUP; DHÖM, First Session (27 April 1919).

⁶⁰⁹*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919). Cevad Bey, son of Mustafa (311 C 23), was born in 1288 in Kızanlık. He entered Military Academy on May 15, 1308. He had three children from his wife Safinaz Hanım, named Sebile, Cihat and Mustafa Turhan. He fell sick while commanding the heavy artillery regiment in the fortified area of Çatalca, and died on August 8, 1929. PFA; D: Cevat Bey, no: 60208.

⁶¹⁰Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, 39.

who on the order of Enver Pasha tempted to arrest Yakup Cemil subsequent to his attempt at overthrowing the government.⁶¹¹

Considering Cevad Bey's testimony, it is difficult to determine his term of office. Although the date he took the office in the Central Command was same as his inauguration in the SO, the date he mentions for the end of his office (end of October 1918) coincides to the termination of his office only in the Central Command. That said, Cevad Bey did not serve as the director of the SO for three years.⁶¹² His term of office, though longer than that of Halil Bey, was relatively short. He turned this duty, which he had held for almost six months over to his successor in about May or June 1915.⁶¹³ That date would also coincide with the closure of the SO.

An illustration of the changes in the administrative structure of the SO was the replacement of Cevad Bey with Ali Başhamba Bey in May 1915. The transition from the SO to the OEA would be realized during the directorship of Ali Başhamba.⁶¹⁴ This replacement can be tracked through the correspondences addressed "to the Directorate of the Office for Eastern Affairs, Ministry of War".⁶¹⁵ Despite this, it is conceivable that Cevad Bey, who would carry on his task at the Central Command until the end of the war, maintained his relationship with the OEA for some time, for as late as 1918, a note on the appointment and dispatch of Lieutenant İhsan Efendi to Tripoli as

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 136-138.

⁶¹² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 27-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶¹³ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁶¹⁴ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13.

⁶¹⁵ ATASE, BDH: F: 1839, D: 49, I: 1/338.

the operator of a radiotelegraph station of the Tripoli Group was submitted to the Central Command.⁶¹⁶

As noted earlier, the most important factor in the emergence of this transition was the termination of the band organization, which eventually culminated in the elimination of the SC that occurred simultaneously with Ali Başhamba assuming control. As a matter of fact, Atif Bey in his testimony states that: “We [the SC] disbanded at the end of April, [3]31. On that date Ali Bey [Başhamba] of Algeria [actually of Tunisia] was appointed by Enver Pasha, the Minister of War. He was appointed with salary, in essence, as an official; we were present voluntarily. Then our duty in the council came to an end.”⁶¹⁷ Cevad Bey, too, confirms the directorship of Atif Bey.⁶¹⁸ Ali Başhamba, as the first director of the OEA, presided over the office from its establishment until he fell ill on October 24, 1918. During this period, correspondences by the director of the OEA were signed either in the form of “Ali Başhamba, SO Director,” or “the Director of the Office for Eastern Affairs, Ali Başhamba.”⁶¹⁹

According to official documents, General Staff Colonel Hasan Tosun Bey was appointed officially after the death of Ali Başhamba on October 31, 1918 as the director of the organization. However, he must have replaced Ali Başhamba for a week at the time of his near death. Cevad Bey, too, in his

⁶¹⁶ATASE, BDH: F: 1859, D: 141, I: 1/30.

⁶¹⁷*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 31-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶¹⁸*Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 68-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁶¹⁹Folr examples, see; ATASE, BDH: F: 1839, D: 49, I: 1/338; F: 1842, D: 64, I: 1/12; F: 1858, D: 136, I: 3/16; F: 1858, D: 136, I: 6/5.

testimony verifies that Hasan Tosun took the office after Ali Başhamba's death.⁶²⁰ It is relatively easy, in respect to his inauguration date to determine the duty of Hasan Tosun: to officially annul the OEA in conformity with the terms of the Mudros Armistice. He must have been charged with holding the OEA under control, as well, which seems to have performed secret activities in defiance of the provision of the Mudros Armistice and overseeing its closure process. Nevertheless, the appointment of an old Ittihadist to such a critical post is interesting, in that if the organization truly desired to be annulled, it would be expected from İzzet Pasha, the Minister of War, to appoint an anti-Ittihadist, not a man who once, along with Selahaddin Bey, took to the mountains with his band in Albania, following the example of Enver Bey. Hence it is conceivable that İzzet Pasha appointed Tosun to that post merely for show or as a useful means to cover ongoing activities of the OEA. The term of office for Hasan Tosun Bey lasted only fifteen days; the end of his duty coincided with the so-called annulment of the office, November 15, 1918.⁶²¹ In other words, Hasan Tosun did not participate in the liquidation of the office, and he was "replaced" according to Cevad Bey.⁶²² As of now, it seems impossible to comprehend the logic behind this replacement. Yet it should be noted that Hüsamettin Ertürk seized control of the OEA as a result of this replacement and played a key function in the transition of the SO or OEA in later underground organizations.

⁶²⁰ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 68-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁶²¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

⁶²² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 68-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

On the other hand, the assertion that the last director was Hüsametdin Ertürk is based on his memoirs, where he exaggerated his own role in the office. The discussion of this issue in detail, beyond proving whether the assertion in question is authentic, generally indicates the extent of the difficulty of verifying the statements in memoirs, which provide first-hand account of the SO and its operations.

Hüsametdin Ertürk made contradictory statements regarding the chiefs of the SO. He stated that he, Suleyman Askeri, and Ali Başhamba had all led the organization.⁶²³ Elsewhere in his memoirs, however, he states that he was a stand-in for Ali Başhamba and that he was charged with officially dismantling the SO,⁶²⁴ which was later on converted to the Worldwide Islamic Revolt Organization (*Umum Alem-i Islam İhtilal Teşkilatı*). To ascertain which one of these claims is true, if either, further literature must be consulted.

The article, titled “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa yahut Umur-i Şarkiye Dairesi” by Mustafa Balcioğlu, a specialist on the administrative structure of the SO, gives a clear idea on the assertion of Hüsametdin Ertürk. An analysis of the list of the directors of the SO that Balcioğlu produced indicates that Ertürk led the organization from October 31, 1918 to December 5, 1918. This seems to confirm Ertürk’s first claim, and because the source upon which Balcioğlu bases his assertion is an archival document housed at the ATASE, other SO specialists, such as Atilla Çeliktepe, have accepted it as authentic.⁶²⁵ Despite

⁶²³ Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, 4.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 165-167.

⁶²⁵ Atilla Çeliktepe, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'nın Siyasi Misyonu* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat, 2003). The main part of the book, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa”, pp. 71-119, appears to be complete plagiarism from Stoddard and Pehlivanlı. See for a detailed analysis; Polat Safi, “Bir ihtimal daha yok: düpedüz intihal!”, *Kılavuz* 42 (2006), 7-9.

its widespread acceptance, however, there are a number of reasons this claim is dubious.

When one reviews at the dates that Ertürk is alleged to have presided over the SO, one concludes that Ertürk was appointed chief the day after the Mudros Armistice was signed (October 30, 1918), and occupied the position for the next five weeks. While antipathy toward the SO on the part of the Allies and anti-CUP circles within the empire made it clear that the organization was to be abolished after the armistice, one wonders why a new leader would be appointed to the SO on the very same day that the organization should have closed. Ertürk's second claim, that he was not the chief but rather a stand-in for Başhamba, raises further doubts about the exact nature of his relationship with the organization. The additional fact that no mention is made of Ertürk's leadership in any of the memoirs or by any of the Ittihadists court-martialed at the end of the war necessitates reflecting on the archives to answer the question of whether Ertürk did in fact head the SO, as he himself claimed, and whether his leadership can be documented, as Balçioğlu claims to have done.

Turning to the ATASE archive with Balçioğlu's article as a starting point, one is immediately confronted with several questions. In the introduction to his article, Balçioğlu provides the transcription of an archival source detailing the reasons behind the establishment of the SO. His failure to provide the ATASE classification number of the document makes locating the original, rather than the transcription he provides his reader, difficult. Comparing his transcription to the original document, one begins to wonder whether Balçioğlu might have intentionally omitted the classification number

to make it more difficult to access the original. While maintaining the general sense of the original document, it excludes parts of the documents Balcıođlu failed to transcribe, collapses sentences together by removing the missing parts and pasting the remaining pieces together, and replaces words Balcıođlu could not read with the author's own.⁶²⁶ Incomplete at best and downright misleading at worst, Balcıođlu's article gives its reader further cause for concern as it progresses.

Later in the article, Balcıođlu cites eight different documents as proof of his list of the chiefs of the SO, including Ertürk, and his description of the organization's central administrative structure. He only provides one classification number for the documents, however, and that number does not correspond to any file at the ATASE archive.⁶²⁷ Since he does list the correct file number and dossier, it is still possible to locate the documents he refers to, despite the incorrect index number he provides for them.⁶²⁸ One of these documents does contain information about the dates of the establishment and abolition of the SO, the identity of its leaders, and the person responsible for the closure process after the Mudros Armistice.⁶²⁹

One again finds discrepancies when comparing Balcıođlu's article to the sources upon which it is based. The documents show that Hüseyin Tosun

⁶²⁶ This document titled " Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa ahiren Umur-i Şarkıye namı alan ve müteakib tarihte ilga edilen dairenin esbab-ı teşkili (Reasons of the foundation of the SO Department, lately entitled OEA and subsequently abolished)" actually carries the following classification number: ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13, 13/1, 13/2, 13/3.

⁶²⁷ The classification number that Balcıođlu cites but does not correspond to any file in the ATASE archive is as follows: ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 20.

⁶²⁸ The documents he actually made use of is as follows: ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4, 13/5, 13/5a, 13/6, 13/6a, 13/7, 13/7a, 13/8.

⁶²⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

was the actual head of the SO during the time Ertürk claims to have been in charge of the organization. This leaves Ertürk as at best the stand-in for Tosun, not for Başhamba as Ertürk had claimed, since Tosun is listed as the last chief of the SO in the documents. Yet the documents describe Ertürk as having been not a leader of the SO, but rather an officer appointed on December 5, 1918 to oversee the closure of the organization.

What can account for these discrepancies? Balcioğlu's failure to even transcribe Tosun's name, his claim that Ertürk headed the SO during the dates that Tosun was its leader, and his assertion that Ertürk left his post on the very same day as the documents he relies on state that he began his duty, all lead one to suspect something more sinister than mere negligence on the part of Balcioğlu. On a more charitable reading, Balcioğlu may have chosen to alter the facts to support Ertürk's claim because he simply could not transcribe enough of the documents to offer any other conclusion. In any event, whether because of academic dishonesty or a failure to properly transcribe the documents on which he based his article, Balcioğlu both mischaracterizes the nature of Ertürk's involvement in the SO and omits the names of several actual heads of the organization listed in the documents.

Even if the documents Balcioğlu relied on paint a different picture of Ertürk than Balcioğlu does in his article, there is reason to question the veracity of their account, too. The documents were written after the SO was closed and placed among the archives of the organization. But it is not clear why these documents were written, or who authored them. Before giving them a potentially undeserved weight, one should cross-check the statements they contain against other sources from the period.

The archival documents record that during the period Ertürk claims to have stood in for Başhamba, roughly between October 31 and November 15, 1918, his position was not “Chief of the OEA.” He is instead referred to as “lieutenant colonel Hüsametdin from the OEA” (*Umur-i Şarkıye Dairesi’nden Kaymakam Hüsametdin*).⁶³⁰ In the documents after December 5, he is mentioned as “lieutenant colonel Hüsametdin in charge of the liquidation of the SO” (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’nın tasfiyesine memur Kaymakam Hüsametdin*).⁶³¹

This is verified by a correspondence from December 15, 1918, in which Cevad Pasha, the Chief of General Staff requests, from the Istanbul Guardianship, to allocate a room in the Gendarme Department by the side of the branches of the Central Command for Lt. Col. Hüsameddin Bey “who was commissioned to liquidate the existing OEA files and accounts”.⁶³² On the other hand, General Staff Colonel İsmet (İnönü) Bey, then Counselor of the Ministry of War, informed the Central Command of the necessary actions that should be taken during the liquidation process:

“Merkez Kumandanlığı’na

Mahremdir

Mülga Umur-i Şarkıye

-Bi’l-umum evrakını Erkan-ı Harbiye-yi Umumiye riyaset-i celilesine teslim edecektir.

-Kasalarını muhasebe me’murlarını ve muhasebe evrakını Muhasebat Müdiriyet-i Umumiyesi’ne teslim edecektir.

- Eşya’yı askeriye Harbiye Da’iresi’ne teslim olunacaktır.

Levazım “ “

⁶³⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 1855, D: 127, I: 6/1 (9 Nov. 1918); F: 1858, D: 136, I: 3/87 (10 Nov.1918).

⁶³¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1869, D: 127, I: 177/15.

⁶³² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 68-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

-Zabitanın muhassesatına a'id mu'amelat kema-kan Merkez Kumandanlığınca ifa' olunacak ve Mu'amelat-ı Zatiyeden yeni vazife me'muriyetleri tebliğ oluncaya kadar Merkez Kumandanlığı muma-ileyhime merci' kalacaktır.

-Bina' asayiş şu'besine teslim olunacaktır.

-Makedonyalı ve Trakyalı ve sa'ir memalik-i müstevliye ahalisinden gönüllü efradın terhis mu'amelatı ve bunların celb sevkinde hizmet eden vücuhdan kırk kişinin umuru Ordu Da'iresi'nce görülecektir.

Harbiye Nazırı namına müsteşar
İsmet⁶³³

Another noteworthy point is that reports dispatched to Ertürk before Başhamba's death on October 31 only dealt with SO operations in North Africa and not those of the SO's other regional boards. Ertürk is in fact listed as having been the director of the Africa Board, one of the subdivisions of the OEA, from at least the beginning of 1918 until October 31.⁶³⁴ This explains the detailed accounts in his memoirs of events concerning North Africa, such as the kidnapping of Sheikh Ahmad al-Sanusi from Tripoli and the establishment of the Africa Groups Command, compared to his laconic treatment of the Caucasus, Anatolia, Rumelia, etc.

Hence, it is possible to maintain that Tosun was appointed as director of the OEA, not Ertürk, after the death of Başhamba. Finally, after the resign of Tosun on the same day that the SO was abolished, Ertürk, the director of the Africa Board,⁶³⁵ must have been charged with the duty of overseeing the closure process. If Ertürk was the head of anything, it would have been an underground successor to the OEA, the Worldwide Islamic Revolt

⁶³³ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 69-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

⁶³⁴ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/6a.

⁶³⁵ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

Organization.⁶³⁶ Ertürk's contradictory claims that he was the head of the SO and that he was a stand-in for Başhamba both turn out to be false. This same conclusion may be drawn from documents contained in the rarely used archive of the Pension Fund (*Emekli Sandığı*).

Ertürk, on January 15, 1943, petitioned the Ministry of Defense to be allowed to retire with the rank of colonel rather than lieutenant colonel.⁶³⁷ Colonel Hilmi Özgören and judge advocate Rıza Olgaç were tasked with evaluating the petition. Though they noted that Ertürk had undertaken important tasks in the SO, they did not mention anything about him leading or standing in as leader of the organization. More importantly, they conducted their evaluation on the basis of OEA documents and under the supervision of Sheikh Ahmad Sanusi and Fevzi Cakmak, Chief of the General Staff. In other words Ertürk's claims are confirmed neither by OEA documents, nor by Sheikh Sanusi, with whom Ertürk worked closely during the First World War, nor yet by Fevzi Çakmak, who knew the activities of the SO well and commented on drafts of Ertürk's memoirs in his own handwriting.⁶³⁸ Some ten years before Ertürk's petition, Atif Bey (Kamçıl), in a petition he drew up for his retirement, declared proudly his duty in the administrative board of the SO. His petition was confirmed immediately upon inspection.⁶³⁹ During a period when mentioning one's place in the SO was a badge of honor rather than an admission of criminal conduct, Ertürk's silence in his petition about

⁶³⁶ Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası*, 166-167.

⁶³⁷ This document is also located in the Republican Archive.; CA; FK: 030.11.1, Y: 157.33.8 (November 20, 1942).

⁶³⁸ PFA; F: Hüsamettin Ertürk; no: 41474-75 ve 71672.

⁶³⁹ PFA; F: Atif Kamçıl. Also see RA; c. no: 030.11.1-155.21.1.

leading or standing in as leader of the SO can only be read as evidence that he never occupied any such positions.⁶⁴⁰

It seems that the only missing part in this picture for now is what happened during the time frame between November 15 and December 5. The only source of information in this respect is the testimony of Cevad Bey. According to him, two different groups were employed for the liquidation of the OEA. One of them, a “commission of officials” (*memur heyeti*), was inducted after the duty of Hasan Tosun had come to an end on November 15. Subsequently, “officers [in the OEA]” set to work,⁶⁴¹ and Hüsametdin Ertürk should be the officer leading this second group. It is hence plausible that between November 15 and December 5, a commission of officials, though a subject that has yet to be clarified, was occupied with liquidating the OEA.

4.5 Relations with the Ministry of War: Central Command

The departure of Süleyman Askeri for Iraq brought along important changes within the administrative structure of the SO. Above all, the SC was chaired successively by Central Commanders and accordingly, the location of the SO’s director changed. Hereafter, the post of the director would be located in the Ministry of War, not in the SO’s Central Command in Cağaloğlu. This

⁶⁴⁰ Ertürk had been retired on age grounds on 23 November, 1942. However, his previous retirement was cancelled and having been promoted to the rank of colonel, he was retired again. . See CA; FK: 030.11.1, Y: 161.11.19 (June 2, 1943).

⁶⁴¹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 68-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

change of address was clearly reflected in official correspondence and new addresses, such as, “Dersaadet Central Command, the Special Organization Service”⁶⁴² or “the Special Organization Service attached to the Dersaadet Central Command, Ministry of War”⁶⁴³ was used. In conformity with their official duty, Central Commanders hereafter would be designated as “Officer to the SO”. In other words, the official title of “Director of the SO” was put aside for a while and the Central Command emerged as the center of the SO correspondence.

One should not rush to interpret that change as the emergence of a double-headed administrative structure, one in Cağaoğlu and the other in the Ministry of War. It would be equally deceptive to read this as evidence of either the SO’s detachment from the Special Branch and its attachment to the Central Command, or the SC’s attachment to the Central Command. This reflected a control and support mechanism that the Ministry of War established over the SO. The SO, after the departure of its first director, established almost all of its relations with the Ministry of War through the Central Command, which was to investigate the compliance of the decisions made by the SO with the regulations of the Ministry of War. In a sense, the Central Command represented an approval office that the Ministry of War had established over the SO. It also undertook the important task of implementing the information and requirements of the SO. This duty of enforcement obliged the Central Command to establish, on behalf of the SO,

⁶⁴² ATASE, BDH: from the district governorate of Orhangazi to Dersaadet Central Command (5 Eylül 1331/18 September 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/22.

⁶⁴³ ATASE, BDH: from Chief of Gönen Branch of National Defense Society to Dersaadet Central Command; F: 1829, D: 8, I: 1/26.

relations with almost all the subdivisions of the Ministry of War and a number of other institutions concerned.

This duty concludes that the Central Command was a superior echelon within the military bureaucracy than the SO. It is important to recall, though, that the office established in the Central Command did not have a voice in the decisions of the SC. Hence it would be erroneous to assert that the SC was under direct control of the Central Command or that the Central Commanders presided over the SO as a director-general. This seems to be why Central Commanders were qualified as “officer to the SO”. Although it was one of the official duties of the Central Commanders to attend to the affairs of the SO, they did not have an effect upon the decision-making mechanism of the SO as much as Süleyman Askeri did.

After all, the Central Commanders were personally involved, in addition to the affairs of the SO, in matters of such units as military police, court martial, fire brigade, prison, and guest house. They accordingly were required to spend most of their working hours for duties other than those of the SO. For example, Cevad Bey mentions that the war broke out in Gallipoli during his service in the SO and was given three battalions of infantry, two regiments of cavalry and gendarme to be boarded and subsisted. He further adds that he was the one to whom “reports of attacks and bombardments occurring every day in Çanakkale” were sent.⁶⁴⁴ Accordingly, Central Commanders were often not in a position to spend all of their energy on the SO. This, taken together with the information above, makes clear that the

⁶⁴⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 20 Şaban 1337, No. 3554, s. 69-SUP; DHÖM, Fifth Session (14 May 1919).

Central Commanders could not have as much effect on the SO as the first director.

As a matter of fact, Cevad Bey remarks that his duty in the SC was to implement the information and requirements in the presence of the Ministry of War and other institutions concerned. Similarly, he was charged with conveying the relevant orders given by the Ministry of War and its branches, to the SO.⁶⁴⁵ In a sense, Central Commanders were responsible merely for the communication and notification of official procedures.⁶⁴⁶

At this point, the duties of the Central Commanders performed on behalf of the SO gain importance. Such an effort is expected, on one hand, to shed light on the nature of relations established between the SC and the Central Command, or between the SO and the Ministry of War; on the other, to provide a partial answer to the questions of how the bands were formed and equipped, which channels were used to distribute them to the combat zone and to provide for their subsistence.

As has already been mentioned, the most essential duty of the SC was to provide operational units. In this context, it carried out coordinated work with a host of governmental institutions, some details of which have been provided. Having entered into the theater of war, SO operational units cut off connections with both the Central Command and the SO. After they had been dispatched, they did not give information to the center about either

⁶⁴⁵ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-27-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶⁴⁶ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 63-64-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

their own military operations or the general conduct of the military activity.⁶⁴⁷ The volunteer units were given numerous orders not to correspond with the center after they reached the combat zone. They were even required to fulfill their needs, such as clothing, from the armies.⁶⁴⁸ In sum, the essential duty of the Central Command arose out of the formation and preparation phases of the unconventional warfare units.

Within this context, the duties of the Central Command were two-fold. The first concerned the voluntary applications to the Ministry of War by those who did not reach the draft age or were discharged from the military. For instance, one individual, originally from Bayburd but residing in Istanbul and not yet recruited, petitioned the Ministry of War to be involved in the military operations as a band member. The Ministry then forwarded the petition to the relevant office, that is, to the Central Command, to be processed.⁶⁴⁹ Similarly, Mehmed Cehil Efendi, who was discharged from the military as first lieutenant⁶⁵⁰, appealed to the Central Command to be granted the right to join the bands.⁶⁵¹ Upon this, Central Command asked the Directorate of

⁶⁴⁷ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 31-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919); *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 24 Şaban 1337, No. 3557, s. 103-SUP; DHÖM, Sixth Session (14 May 1919).

⁶⁴⁸ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 27-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶⁴⁹ ATASE, BDH; letter to the Ministry of War (3 Kanun-i sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/67.

⁶⁵⁰ Cehil Efendi: son of Hüseyin Ağa, from the 29th Regiment, 4th Reserve (redif) Battalion, 13th Company. ATASE, BDH: from the Directorate of Personal Affairs to Dersaadet Central Command (11 Kanun-i Sani 1330/24 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/66.

⁶⁵¹ ATASE, BDH: letter from Mehmed Cehil Efendi to Dersaadet Central Command; F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/64.

Personal Affairs the reason of discharge.⁶⁵² As a result of the inquiry, it was discovered that Mehmed Cehil Efendi had been expelled from the military for disobedience to the major of his battalion.⁶⁵³ A report penned by Bekir Sitki Bey, who was then in Kayseri and occupied with preparations to go to Caucasia with his battalion, refers to the same point. It is mentioned in the report that Salih Zeki Bey, borough master of İncesu wanted to join the battalion as a volunteer, and permission is requested for a voluntary unit standing ready in Balıkesir under the command of Salih Zeki Bey, who was of Caucasian origin and believed to serve the cause of the battalion “exceptionally” with his thorough knowledge of Caucasia.⁶⁵⁴

There is a common point in these three examples. In the first example, although the Central Command received the reply from the Department of Personal Affairs, it was the SC that decided to enroll the mentioned individual in the band organization, as it is understood from the correspondence that it was the Central Command that forwarded the result of inquiry to the SC and would act according to the decision made by the SC.⁶⁵⁵ In the second example, too, the Central Command communicated the subject to the SO to have the final decision.⁶⁵⁶ The last example has the same conclusion: the correspondence concerning the dispatch of Salih Zeki Bey to Caucasia,

⁶⁵² ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Directorate of Personal Affairs (7 Kanun-i Sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/65.

⁶⁵³ ATASE, BDH: from the Directorate of Personal Affairs to Dersaadet Central Command (11 Kanun-i sani 1330/24 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/66.

⁶⁵⁴ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sitki Bey, SO volunteer battalion commander, to SO (11 Şubat 1330/24 January 1915), F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/76.

⁶⁵⁵ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command Merkez to the Directorate of Personal Affairs (7 Kanun-i Sani 1330/20 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/65.

⁶⁵⁶ ATASE, BDH: letter to the Ministry of War (3 Kanun-i sani 1330/16 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/67.

should he be granted a leave of absence, along with a voluntary unit, was again forwarded to the SO and closed with the following question: “what is the decision of the council on this matter?” (*Bu babda heyetin kararı ne merkezdedir?*).⁶⁵⁷

In other words, Central Command did not have the right to speak on the most important duty of the SC. What it did was to implement the information received in the presence of the Ministry of War and other institutions concerned, having audited the compliance of the applications with the regulations of the Ministry of War, and inform the SO of the results. In this context, the Central Command can be said to have been the office that dictated the orders coming from the Ministry of War and its branches to the SO. These orders were not directly given to the SO, but issued on behalf of the Central Command and then its copy was served to the SO.⁶⁵⁸

Officers who were discharged or eager to earn a return of rank also wanted to participate in the SO. In such applications, the Ministry of War had the unique authority to rule. In this context, correspondence from the Central Command to the Ministry of War about a discharged soldier, Refet Efendi,⁶⁵⁹ sets an example:

“Harbiye Nezaret-i Celilesi’ne: Silk-i celil-i askeriden alakaları kat edilen harb-i hazır dolayısıyla Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’da istihdamlarını ve ibraz edecekleri fedakarlık ve hüsn-i hidmete göre iade-i rütbelerini istihlal eylemekte olup Nezaret-i Celilelerine mensub olduğu anlaşılan merbut pusulada ismi muharrer Refet Efendi’nin

⁶⁵⁷ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı Bey, SO volunteer battalion commander, to SO (11 Şubat 1330/24 February 1915), F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/76.

⁶⁵⁸ This is also verified by the testimony of Cevad Bey. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-27-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁶⁵⁹ Refet Efendi, son of İbrahim, naval first lieutenant, was discharged from the army on 13 Teşrin-i evvel 1327/26 October 1911. ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War to Dersaadet Central Command (11 Şubat 1330/24 February 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/73.

bu gibi hidematda istihdamına mani bir hal olup olmadığı ve hüsni hizmeti görüldüğü takdirde iade-i rütbesi hakkındaki işar-ı devletlerinin inba buyurulması maruzdur.”⁶⁶⁰

Applications made by the SO as to the participation of officers in the organization were forming the second part of the Central Command's duty regarding voluntary affairs. The Central Command had to appeal to the Directorate of Personal Affairs regarding the officers the SO requested to be appointed, and receive its permission. Personal Affairs instructed military troops in order for the officers to be able to participate in the SO⁶⁶¹ and the appointment could not be made without its consent. For example, a petition by the Field Artillery Distinguished Captain Rıza Bey, a deputy cadaster technician in the carpentry factory of War Material Manufacturers, requesting to participate in the actual war, was first presented to Personal Affairs, and therefrom to the Recruiting Office of Bursa, which communicated the following information: “*nakliye arabalarının inşâsına nezâret etmek üzere me'mûr edilmiş olduğundan vazîfesinin ehemmiyetine binâen infikâkî[nin] muvâfık olamayacağı*”.⁶⁶²

Personal Affairs possessed the right of appointing another officer in place of the requested. Correspondence between the Central Command and Personal Affairs alludes to this. The Central Commander⁶⁶³ requested from

⁶⁶⁰ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Ministry of War (8 Şubat 1330/21 February 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/72.

⁶⁶¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1859, D: 141, I: 1/36.

⁶⁶² ATASE, BDH: from field artillery distinguished captain Rıza Bey to the Office of the Supreme Military Command (21 Kanun-i evvel 1330/3 January 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/61 ve 1/61a.

⁶⁶³ It is not clear who composed this letter no. 14528 sent from Dersaadet Central Command. Nor is it easy to find this out by reference to its date. For the date in question, 19 December, coincides with the day on which Cevad Bey took over the central commandship from Halil Bey. ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/4.

the Personal Affairs to permit Captain Osman Nuri, son of İzzet Efendi,⁶⁶⁴ to work in the SO medical committee of (*TM Sıhhiye Heyeti*) and accordingly give direction, if granted permission, to the military troops he was attached to. It is mentioned in the reply on December 20, 1914 that Captain Osman Nuri was not deemed suitable to be granted permission due to an unspecified reason, and that Zeynelabidin Efendi, who would be sent to the center after his arrival from Gallipoli, was appointed instead.⁶⁶⁵

On the other hand, the Ministry of War reserved the right to appoint the officers working in the SO to any other office or position. For instance, Cavalry First Lieutenant Kamil Efendi, who participated in a voluntary unit of the SO, was appointed to the Central Records Office on the memorial of the Ministry of War, on June 26, 1331. Entirely outside the mandate of the SO, the order as to the appointment in question was first presented to the Central Command and therefrom to the SO with the following note: “*muamele-i lâzime ifası zımında muhtıra*”.⁶⁶⁶ The SO’s demands of the army officers were, too, subjected to the permission of the armies. In this regard, correspondence between Gendarme Regimental Command of Trabzon and Central Command is explanatory: First Lieutenant Rıza Efendi, Görele Platoon Commander, was demanded by the Central Command to be

⁶⁶⁴ Osman Nuri: Son of İzzet Efendi, with the registration number 321-22, from the 3rd Army Corps, 3rd Regiment, 2nd Battalion.

⁶⁶⁵ ATASE, BDH: F: 1859, D: 141, I: 1/55. Central Command was also charged with corresponding with Directorate of Personal Affairs to ensure the reappointment of those individuals who had completed their task given by the SO or alternatively had been relieved of their mission. For a few examples see: ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Directorate of Personal Affairs (20 Teşrin-i sani 1330/3 January 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/4; ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Directorate of Personal Affairs (17 Eylül 1331/30 September 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/21.

⁶⁶⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to SO (29 Haziran 1331/12 July 1915); F: 1838; D: 44, I: 2/27.

employed in Artvin by the SO, but he was deemed more suitable to remain in his detachment and accordingly the demand was rejected.⁶⁶⁷

On the basis of such examples, the duty of the Central Command was to communicate the orders given by the Ministry of War to the SO and implement the demands of the SO having confirmed their compliance with the requirements of the Ministry of War. It can also be deduced that in the recruitment of officers, the SO was exclusively subjected, through the agency of the Central Command, to the jurisdiction of Ministry of War and one of its subdivisions, Directorate of Personal Affairs.

Regarding the employment of students, the SO could act more freely, and it was enough for it to write its demand of students to the upper echelons those schools were affiliated with. For instance, Ali Abbas Efendi, a fourth year medical faculty student at Maltepe Hospital,⁶⁶⁸ and in another example, Mehmed İdris Efendi and Ata Efendi, both students at Kuleli Military High School (1st battalion, 1st company) were requested to be employed in the SO.⁶⁶⁹ Upon this demand, the Central Command ordered the General Directorate of Health in the first, and Directorate of Military Schools in the second example to give directions to the aforementioned schools and thereafter send the students to the center.

⁶⁶⁷ ATASE, BDH: from the commander of stationary gendarme regiment, Tevfik Bey, to Dersaadet Central Command (30 Teşrin-i Sani 1330/13 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/38.

⁶⁶⁸ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to General Directorate of Health (28 teşrin-i sani 1330/11 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/27. For a letter about the employment of Aydınlı Mehmet Efendi, a senior student of the military medical school, and İlhami Efendi, fourth-class student of the same school, 'n the SO, also see: ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to Chairmanship of Health Office (8 Kanun-i evvel 1330/21 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/60.

⁶⁶⁹ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Directorate of Military Schools (28 Teşrin-i Sani 1330/11 December 1914) F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/28.

Central Command also investigated individuals who were willing to participate as volunteers and living in Istanbul. Meticulous attention was paid to personal applications and a secret investigation was conducted by the Command of Military Police Company (*İnzibat Bölüğü Kumandanlığı*), which was attached to Central Command.⁶⁷⁰ For instance, Şehabeddin Fikret Bey, a tradesman from Adana, with his thorough knowledge of Egypt and tradesmen along the Suez Canal, petitioned the Ministry of War to be involved in the voluntary organization in the region. The petition was first presented to the relevant office, that is, to the Central Command, which subsequently assigned the Beyoğlu Military Police Office (*Beyoğlu İnzibat-ı Askeri Zabıtlığı*) with the task of investigating the person in question. The intent of the investigation was clearly defined:

“Müstedinin adresi balada muharrerdir [Beyoğlu, Tarlabası Caddesi, 123 numaralı hane]. Gönüllü kaydına kabul şartlarını haiz olup olmadığının ve ahval-i hususiyesiyle burada ne suretle ve ne ile meşgul olduğunun bi't-tahkik sürat-i beyanı zımında tevdi kılındı.”⁶⁷¹

Because the person under investigation was from Adana, the opinion of Suphi Pasha (Deputy of Adana) was solicited. Suphi Pasha “confirmed that the father of the person mentioned and the person himself are among the men of honor”.⁶⁷² The Military Police also reported that the person in question

⁶⁷⁰ The Central Command could also carry out secret investigations about the individuals about whom the SO had demanded inquiry. In these cases, Military Police Office again were stepping in, informing the SO about the results of the investigation that was “secretly carried out”. For the results of the secret investigation carried out by Fatih Military Police Office in the house of Kemal Hayri Efendi, candidate for reserve officer in the War Academy, see: ATASE, BDH: from the Office of Military Police to SO (18 Nisan 1331/1 May 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 1/15.

⁶⁷¹ ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War to Dersaadet Central Command, and therefrom to Beyoğlu Office of Military Police (6 Kanun-i evvel 1330/19 December 1914); F: 1829, D: 7, I: 1/54.

⁶⁷² ATASE, BDH: from Suphi Paşa Beyoğlu Office of Military Police (11 Kanun-i evvel 1330/24 December 1914); F: 1829, D: 7, I: 1/55.

had recently reached the draft age and hence no inconvenience would arise from his participation in the band organization. Having conducted the investigation, the Central Command forwarded the report to the SC, which would have the final decision on Şehabeddin Fikret Bey's acceptance to the organization.⁶⁷³

The main task of the Central Command began once the formation of voluntary units concluded. Among these duties, they took the lead of the dispatch of SO members and voluntary units formed under the command of the Ministry of War to the regions. Those units were being distributed to quarters determined in line with the regulations of the Ministry of War. Enlisted in the army in the stations on their way, they eventually joined the armies. For the units that were sent to the fronts directly from their locales, the Central Command was content with notifying the SO of the process. For instance, the Samsun Branch of the NDS informed the Central Command of the dispatch of a voluntary unit, composed of 44 combatants, to the combat zone, and Central Command, upon this, notified Rıza Bey from the SO of the subject.⁶⁷⁴

The Central Command, furthermore, guaranteed the provision of convenience for SO members while they were being dispatched to the fronts. This duty obliged the Central Command to exchange correspondence with a host of different units. For example, the Central Command ordered both the military and local authorities to assist and facilitate issues for Emin Bey, one

⁶⁷³ ATASE, BDH: from the Office of Military Police to Dersaadet Central Command, and therefrom to SO (16 Kanun-i evvel 1330/29 December 1914); F: 1829, D: 7, I: 1/54a.

⁶⁷⁴ ATASE, BDH: from the National Defense Society to Dersaadet Central Commander Halil Bey (4 Kanun-i evvel 1330/17 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/48.

of the SO members, who would travel to İzmir by railroad.⁶⁷⁵ In addition, he was provided with a certificate that enabled him to travel in second class from Haydarpaşa to Karahisar, and continue to İzmir.⁶⁷⁶

On the other hand, the Central Command distributed certificates to those conducting activities on behalf of the SO and thus they became eligible to be exempted from both tight military and civil control, and receive assistance and convenience. A certificate written on behalf of Ahmed (son of Mehmed from Rize), Bahadır (son of Mustafa from Rize), Halil (son of Mustafa from Şile), Ahmed (son of Dursun from Of), and Sadık (son of Hasan) exemplify such documents:

“Balada isimleri muharrer beş nefer Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’ya aid eşyayı mahall-i müretteblerine sevk edeceklerinden esna-yı rahde muhalefet olunmaması, lazımgelenlere muavenet ve teshilatın iraesı zımnında işbu vesika yedlerine izam kılındı.”⁶⁷⁷

But for those going abroad there was tighter border control and the passing of financial aid brought to SO units abroad across borders were subjected to Ministry of Finance. The Central Command exchanged correspondence with border inspectorships and the fact that customs officials were not attached to border inspectorships prevented exports of currency such as gold and silver. Muhammed Serrac and Hacı Efendi, who were sent

⁶⁷⁵ ATASE, BDH: certificate from Dersaadet Central Command (28 Temmuz 1331/10 August 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/18.

⁶⁷⁶ ATASE, BDH: from the Office of Military Police to the Chairmanship of Central Administrative Committee (*Merkez İdare Heyeti Riyaseti*) (28 Temmuz 1331/10 August 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/19.

⁶⁷⁷ ATASE, BDH: certificate from Dersaadet Central Command (8 Şubat 1330/21 February 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 02.

by the Central Command to Selanik, would encounter such complications at the border.⁶⁷⁸

Once the voluntary units were sent to their respective regions, they severed ties with the SO's Central Command. They maintained contact with the Central Command and informed them of their stops along the way until they reached their destination. For example, the line of marching for Bekir Sıtkı Bey's voluntary battalion of 580 combatants can easily be followed from the telegrams: Kayseri on February 24,⁶⁷⁹ Sivas on March 2,⁶⁸⁰ Zara on March 6,⁶⁸¹ Refahiye on March 16,⁶⁸² Kemah on March 19,⁶⁸³ and finally Erzincan on March 24. On the order of the Third Army, the voluntary battalion headed towards its destination via İspir with a total of 530 combatants.⁶⁸⁴ Similarly, it can be ascertained that the Veysel Bey Battalion was in Sivas during the first week of March,⁶⁸⁵ in Koçhisar on March 15,⁶⁸⁶ finally arriving at their area of duty, Trabzon, on March 24.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁷⁸ ATASE, BDH: from the Security General Directorate to Dersaadet Central Command (9 Ağustos 1331/22 August 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 1/20.

⁶⁷⁹ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (11 Şubat 1330/24 February 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/75.

⁶⁸⁰ ATASE, BDH: from Sivas Branch of National Defense Society to SO (21 Şubat 1330/6 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/78.

⁶⁸¹ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/83.

⁶⁸² ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (16 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/88.

⁶⁸³ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (20 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1.

⁶⁸⁴ ATASE, BDH: from Bekir Sıtkı, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (25 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/91.

⁶⁸⁵ ATASE, BDH: from Veysel Bey, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (22 Şubat 1330/7 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/80.

The Central Command generally took the necessary action regarding arms and ammunition requirements of the SO before the Office of the Ministry of War (*Harbiye Dairesi Riyaseti*). For example, on December 21, 1914, the Central Command requested 50 revolvers from the Office of the Ministry of War for the officers that would be employed in the SO.⁶⁸⁸ Such demands had a standard style of request: “*müfredatı merbut pusulada gösterilen alat ve edevat-ı tahribiyyenin Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’ca gösterilen ihtiyaca mebni itası zımında icab edenlere emr buyurulması mütemennadır*”.⁶⁸⁹ In general, the Office of the Ministry of War seems to have supplied such requirements from Tophane⁶⁹⁰ and Maçka⁶⁹¹ arsenals. There were, however, instances where the requirements could not be met due to the lack of the demanded materials in the arsenals.⁶⁹²

Those requirements met by the Office of the Ministry of War, on the other hand, illustrate that the primary weapon used in the SO volunteer units was modified Martin rifle (muaddel Martin tüfengi), but the condition of the weapons had explicitly deteriorated. A correspondence written by Central

⁶⁸⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Veysel Bey, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (15 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/87.

⁶⁸⁷ ATASE, BDH: from Veysel Bey, voluntary battalion commander, to the SO (24 March 1915); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/90.

⁶⁸⁸ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Office of Minister of War (8 Kanun-i evvel 1330/21 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/57.

⁶⁸⁹ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Office of Minister of War (6 Kanun-i evvel 1330/19 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, F: 1/51. Also see: F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/53 and 1/54.

⁶⁹⁰ ATASE, BDH: details of the arms, ammunition, and equipment required the Central Command on behalf of SO; F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/45.

⁶⁹¹ ATASE, BDH: details of the arms, ammunition, and equipment required the Central Command on behalf of SO; F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/46.

⁶⁹² ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Office of Minister of War (6 Kanun-i evvel 1330/19 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/51.

Command to Office of the Ministry of War illustrates a typical example of such conditions:

“Muaddel martinlerin tırnak ve iğneleri bir müddet endahtından sonra kırılarak gayr-i kabil-i istimal bir hale gelmekte olduğu bildirilmektedir. Binaen aleyh eşedd-i ihtiyac olan ber vech-i bala iki kalem bedelin edevatının [1000 aded tırnak ve 1000 adet muaddel martin iğnesi] itası zımında icab edenlere emr buyurulması mütemennadır.”⁶⁹³

Only the voluntary units available in Istanbul seem to have been armed and equipped by the Central Command, therefore, the Central Command did not sufficiently arm each voluntary unit sent to the combat zone. A ciphered telegram sent on November 30, 1914 by Hasan İzzet Pasha, Commander of the Third Army, reveals another method of arming the SO units on the fronts. Hasan İzzet Pasha reports in the telegram that 120 rifles captured from the Russians were sent to Bahaeddin Şakir Bey, who was then in the region, to be issued to the SO units. He further adds that on the order of the Office of the Supreme Military Command, he delivered 3000 modified Martin rifles, with 500 bullets for each to the Province of Trabzon.⁶⁹⁴ A portion of those rifles was most likely delivered to the SO forces, as it is known that during that time the SO formed the dominant power in that region.

Apart from the arms, ammunition, and equipment supplied through the medium of the Central Command, the SO could receive assistance from the armies, and materials captured from the enemy could be delivered to them. The SO usually used couriers to receive such assistance. However, the supply of arms, ammunition, and equipment in provinces far away from

⁶⁹³ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Office of Minister of War (16 Kanun-i evvel 1330/29 December 1914); F: 1829, D: 8, I: 1/10.

⁶⁹⁴ ATASE, BDH: from Hasan İzzet Paşa to the Ministry of War (16 Teşrin-i sani 1330/29 November 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 8.

the central authority was a greater challenge than supplying in Anatolia. Hence more complex methods were appealing to the SO members, as has been detailed in the section concerning the logistical methods in the SO.

The Central Command also had relations with the Ottoman Red Crescent Association, as it was sometimes applied to provide medical aid and medical aid services for the SO.⁶⁹⁵

The Central Command furthermore established close relations with the Directorate of General Munitions (*Levazimat-i Umumiye Dairesi*), as that directorate supplied a part of the subsistence of the combatants that would be sent to the front lines. In this context, the Directorate of General Munitions took action at the request of the Central Command and drew from a number of different sources to meet the demand. For example, the provisional needs of the combatants of the Dagestan Voluntary Battalion that would be returned to Bursa from Dersaadet to Bursa were met by the Directorate of the Military Guesthouse. During their time in Bursa, their provisions were to be supplied by the Directorate of the Commission for War Supplies and Taxes (*Tekalif-i Harbiye Komisyonu Başkanlığı*).⁶⁹⁶ The same directorate also provided clothing material required by the SO. There were, however, instances where the Central Command demanded such materials directly from the Ministry of War, bypassing the General Munitions, most likely in order to speed up the process. A correspondence written by Cevad Bey, the Central Commander explains:

⁶⁹⁵ The Archive of the Turkish Red Crescent (*Türk Kızılayı Arşivi*, TKA): from the SO to the Red Crescent Association (3 Kanun-i evvel 1330/16 December 1914); Kutu (Box, K): 313, Belge (document, B): 28; TKA: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Red Crescent Association (20 Teşrin-i evvel 1330/3 December 1914); K: 12, B: 198.

⁶⁹⁶ ATASE, BDH: from Directorate of General Munitions to Dersaadet Central Command (24 March 1915); F: 1829; D: 6, I: 1/8.

“Merbut pusulada müfredatı muharrer elbise şiddet-i ihtiyaç olduğundan Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa’ya itası hususunda icab edenlere emr ve irade buyurulması maruzdur. Haki elbise, kat: 2000, Kaput: 2000, Ayakkabı: 2000.”⁶⁹⁷

Besides the promotion and discharge of the officers attached to the SO, affairs such as granting war medals⁶⁹⁸ were among the duties of Personal Affairs. Personal Affairs notified the Central Command of the situation after an imperial decree regarding the individual to be promoted was issued. Having received the order, the Central Command was then to inform both the SO and the promoted officer. For example, Yakup Cemil, the famous self-sacrificing volunteer of the SO, was discharged “due to politicking” as a captain (3rd Corps, 24th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 5th Company) on February 4, 1913. Following his appointment to the SO with the commencement of the First World War, he was promoted to reserve major for his services in the Lazistan region on June 10, 1915, and the Central Command thus informed both the SO and Yakup Cemil of the promotion.⁶⁹⁹

Personal Affairs had, of course, no authority to grant war medals to the volunteers. The Central Command, therefore, applied directly to the Ministry of War, and if deemed suitable, war medals and certificates were sent to the Central Command, after which they were delivered to First Lieutenant Arif

⁶⁹⁷ ATASE, BDH: from Dersaadet Central Command to the Ministry of War; F: 1829, D: 8, I: 1/17.

⁶⁹⁸ For the correspondence about Osman Nuri Efendi, first lieutenant in the 8th Army Corps, who had been granted the war medal on account of his sacrifice as a SO member in the Battle of Şuayyibe, see; ATASE, BDH: from the Directorate of Personal Affairs to Dersaadet Central Command (31 Ağustos 1331/13 September 1915); F: 1831, D: 19, I: 2/17.

⁶⁹⁹ ATASE, BDH: from the Directorate of Personal Affairs to Dersaadet Central Command, and therefrom to SO (5-6 Haziran 1331/18-19 June 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 4/4. For the promotion of another SO member, cavalry captain Aziz Bey, to major, also see; ATASE, BDH: memorandum from Dersaadet Central Command to SO (5 April 1916); F: 1851, D: 109, I: 1/1.

Bey, one of the liaison officers between the Central Command and SO. Finally, the medals were presented to their owners by the SO itself.⁷⁰⁰

4.6 Branches of the SO

It is difficult to determine the branches of the SO due to the perennial source material predicament. After all, this is an organization whose name was not mentioned in the foundation charts of the Ministry of War, although it was attached to the same ministry. More importantly, the foundation charts of the SO itself have yet to be fully documented. Furthermore, Ittihadists, court-martialed after the war, did not provide sufficient information to the court on the subject.

Still, it seems possible to reach a conclusion, which can be amended by future studies, about the branches of the SO by considering the testimonies of Atif and Cevad Beys. First, it is essential to make a sharp distinction between the center and outer regions, which may otherwise lead to an erroneous conclusion that those in charge of the operational units in the field were also leading the branches in the center. However, Cevad Bey's statements outline that the duty of the branches in the center was to run the procedures, which necessitates close relation with both the Ministry of War and other governmental departments, thus making it impossible for the officers in the field to officiate such a service.

⁷⁰⁰ 37 volunteers having treatment in the hospital of Karaağaç in Edirne had been granted the silver legion of merit. ATASE, BDH: from the Ministry of War Office of Dispatches to Dersaadet Central Command (12 Mayıs 1331/12 May 1915); F: 1838, D: 44, I: 4.

Cevad and Atif Beys suggest similar views on the number of the branches. According to Cevad Bey, the SO was only concerned with the Caucasus and Tripoli during his term of office, roughly between October 1914 and May 1915. But in the remainder of his testimony, he mentions another branch relating to the activities in Macedonia⁷⁰¹ and that should have represented the Rumeli Branch. Atif Bey, on the other hand, counts four branches, namely Rumeli, Caucasus, Africa, and Tripoli, and adds, "I do not remember the amount exactly".⁷⁰² It is possible that Africa and Tripoli were not independent units, but integral parts of the same branch. Considering those testimonies, then it is presumed that the Central Command of the SO consisted of three regional branches, which were subordinate to the SC.

Acknowledging the court-martial ordinance, one might deduct the existence of another branch, the Eastern Cities (*Vilayat-ı Şarkıyye*), under the command of Bahaeddin Şakir. As a matter of fact, it is mentioned in the ordinance that Bahaeddin Şakir went to Erzurum to command the forces in the Eastern Cities. At this point, recall that Erzurum was the center of the Caucasus Revolutionary Committee, established on October 12, 1914, to eliminate the lack of coordination between various SO branches in Erzurum, Trabzon, and Van, while operating against the Caucasus. The field of action of the said committee embraced almost the entire *Vilayat-ı Şarkıyye*, and Bahaeddin Şakir was its director. For this reason, it is more suitable to claim

⁷⁰¹ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁷⁰² *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 30-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

that there was not a branch called *Vilayat-ı Şarkıyye* in the SO, but an independent Caucasus branch instead.

As for the directors of those branches,⁷⁰³ Captain Arif Bey seems to have directed the Rumeli Branch. Hüsametdin Bey, whose duties were detailed in the section “Directors of the SO”, should have directed the Africa-Tripoli Branch. The claim that Ali Başhamba had previously directed this branch is not persuasive, as he was a member of the Council of State during the period he is claimed to have been in charge of the branch. In a similar vein, there is no information confirming the directorship of Hasan Tosun in the same branch.

At first glance, Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir might be considered to be the leader of the Caucasus Branch. He was, however, in the field occupied with conducting operations, not in the central command. It seems that distinguished Captain Mümtaz Bey led this branch in the center.⁷⁰⁴ As noted earlier, he should not be confused with another Rıza Bey operating in the Trabzon region, as he was an officer leading the Caucasus Revolutionary Society’s Trabzon area command under the supervision of Bahaeddin Şakir,⁷⁰⁵ whereas distinguished Captain Rıza Bey was the officer charged with implementing the activities of the Central Command and the information

⁷⁰³ According to Tunaya, the central command of the SO consisted of four departments. Subjected to the supervisory council, each of the departments was headed by an officer: Arif Bey at the head of the Rumelia Department, Captain Rıza Bey at the head of the Caucasia Department, Hüseyin Tosun and Ali Başhamba Beys at the head of the Africa-Tripoli department, and finally Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir and Ruşeni Beys at the head of the department of Eastern Vilayets, with its center in Erzurum. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 342.

⁷⁰⁴ *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 7 Şaban 1337, No. 3543, s. 26-SUP; DHÖM, Second Session (4 May 1919).

⁷⁰⁵ Sarısaman, “Trabzon Mıntıkası Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Heyet-i İdaresinin Faaliyetleri”, 500-505.

about the activities of the SO in the Caucasus, and bringing the information to that effect to the Central Command to be confirmed and enforced.⁷⁰⁶

This organizational scheme, which can be corrected further through future studies, reveals that the SO consisted of a general director and an administrative board of three, as well as three provincial branches with a director at the head of each. Also to be added to this table were a correspondence desk to administer general correspondence, an accounting desk to organize finances, a few couriers to maintain the connection between the SO and the Ministry of War, and finally a number of janitors, and orderlies (Table I).

The replacement of the SO by the OEA resulted in the termination of the organization's reliance on the band organization. Accordingly, the activities concerning other branches of unconventional warfare, such as intelligence and propaganda activities, quickly rose to great prominence in the OEA, compared to the previous period. On the other hand, the SC was eliminated, thus causing the administrative structure of the OEA to differ from that of the SO. Led by a director general, the OEA was divided into several branches, each under its own chief, who was subordinate to the director general. This structure, as before, was included again under the Şube-i Mahsusa, one of the subdivisions of the Ottoman General Staff. With the foundation of the OEA, however, central commanders, once the chiefs of the SC, abandoned their duty of mediation between the organization and the

⁷⁰⁶ ATASE, BDH: ciphered telegram from the subgovernorate of Canik to the Ministry of Interior (7 Kanun-i evvel 1330/20 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/56; ATASE, BDH: from regional governor of Karesi to the Ministry of War (21 Teşrin-i sani 1330/4 December 1914); F: 1828, D: 4, I: 1/14. This opinion is also confirmed by the testimony of Cevad Bey. *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 14 Şaban 1337, No. 3549, s. 66-SUP; DHÖM, Fourth Session (8 May 1919).

Ministry of War. This change, in turn, made the exchange of information among various military departments more effective. The transformation of the SO into OEA resulted in a new and more complex central structure, consisting of 11 branches with the employment of 92 personnel, whose names are only partially recorded in the surviving papers.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁷ ATASE, BDH: F: 1870, D: 180, I: 7/1.

Table I
Structure of the SO

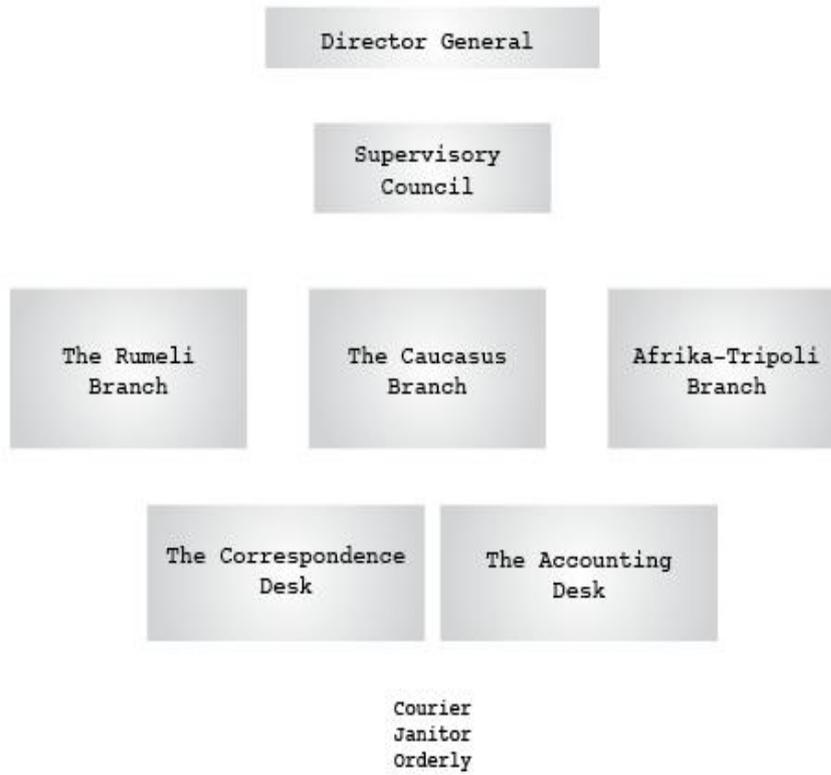


Table II
Cadre of the SO

Supervisory Council

1. Member: Atif Bey
2. Member: Aziz Bey
3. Member: Dr. Nazım Bey

The Rumeli
Branch

Director:
Captain Arif Bey

The Caucasus Branch

Director:
1. Distinguished Captain
Rıza Bey

The Africa-Tripoli
Branch

Director:
1. Lieutenant Colonel
Hüsamettin Ertürk

The Correspondence
Desk

The Accounting
Desk

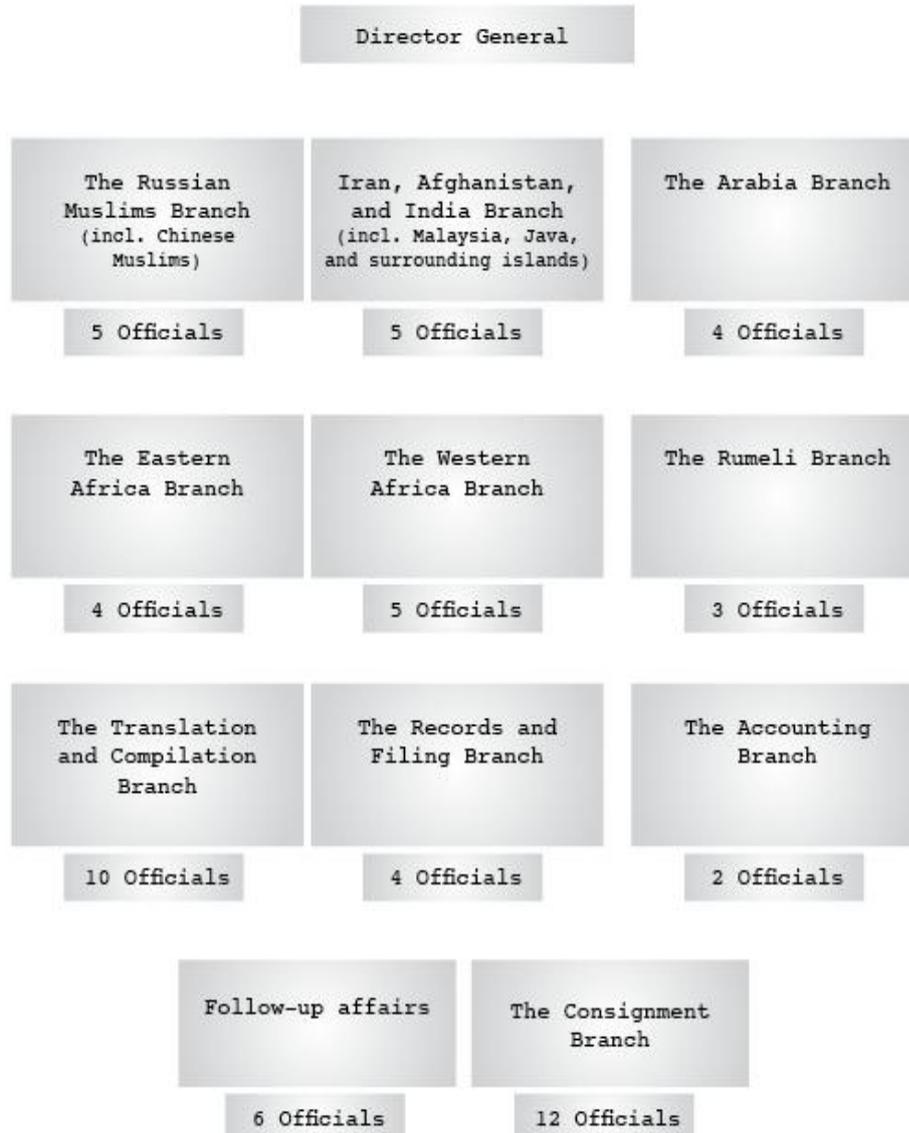
Courier
Janitor
Orderly

Each branch was headed by a military officer, who was subordinate to the director general of the OEA, who was under the command of the Minister of War. The field of action for the Russian Muslims Branch, including Chinese Muslims, was limited to Iran, the Caucasus, Crimea, and Turkestan. The Iran, Afghan, and India Branch was also concerned with Malaysia, Java, and surrounding islands. Branches monitoring the affairs concerning Arabia, and Eastern and Western Africa were designed independently. Another section, the Translation and Compilation Branch, was charged with following materials in Russian, German, English, French, Persian, Arabic, Italian and Urdu languages, and their translation and publication.⁷⁰⁸ Apart from these, there were also the the Record and Filing Branch to keep the records and dossiers of the organization, as well as creating general correspondence; the Accounting Branch to organize financial affairs; another branch to track the affairs of the organization; and the Consignment Branch (Table III).

The extent to which the OEA has respected this foundational chart is unclear. Yet it is clear that in the second half of 1918, the number of the branches was reduced to 7 and the personnel to 47 due to the consolidation of some branches. The India, Egypt, and Afghan Branch was combined with the Arabia Branch, while the Russian Muslims Branch was replaced by the Eastern Branch, the honorary director of which was Fuad Köprülü. The branch under the command of Hüsametdin Bey (Ertürk) seems to have shouldered the heaviest workload, and was charged with supervising the following desks: Eastern Africa, Western Africa, Consignment, Follow-up Affairs, Personal Affairs, and Courier Desks (Table IV).

⁷⁰⁸ ATASE, BDH: F: 1844, D: 72, I: 8/1.

Table III
Structure of the OEA



Servants, janitors and orderlies

Officials	60
Servant	32
Total	92

Table IV
Structure of the OEA
(1918)



Officials	30
Janitors	1
Porters	1
Orderlies	4
Post Officers	5
Dispatchers	3
Sergeants	1
<hr/>	
Total	46

The subordinate units and cadre of this organization were as follows:

1) Translation and Compilation Branch

Director: Infantry Major Ali Riza Bey

a) Urdu, Afghan, Balochi, and Indian language Desk: Abdürrab Bey

b) Arabic language Desk: Sheikh Hazer Efendi

c) Arabic and Turkish languages Desk: Sheikh Muhammed Efendi

d) Turkish, Arabic, English, French: Cavalry First Lieutenant Yusuf Efendi

e) Turkish, French: Munitions Aspirant (Levazım zabıt namzedi) Hami Efendi

f) German: Private Ziya Efendi

g) Turkish, French, and English: Private Ferid Efendi⁷⁰⁹

2) The India, Egypt, Afghan, and Arabia Branch

Director: Dr. Fuad Bey

Afghan, India Desk: Abdürrab Bey

Egypt Desk: Cavalry First Lieutenant Yusuf Efendi⁷¹⁰

3) The Eastern Branch

Director: Infantry Captain Mehmed Nuri Efendi

Honorary Director: Köprülüzade Fuad Bey

a) Iran Desk: Gendarme Captain Süheyl Efendi

⁷⁰⁹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/5.

⁷¹⁰ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/5a.

- b) Caucasus Desk: Cavalry First Lieutenant Adnan Efendi
 - c) Crimea Desk: Cavalry First Lieutenant Rifat Efendi
 - d) Turkestan, Northern Turks: Infantry Captain Süleyman Efendi
 - e) Publication and press distribution desk: Cavalry Lieutenant Bahri Efendi
- Office accountant: Infantry Captain Saadeddin Efendi
- Office accountant: Kemal Efendi
- Office accountant: Brevet Lieutenant Selim Efendi⁷¹¹

4) The Eastern Africa, Western Africa, Shipment, Follow-up affairs, Personal affairs, Courier Branch

Director: Cavalry Lieutenant Colonel Hüsameddin Bey

- a) Eastern Africa Desk: Reserve Accountant Assignee (*İhtiyat Hesap Memuru Vekili*) Nuri Efendi
- b) Western Africa Desk: ditto
- c) Shipment Desk: Executive Sergeant Major İlhami Efendi
- d) Courier Desk: Tayyib Efendi and Private Dürri Efendi
- e) Follow-up affairs Desk: Executive Sergeant Major İhsan Efendi and Platoon leader Salih Efendi
- f) Personal affairs Desk: Private Hidayet Efendi⁷¹²

5) Records and Filing Branch

Director: Infantry Senior Captain Muhtar Efendi

⁷¹¹ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/6.

⁷¹² ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/6a.

6) The Rumeli Branch

Director: Infantry Captain Fuad Efendi⁷¹³

7) The Accounting Desk

Director: Infantry Senior Captain Ali Rza Efendi

Accountant: Private Celal Efendi⁷¹⁴

Other employees:

Janitor: Talib Ağa

Porter: Private İsmail, son of Ahmed, Şam

Orderly: Salih Mehmed, son of Ahmed, Drama

Orderly: Bahaeddin, son of Celal, Manastır

Orderly: Cemil, son of Ahmed, Dersaadet

Orderly: Abdülhak, son of Yusuf, Pristina

Post officer: Hakkı, son of İbrahim, Koçhisar

Post officer: Süleyman, son of Ali, Selle

Post officer: Ahmed, son of İsmail, Tirebolu

Post officer: Sadık, son of Hüseyin, Afyonkarahisar

Post officer: Ahmed, son of Mustafa, Beyşehir

Dispatcher: Elmas, son of Mehmed, Tripoli

Dispatcher: Hacı Adullah, son of Abdullah, Tripoli

Dispatcher: Tabuni, son of Selim, Tripoli

⁷¹³ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/7.

⁷¹⁴ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/7a.

Cook and Kitchen Sergeant: Ahmed, son of Yusuf, Tavas⁷¹⁵

These two structures clearly reveal that the SO, and the OEA that replaced it, struggled to take root in all regions considered to be part of the Ottoman war strategy, and performed activities at the behest of a conscious, rational, and organized center in Istanbul, which authorized its subordinate units to establish units throughout the distant territories of the Empire and of the Entente powers.

“Besides, the modest structure of the SO is crucial to understand how it served as the basis for the development of a broader system that would emerge with the establishment of the OEA. The foundation of this office seems to have been indebted to advanced planning and improved patterns of organization. In this context, it seems possible that this improvisation brought in more professionalism in both monitoring threats and taking action. The increase in the formation of subdivisions in the OEA might be regarded as the product of not only the shifting demands of intelligence but also the growing workload, which could be dealt with only by specialization.”⁷¹⁶

Bringing into question the place the SO occupied in military-civilian bureaucracy and its central command, a number of issues have been dealt with in this chapter from the phrases ascribed to the SO, to the transition period to the OEA, from the SC of the organization to its branches. In sum, the SO was an unconventional warfare organization, which was officially established on November 30, 1913, to conduct activities particularly in Western Thrace and Macedonia, and authorized in August 1914 to participate in action in all the regions related to the Ottoman war strategy. The SO does

⁷¹⁵ ATASE, BDH: F: 1846, D: 79, I: 13/8.

⁷¹⁶ Safi, “*The Ottoman Special Organization*”, 130.

not give the impression of an official department up to the outbreak of the First World War. Instead, its activities seem to have been hidden behind the official duties entrusted to Süleyman Askeri. With the outbreak of the war, the organization was attached to the Ministry of War, likely the result of a decision in early August at a meeting that the CUP leadership attended. It is logical that the Special Branch, one of the subdivisions of the Ottoman General Staff, was transformed into the SO with the commencement of the war, though it retained its name.

The SO, which had come into prominence by conducting band warfare within the sphere of unconventional warfare, however, began to undergo a change by February 1915 and this transition was completed by the elimination of the SC in May 1915. This seems to have occurred by and large as a result of the termination of the organization's reliance on armed bands. On the other hand, tension between the military and civil wings of the CUP can be said to have played a role in weakening the effectiveness of the band organization, thus strengthening Enver Pasha's hand in dismissing a part of the SO's field commanders who were inclined to ignore the orders of the SO and armies. Accordingly, the SO was replaced by the OEA under the command of Ali Bey Başhamba in May 1915. The OEA was evidently organized as the continuation of the SO. The contiguous nature of this relation can be derived from both the customary substitution of the phrase, the OEA, for the SO, and the overwhelming number of SO personnel maintained in the OEA. Yet recall that the OEA, which came into prominence more with its intelligence and propaganda activities rather than band warfare, represents an organization structurally different from the SO.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study can be essentially construed as an answer to the question: “What is the Special Organization?”. For hardly any of the definitions hitherto produced have stressed the fundamental connotation conveyed by the phrase of the SO, namely its military meaning. The existence of numerous irreconcilable SO definitions in the literature seem to be related to the misuse of the terms, “intelligence” and “band”, the two most frequently used conceptual tools in the comprehension and explanation of the SO. This apparently makes it complicated to mark out the scope of the subject matter.

These two conceptual tools have become so possessive that any dimension of the SO grew confined to function under their aegis. Foundation discussions clearly reveal this point, as those who prefer to comprehend the SO within the framework of the term, “intelligence” trace its origins to some intelligence services, whereas those who prefer to explain the SO through the aegis of the term, “band” trace its origins to some underground organizations. As a result, the origins of the SO are alleged to have sprung up from seven different organizations by seven different authors. It might, however, give no fruitful results to decide which one of these theories is more convincing, since none of them underscores the significance of the CUP from

which these organizations, without any exception, had derived from. Indeed, the politicization of the army and the reorganization of the CUP (1906-1908) on the one hand, and the subsequent rapprochement between the CUP and the army on the other, seems to be what led to the establishment of certain features as structural elements in the CUP, such as secrecy and underground activity, band and self-sacrificing organizations, and revolutionary features, thus preparing the ground for the most basic modes of action in the SO.

These discussions also reveal that “intelligence”, as used in the literature, did not go beyond being a hollow term. This not only poses certain conceptual and methodological problems but also leads to a distorted conceptualization of the SO. This is justified by the fact that the Ottoman General Staff’s Second Branch carried out the intelligence assignments that has been attributed to the SO, and that the SO was a source of intelligence rather than an intelligence service.

Similar conceptual and methodological problems are also encountered in the interpretation of the term, “band”. Most importantly, the elasticity of the term is discarded, which, in turn, plays a principal role in forming a negative impression of the SO. The nature of the term and illegal activities embarked upon by the members of the SO appear to be also responsible for the formation of this negative perception.

However, concepts and categories that were produced by the Ottomans to understand the nature of the bands should be assessed in their own period and context. Though varying in itself, there were two types of bands in the most general sense: bands executing brigandage with the sole

intention of plunder and robbery, and bands in pursuit of national and political intentions. The bands formed by the CUP between 1906 and 1908 bore a remarkable resemblance to the bands in the latter group. There were, however, a number of differences between the CUP and SO bands. Most importantly, the CUP bands which first originated within the context of the revolutionary warfare represented a political activism whereas the SO bands used to support the army represented a military activism. The changing conjuncture and a number of other factors seem to have diversified the intended use and formation of the bands.

All these do not necessarily mean that “intelligence” and “band” can play no role in the comprehension and explanation of the SO. On the contrary, sound conclusions can be drawn about the SO by rendering these epistemic tools more useful. This study, however, argues that conceptualization of the term, “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa” represents the most effective way to understand and grasp the SO, which, before all else, signifies a mode of action rather than the proper name of an organization, and points to three essential features that would explicitly clarify the true identity of the SO.

Firstly, the SO was both the description of the unconventional warfare activism that began to emerge in the initial period of experimentation and formation, and the proper name for the organization that fit this description. Although it seems possible to liken this structure to a special forces organization in its modern form, to define it entirely as such would be misleading, as the special forces is a term used to describe elite military units trained to carry out high-risk assignments that regular troops cannot perform.

This seems to be more relevant and descriptive for units like the Italian Arditi and German Sturmtruppen.⁷¹⁷ They were both a type of special force used to release the deadlock the long war of entrenched positions had created.⁷¹⁸ Both were designed to infiltrate enemy trenches, attack the weakest parts of the enemy lines, and prepare the way for a broad infantry advance. More important was that the combatants were outfitted with special armament and equipment, and these units consisted of combatants subjected to special training, both physically and mentally. It would, however, be wrong to regard the SO as a special forces organization as a whole. It had a distinct character but still its mode of action was certainly not a new concept in history.

Secondly, the phrase of the SO, signifies the special mission this formation was charged with or special purpose this formation was directed at, which became crystallized by the developments from the War of Tripoli up to the eve of World War I. The principal duty of the SO was to provide support to the Ottoman army during the First World War by conducting attempts to set up a force of the Muslims of the East to foil the military plans of the Entente powers. To achieve this end, the SO either directly supported the

⁷¹⁷ Sturmtruppen mean, just like Arditi, stormtroopers, which was established in March 1915 on the order of German Ministry of War to the 8th Army under the name of "Sturmabteilung Calsow (SA Calsow)". However, the organization lived its maturity not under Major Calsow but Colonel Rohr who began to command them from September 8. For more information, see; Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (Praeger Paperback, 1995); Dave Shunk, "Army Capstone Concept and the Genesis of German World War One Assault Squad and Infiltration Tactics," *Small Wars Journal* (August 2010): 1-12.

⁷¹⁸ The Arditi was first established as operational units under Giuseppe A. Bassi in June 1917. Angelo L. Pirocchi opposes the widely held opinion that since the Sturmtruppen was established before the Arditi, the latter was solely inspired by the first. Concerning the fact that Italy was the only state during the First World War that formed assault units (*Reparti d'Assalto*) at the level of division, and later even that of an army corps, Pirocchi argues that mission of Arditi was much larger in scope compared to German Sturmtruppen. For the origins and deployment of the Arditi, see; Angelo L. Pirocchi, *Italian Arditi, Elite Assault Troops 1917-1920* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 5-14.

regular armies on the battlefield by the combatants it gathered from various sources, as observed in the fronts of the Caucasus, Sinai-Palestine and Iraq, or attempted to instigate interest groups of Turkish-Muslim stock or other beliefs and origins beyond the frontline found in enemy-occupied zones like Egypt, partly occupied zones like Libya, and neutral countries like Iran, against the Entente Powers.

Thirdly and finally, the phrase of the SO, draws attention to the special place this organization and its central command occupied in military-civilian bureaucracy. The activities conducted by the SO prior to the First World War were not officially sanctioned but seems to have been hidden behind the official duties of Süleyman Askeri. Though not mentioned in its foundational and organizational charts, the organization was attached to the Ministry of War with the outbreak of the First World War, and the Special Branch was transformed into the SO, though it retained its name.

As long as the SO preserved these three characteristics, it was never called by any other name than “Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa.” Indeed this name was changed only after the SO lost two of its three special characteristics, when guerilla-band warfare, its most important kind of operation, was abolished with the central cadre that conducted it, and when the special position it had enjoyed within the military-civil bureaucracy came to an end. By November 1915, the name of the organization, which had thus been deprived of its structural characteristics, was changed to the OEA. Thus, the SO seems to have been a short-lived adventure in terms of its official existence, but its actions had a much broader impact. For this reason, it should not be regarded as an organization that was erased from history on October 30,

1918. In any case, there is ample evidence that the SO continued to carry out its paramilitary and intelligence activities, although ostensibly annulled with the Mudros Armistice, thus representing a transition toward later underground organizations.

Findings of this study is expected to contribute primarily to the growing literature of the SO and provide a reliable ground for further studies in the historiography that is often dominated by opposing views. It also seeks to provoke debates on various aspects of the SO, and thereby aims to prevent the subject from remaining the enterprise of a somewhat esoteric group. For although a myriad of events verify the eccentricity of the subject, the SO still refers to, as is the case with other historic narratives, a real past, consisting of real people, and to a historic adventure that has its own form and characteristics. Of course, caution should not be thrown to the wind, for when the matter comes to the SO the way on which the historian has to walk gets more rugged and full of potholes. Despite the intricacy and dead-ends that hound researchers, there still appears a number of other dimensions of the subject that should be approached from a perspective free of the baggage that has so long weighed it down.

Mindful of conceptual and methodological pitfalls sketched out earlier, SO's ideological identity and philosophy of action and their effects on the activities of the organization remain subjects of future research that need to be mapped out. Another important avenue for future research obviously lies in elaborating the activities of the SO in little researched regions such as Caucasus, Central Asia, Russia, North-Western Africa and the Balkans. In addition to widening the geographical scope of the analyses, propaganda

and political intelligence activities of the SO as well as its attendance in international meetings seems another neglected area of research or an important stream of subject to pursue. As to the financial structure of the SO, we barely know more than the SO's receipt of money from the discretionary fund (*tahsisat-ı mesture*). Therefore, another avenue of future research can be said to concern the financial sources of the SO. Tracking the employees of the SO during the post-war period, especially during the early Republican era is another subject that needs attention. Although numerous dimensions of the OEA were considered to be among the main field of study in this dissertation, a concerted study on the OEA and its effect upon the national struggle period would obviously be extremely helpful for a more thorough understanding of the SO.

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