Pan-Islamism and Modernisation

During the Reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II,

1876-1909

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Abstract

The reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) is one of the most controversial in today’s historiography. Historians often depict him as a tyrant who instrumentalised Islam as a means of enhancing and expanding his personal authority. In this dissertation, I argue that such views of Abdülhamid are inadequate and fail to explain two aspects of his reign: the modernisation of Ottoman institutions and infrastructure he undertook at home and his immense prestige among Muslims abroad. A close reading of Abdülhamid’s own religious views reveals that, to him, Islam and the state were meant to support each other at home and abroad. To that end, the Sultan embarked on a campaign to expand Ottoman influence among the Muslims of the Indian Ocean world, challenging British hegemony in the region. He built alliances with Islamic institutions such as Sufi orders, while transforming and modernising Ottoman institutions and enhancing their Islamic character. His efforts were capped with the construction of the Hijaz Railway, a signal of Ottoman independence and the mobilising capacity of the international Islamic community.
Résumé

Le règne du sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) est l'un des plus controversés dans l'historiographie d'aujourd'hui. Les historiens le décrivent souvent comme un tyran qui instrumentalisait l'islam comme un moyen de renforcer et d'étendre son autorité personnelle. Dans cette thèse, je soutiens que ces opinions d'Abdülhamid sont insuffisantes et ne parviennent pas à expliquer deux aspects de son règne: la modernisation des institutions ottomanes et l'infrastructure qu'il a entreprises au pays et son immense prestige parmi les musulmans à l'étranger. Une lecture attentive de ses propres opinions religieuses révèle que, pour lui, l'Islam et l'Etat étaient destinés à soutenir l’un l’autre au pays comme au monde entier. À cette fin, le Sultan a lancé une campagne pour étendre l'influence ottomane parmi les musulmans du monde de l’Océan Indien, combattant l’hégémonie britannique dans la région. Il a construit des alliances avec des institutions islamiques telles que les ordres soufis, tout en transformant et en modernisant les institutions ottomanes et en renforçant leur caractère islamique. Ses efforts ont été couronnés avec la construction du chemin de fer du Hidjaz, un signal de l’indépendance ottomane et la capacité de mobilisation de la communauté islamique internationale.
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First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Malek Abisaab, for his advice, encouragement and support over the years I have worked with him. I am also thankful to the other members of my dissertation committee, Prof. A. Üner Turgay and Prof. Gwyn Campbell. The former aroused my interest in the Ottoman world, while the latter introduced me to the Indian Ocean world as a unit of analysis. Prof. Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert (who, along with Prof. Abisaab and Prof. Campbell was on my comprehensive examination committee) introduced me to the field of world history. Prof. Nancy Partner helped me see that history lies in the narrative. The present dissertation owes no small debt to all these approaches.

In preparing the dissertation, I have also benefitted from conversations with Prof. Elizabeth Elbourne, Prof. İhsan Fazhoğlu, Steven Serels, Veysel Simsek and Alberto Tiburcio. Any shortcomings in the dissertation are, of course, my own responsibility. I am grateful to Selim Argun, Prof. Şükran Fazhoğlu, David Mason and Emrah Şahin for teaching me what I know of modern and Ottoman Turkish, without which the present study would not have been possible.

I gratefully acknowledge the fellowships awarded to me by McGill University from 2006 to 2009, as well as the Doctoral Research Bursary awarded to me by the Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC) from 2009 to 2011. I would like to thank the staff of the Islamic Studies Library, the Humanities and Social Sciences Library and the Inter-Library Loan service at McGill University for their help. I
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Maria Chowdhury, for their constant support and encouragement; my wife, Katie
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a few months before the completion of this dissertation, for being an inspiration.
A Note on Transliteration

In this dissertation, I have transliterated Ottoman Turkish terms (such as Abdülhamid or Osmanlı) using modern Turkish spelling. For Arabic terms, I have followed a simplified version of the system used by the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill, omitting diacritical marks except for the ‘ayn and hamza. For terms that are well known in English, I have followed the generally accepted English spelling (for instance, “Istanbul” rather than “İstanbul”). For Russian terms, I have adopted the Library of Congress system.
# List of Abbreviations

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<td>Foreign Office Confidential Print</td>
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<td>LC</td>
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Introduction

In 1908, the Ottoman Empire, long known in the West as the “sick man of Europe,” launched the Hijaz Railway amid much fanfare. This railway connected Damascus across long stretches of forbidding terrain to the second-holiest city in Islam, Medina. Plans were afoot to eventually continue the railway to Mecca. Although the extension to Mecca never came to pass, the construction and launch of the Hijaz Railway was a high-water mark in the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909). This railway was constructed using Muslim labourers and, perhaps more importantly, financed by Muslim capital. It was also the only Ottoman railway planned, built, owned and operated by the state. It demonstrated not only to Ottoman subjects but also to the world at large that the Ottoman Empire had the mobilising capacity, the acumen and the wherewithal to initiate and complete massive infrastructural projects. Moreover, the destination of the railway, namely the Hijaz vilayet (province) was not chosen accidentally, for it was the home to the birthplace of Islam, and the fountainhead of Sultan Abdülhamid’s legitimacy as Caliph. Indeed, in a global age of railways, the Hijaz Railway was one of a kind: the only railway built to ease access to the holy places of a religion by an empire espousing that religion, with the help of contributions from the followers of that religion not just at home but around the world.

Several important questions arise from this episode in Ottoman history. First and foremost, why was the railway constructed? As we will see below, historians who have
studied the Hijaz Railway in detail have come up with a range of answers, largely privileging strategic concerns, that is, Istanbul’s need to bring the Hijaz more firmly into its grasp by easing troop transportation into and through the province. This, however, brings us to a related question: why was the railway built when it was? In other words, why was the turn of the twentieth century deemed by the Sultan and his advisors to be the most opportune moment to construct the Hijaz Railway? After all, the Sultan had already been in power for over twenty years when he initiated the railway project. What were the domestic and international factors that made this railway both possible and desirable in 1900? Lastly, what is the significance of the fact that the state decided to connect one of the holiest sites of Islam to the Ottoman railway network? Are we to understand this project as an attempt by the Sultan to place the resources of the state at the service of his religion, Islam? Or is it perhaps more apt to see the railway, a quintessential symbol of modernity, as an instrument of modernisation in the Hijaz? Is it possible to achieve a synthesis between these positions?

**Argument, Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation will attempt to answer the questions posed above by examining the broad domestic and international context within which the Hijaz Railway project was developed and realised by Sultan Abdülhamid and his advisers. Here I use the term “context” to mean a set of “connections construed as relevant to someone, to something
or to a particular problem,” in the words of Roy Dilley. The word “construed” is crucial here: I reject the notion that the context of a phenomenon is self-evident; rather, it is the observer who decides what constitutes the context, depending on what he deems to be of relevance to understanding the phenomenon he is studying. Many of the historians dealing with Abdülhamid’s reign have placed the Hijaz Railway in the context of the Sultan’s Pan-Islamic political programme. Meanwhile, historians of the railway itself have largely dealt with it as a strategic issue, placing the railway in the context of the Ottoman Empire’s military considerations. Neither of these is sufficient in order understand why the Ottoman state embarked upon this venture.

What I propose to do in this dissertation is examine a much broader context for the genesis and realisation of the railway project. Thinking of context as a set of connections, I examine several of these connections in depth. The first that springs to mind is the connection between the railway and Abdülhamid. Although, as we see in Chapter Five of this dissertation, the Sultan was not the originator of the idea, he was, eventually, its strongest and most significant backer. However, the question of why Abdülhamid backed the project remains an important one to answer. In addition to the strategic value of the Hijaz Railway, two strands of Abdülhamid’s rule are important to analyse in this regard: the Sultan’s policy of Pan-Islamism, which attempted to rally Muslims around the world to a common cause, and his modernisation drive, which was aimed at rallying the energies of the Ottoman Empire’s subjects to withstand and challenge attempts at hegemony by the European powers, particularly Britain. This dissertation also breaks new ground by linking the Hijaz Railway to greater trends in the

Indian Ocean world, a vast region stretching from East Africa to South-East Asia, and including the littoral of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The present dissertation thus examines the context of the Hijaz Railway in a breadth of time and space not usually accorded to it in the literature, giving us new insights not only into the reasons for the construction of the railway, but, more broadly, at the way the Ottoman state functioned under Abdülhamid.

The present dissertation historicises Abdülhamid’s views and treats them as processes rather than facts. With this aim in view, and certainly without trying to deny his individual contributions, I point out the sources (be they Muslim intellectuals, government officials, foreign Muslim critics of Western imperialism, Sufi leaders, or others) from whom Abdülhamid drew some of his initial ideas. I also demonstrate how Abdülhamid transformed those ideas into a uniquely Hamidian set of policies, but without ever being the lonely figure he is often depicted as. I balance the views of Abdülhamid, who had a tendency to take sole credit for his policies and achievements, with other sources which point to the winnowing process by which these ideas came to form state policy.

Abdülhamid, the younger brother of Sultan Murad V (r. 1876), ascended the Ottoman throne after a palace coup in 1876. Sultan Abdülhamid II was to remain on the throne until 1909, leading the Ottoman Empire through a number of significant international and domestic trials, and devising a new strategy for the maintenance of Ottoman independence and territorial integrity. This strategy involved making Islam the foundation of the state in order to give it internal cohesion and, simultaneously, modernising the infrastructure of the Empire to help it withstand outside competition and
make the most of what the Sultan believed to be its great economic and human potential. Abdülhamid also cultivated relationships with overseas Muslims around the Indian Ocean rim in the hope that one day this alliance would prove beneficial both to the Ottoman Empire and the foreign Muslim communities. This strategy of Pan-Islamism was one of the main hallmarks of Abdülhamid’s foreign policy.

This dissertation looks at Sultan Abdülhamid’s use of Islam at home and abroad as a form of “religiously informed universalism,” to use Sugata Bose’s phrase. Many historians have followed Max Weber in asserting that the nineteenth century when religion was in continuous retreat. As C.A. Baily argues, however, several religions, including Islam, “staged a remarkable resurgence after 1815.” These religions were certainly changed by the new conditions within which they operated, but they also helped change the parts of the world where they held sway. This religious revival was occurring, according to Baily, “on a global scale.” It thus becomes particularly relevant to look at both the ideational and material aspects of the deployment of Islam by Abdülhamid.

I argue that Abdülhamid and his associates posited this Islamic universalism against many competing visions, whether they be local, regional or global in scope and character. These alternatives included Ottoman patriotism, which had been promoted by the state during the Tanzimat (reform) era of 1839-1876 and was meant to transcend religious differences between the subjects of the Empire; the ethno-religious nationalisms of various Ottoman Christian minority groups, such as the Bulgarians, Armenians or Greeks; tribal particularism, such as that of various Arab, Kurdish or Armenian tribes;

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2 For Bose’s use of the term “religiously informed universalism” as a set of political beliefs and attitudes, and his application of the term to Islam, see Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.
religious particularism, such as that of Shi‘ites in the Baghdad and Basra provinces or the Wahhabis in central Arabia. The alternatives also included the imperialist, Eurocentric universalisms propagated by the Great Powers, such as Britain, France and Russia, all of which were interested in expanding into Ottoman territory during the reign of Abdülhamid.

In contradistinction to all these ideologies or identification systems, Abdülhamid proposed and promoted an Islamic universalism centred on Istanbul, with its key elements including loyalty to the caliph and resistance to non-Muslim rule. In the Ottoman Empire, however, the caliphate and sultanate went hand-in-hand. Abdülhamid’s position as leader of an international religious community thus could not be separated from his role as the political and dynastic leader or a particular state with a particular territory. Thus, despite his universalist beliefs and claims, Abdülhamid was sometimes forced to act in a particularistic fashion in defence of the interests of the Ottoman Empire. For instance, much as he wanted to lead an effort to liberate his fellow Muslims in India from British rule, he was fully aware that unilaterally declaring war on Britain (the world’s leading power in the late nineteenth century) would be suicidal for the Ottoman Empire. Hence, instead of military help, the Ottomans under Abdülhamid gave the Indians moral encouragement.

The Hijaz Railway was one of the creative solutions which arose out of the tension between Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism and his need to defend the interests of the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, this railway connected two cities and, by extension, two provinces within the Ottoman Empire, and was meant to further the centralisation of the Ottoman state. On the other, the project was undertaken as a display of Ottoman
economic and organisational potential to the Muslims of the world, and was constructed using donations not only from all over the Ottoman Empire, but all over the Muslim world as well. Indian pilgrims, for instance, would not use this railway (as they travelled to the holy cities of the Hijaz by steamship and disembarked at Jidda). However, donating to the largest modern infrastructure project in the Ottoman Empire undertaken without Western financing was a way to voice protest against the British rulers of India. Similarly (though on a smaller scale), the Hamidiye Tribal School, opened by Sultan Abdülhamid in order to integrate Arab (and later other) tribes into the Ottoman state, eventually also housed the children of Muslim traders from South-East Asia and gave them the means of asserting a sphere of action that was autonomous from their colonial overlords, the Dutch.

I use the above as case studies to demonstrate the intertwining of the Hamidian guiding principles of modernisation and Pan-Islamism. As we shall see below in more detail, most historians examining the reign of Abdülhamid come to one of two conclusions. Some view him as a retrograde fanatic and a blot on the history of the late Ottoman Empire (which they otherwise see as one of increasing Westernisation and secularisation). Consequently, even if they do recognise his responsibility for some degree of modernisation during his reign, they see this modernisation only as a tool used by Abdülhamid to help solidify his regime.

Other historians take the opposite approach, seeing Abdülhamid as a moderniser in the tradition of the earlier Tanzimat era. For those historians, Abdülhamid’s religiosity is nothing but a sham, a smokescreen used by him to advance his true goal, which is (for some scholars) the consolidation of the Ottoman Empire or (for others), personal power.
Thus, what is common between these two schools of thought is the idea that Abdülhamid could not actually have been both a pious ruler and a reformer and moderniser; one of these two aspects of his personality must have been false or unimportant. What is largely lacking in the literature is a detailed examination of the Sultan’s own views on religion and its role in the state. This dissertation provides such an analysis, and consequently transcends the alleged religion-modernisation dichotomy, rejecting the notion that either Abdülhamid’s religious attitude or his modernism was merely a tool to advance a hidden agenda of power.

Following Talal Asad, I argue that there is nothing incompatible between religion and modernisation, as the experience of the Ottoman Empire under Abdülhamid amply demonstrates. Asad points out the unviability of the notion (introduced by Max Weber) that modernisation must necessarily involve a reduction in the importance of religion to society, largely because religion becomes increasingly divorced from the everyday concerns of society. According to Asad, however, religion is “not indifferent” to the concerns of everyday life in a modern setting. He cites the examples of two hallmarks of modernity: the economy and science, pointing out the contribution of religion to debates involving those spheres, even after the onset of modernity. Consequently, the idea of modernity relegating religion to an ever-shrinking domain of its own is rather hard to maintain.4

Abdülhamid’s reign followed a period of intensive modernisation known as the Tanzimat (1839-1876), during which successive sultans transformed several key institutions, including the army and the judiciary. This modernisation took the form of

appropriating Western models and applying them to the Ottoman context. Islam did not retreat from the scene, however; instead, becoming increasingly dissociated from power, it became a medium of social protest, whether by intellectuals or Sufi orders. During Abdülhamid’s reign, however, Islam once again gained a central place in the way the state was run. As Mehmet Alkan argues, modernisation continued and was, if anything, intensified under Abdülhamid, but the statist ideology of his predecessors was replaced by an “Islamist” one. For instance, while the state decided to take a leading role in the education of its young subjects during the Tanzimat era, Abdülhamid continued this policy, with the difference that under his rule the schools promoted a state-sanctioned concept of Islamic morality in place of the Ottoman patriotism promoted by Tanzimat-era schools. Thus, rather than constrasting Abdülhamid’s views on Islam and modernity, and his actions in support of both, it makes far more sense to see how they were interrelated, and ultimately how they came together to produce large-scale projects such as the Hijaz Railway.

One of the consequences of the rise of the nation-state is the predominance of national historical narratives. As a result, much of what is written about the late period of the Ottoman Empire tends to relate to the rise of the Young Turks as precursors to Kemalism and modern Turkey. Thus, what we see before us may be a history of the Ottoman Empire, but often the Ottomans are just a way for the historian to make a statement about today’s Turkey. It is telling that Carter Findley has to note that “the

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contemporary Turkish Republic is not the only vantage point from which to think about the history of the Turks.”\textsuperscript{7} This is even more the case if one is also interested in the other peoples of the Ottoman Empire, as well as non-Ottomans who interacted with the Empire in a myriad ways. One of the pioneers of world history, William McNeill, argues powerfully that an “ecumenical history” (a history that surveys the experiences of “humanity”) can overcome some of the limitations of “parochial historiography” (that is, a history that takes, as its unit of analysis, the experiences of one particular group of people).\textsuperscript{8}

In that spirit, this dissertation examines not just the views of Sultan Abdülhamid and the experiences of the Ottomans, but also the views of a diverse range of actors, such as Russian Pan-Slavists, Indian activists in South Africa or anti-Ottoman campaigners in Britain. In so doing, this work avoids presenting the world through an exclusively Ottoman prism, which is the major shortcoming of much of the Turkish historiography on the subject. My aim is to place the era of Abdülhamid in the relevant international context of its time, rather than in the succession of eras of Ottoman history leading to modern-day Turkey. In this way, another significant problem, namely teleology, is avoided as well.

McNeill also argues that “larger patterns” matter much more than “particular transactions.”\textsuperscript{9} Abdülhamid’s reign covers a substantial time period, and examining every detail of his rule, or even the use of Islam during his entire reign, may lead to us losing sight of the forest for the trees. Instead, in this dissertation I seek to uncover and elucidate the “larger patterns” by examining several broad themes in Ottoman history under Abdülhamid. These include the rise and spread of Ottoman Pan-Islamism; the

\textsuperscript{7} Findley, The Turks in World History, 6.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 35.
transformation and modernisation of domestic institutions; and Ottoman efforts led by Abdülhamid to combat the hegemony of successive Great Powers (Russia, followed by France and then Britain). Thus, unlike other authors who have written on the subject, I do not examine the details of the construction work performed on the Hijaz Railway. Rather, I examine the way in which the railway ties into the three above themes.

While I thus adopt the methodology of world historians to some extent, this dissertation is not a work of world history in the classical sense. While an analysis of the spread of ideas and technology is a crucial part of this work, the scale of the study is not quite global, but is rather geographically bounded. The geography of the Ottoman Empire is usually defined in land-based terms (locating the Empire in Anatolia, the Balkans, Arabia, North Africa, and so on), but it can equally be defined by seas. The Ottoman capital, Istanbul, was located where the Black Sea meets the Mediterranean. The Ottomans in the late nineteenth century controlled the entire eastern Mediterranean shore, and much of the southern shore as well. They claimed territory on both sides of the Red Sea, and on the west coast of the Persian Gulf. Due to British control of the Suez Canal, much of Ottoman infrastructural development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was centred on finding an alternative route to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean.

A sea-based perspective can give us insights that a solely land-based view cannot. For example, the founder of modern sea-centred history, Fernand Braudel, argues that the Mediterranean Sea formed one coherent unit, despite political and cultural boundaries. In his view, “The Turkish Mediterranean lived and breathed with the same rhythms as the
Christian.”¹⁰ Just as his seminal study of Italian and Spanish ports in the sixteenth century is considerably enriched by placing these ports in the context of the Mediterranean world, and as many studies of India and Africa today are enriched through a perspective that places them in the context of the Indian Ocean which washes their shores, so I believe that histories of the Ottoman Empire (whose southern lands at least fall squarely in the Indian Ocean region) would benefit considerably from an awareness of the Indian Ocean context. Consequently, in the present dissertation I have to some extent adopted the approach of the Indian Ocean World school of history, which is itself an outgrowth of the Mediterranean school pioneered by Braudel. In particular, I follow Bose in arguing that the Indian Ocean World remained a coherent whole even in the era of imperialism, and that the Muslim inhabitants of the Indian Ocean rim never allowed the European colonial powers to achieve complete hegemony there.¹¹

While Bose masterfully presents the multiple roles that Indian merchants, politicians and others played in the Indian Ocean World even in the era of high imperialism, he does not go into detail about the Ottoman role in the ocean, except as reported by Indian travellers. As for traditional histories of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they mostly tend to feature land-based analysis and largely miss the oceanic perspective. This dissertation remedies this serious omission and breaks new ground by examining the Ottoman political and diplomatic presence throughout the Indian Ocean region: in Ottoman Arabia, in British-held and independent parts of Africa, in British India, and in British- and Dutch-controlled parts of South-East Asia. Much of Abdülhamid’s struggle against British hegemony took part in the Indian

Ocean, and it is no coincidence that the Hijaz Railway paralleled one arm of the Indian Ocean, namely the Red Sea. By bringing together the different strands of the Ottoman presence around the oceanic perimeter, this study places Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism in its vast geographical context and demonstrates the sweep of the Sultan-Caliph’s hopes and ambitions. More importantly, it demonstrates the Ottoman Empire’s role as a dynamic power of international proportions, a role the Empire is often not recognised as performing in this era in its history.

The present dissertation is thus a contribution not only to Ottoman history and the history of the modern Middle East, but also both to world history and interregional history (of which Indian Ocean World studies is a subfield), as well as the history of modern Islamic politics, the history of transportation, and the history of the reign of Abdülhamid II. Lastly, it is important to point out that this dissertation is primarily a work of political history and the history of ideas, rather than of social history. A detailed analysis of the social classes which backed Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism or rejected it is thus mostly beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, the views and roles of various social groups (such as Sufi brotherhoods or Bedouin tribes) are examined here when relevant.

**Literature Review**

As Caroline Finkel points out, “Abdülhamid II has been more harshly judged by history than any other sultan.” According to Finkel, this characterisation is, more than anything, a result of Abdülhamid’s use of Islam as a “cement” to bind the empire together, which is
anathema to many historians because of their “particular modern agenda.”¹² In this section, I will examine what this agenda has consisted of over time, and note the increasing instances of a more neutral and even appreciative approach to Abdülhamid and his era. If Finkel is right to claim that Abdülhamid’s attitude towards Islam is problematic to many historians, their views on his religiosity bear investigation. What exactly do historians understand by “Islam” in the context of Abdülhamid’s rule? Furthermore, if Abdülhamid’s religious views have been a cause of his negative treatment in the literature, the question then arises of what historians make of his modernisation efforts. Do they view them as lying in contradistinction to his piety, successful in spite of his attachment to Islam? Do they view them as the true highlight of Abdülhamid’s reign, thinly veiled by a veneer of religion? Or do they view his attempts at modernisation as an inevitable failure?

What does Finkel mean by the “particular modern agenda” of scholars dealing with the Hamidian period? The answer certainly depends on where one is writing. For scholars based in Turkey, Kemalism, the ideology that arose under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (r. 1920-1938), was the central fact for several generations. As a project aiming to transform Turkey from the remnants of a Muslim empire into a secular, Europeanised nation-state, Kemalism saw the Hamidian era as its ultimate Other.¹³ It is important to note that Kemalists did not see the creation of the Turkish Republic as a work that had been completed, but rather saw a movement towards the achievement of

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the goals of the Kemalist ideology as a continuous process, or, in the words of Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb Khan, even a “permanent kulturkampf against society.” Hence, assessments of the Ottoman past necessarily had something to say about the republican present. In such an atmosphere, to say anything positive about Abdülhamid was, in a sense, to negate the achievements of the republican era. As we shall see below, however, much has become possible in contemporary Turkey that was not possible up to the 1980s or 1990s.

Similarly, many Western historians who express open admiration for republican Turkey have viewed the Hamidian era as an inconvenient interruption in the supposedly continuous process of Westernisation, modernisation and secularisation that, according to the accepted schema, commenced with the Tanzimat of 1839-1876, was continued by the Young Turks (1908-1918) and was brought to perfection by Atatürk. Abdülhamid sticks out from this pattern like a sore thumb, because, despite being an active moderniser, he was not interested in Westernising the Ottoman Empire. He had the confidence in his state, dynasty and religion to believe that the Ottoman Empire could survive and prosper through means other than imitating the West. Having developed the theory that Islam is inherently outmoded and responsible for postponing or preventing the “modernisation” of Muslim societies, Western scholars have thus traditionally seen Abdülhamid’s rule as an aberration, or at best an unsuccessful reaction. It is thus no coincidence that the amount of scholarship done on the Tanzimat era and the Young Turk period, that is, the period immediately preceding the Hamidian one and the one to which Abdülhamid succumbed, far exceeds anything written on Abdülhamid II. Nevertheless, in a parallel to new views

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on Abdülhamid arising in Turkey, there has also been a significant reassessment of his reign in the West in recent years.

Abdülhamid has tended to receive short shrift in general histories of the Ottoman Empire or Turkey. Bernard Lewis, who was once one of the most influential Western scholars on the Ottoman Empire,\(^\text{15}\) argues in his book *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (originally published in 1961) that Abdülhamid “was far from being the blind, uncompromising, complete reactionary of the historical legend; on the contrary, he was a willing and active modernizer.”\(^\text{16}\) Despite this assertion, however, Lewis himself is partially responsible for maintaining the “legend” he criticises. Thus, when writing about the Orient Express, which was launched in 1888 and linked Istanbul to Vienna, Lewis claims that “for a whole new generation of Turks” the railway station in Istanbul where they could board the Orient Express was the “anteroom to freedom and modernity.” On the other hand, the Hijaz Railway is described by Lewis as “a move in the opposite direction,” that is, a move away from “freedom and modernity,” even though it was “paid for by donations from Muslims all over the world.”\(^\text{17}\) Thus, Lewis aims to portray the policies of Abdülhamid as retrogressive, and “Muslims all over the world” as dupes who willingly gave up their money to pay for something that would take them away from “freedom and modernity.” The idea that the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the destination of the Orient Express, was no greater friend of individual freedom than Abdülhamid, does not seem to occur to Lewis. Instead, Islam stands in for backwardness and restrictiveness, and so a railway, a symbol of progress for Lewis in its own right,

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becomes a symbol of backwardness if it leads to the Islamic holy city of Medina. Needless to say, a sultan who promotes such a venture, to Lewis and those who share his views, cannot be a positive influence on the empire.

This attitude towards Abdülhamid has persisted to some extent, and can be found in much more recent scholarship on the Ottoman Empire. For instance, Stephen Kinzer depicts Abdülhamid as “an intolerant and narrow-minded tyrant who countenanced no talk of reform.”\textsuperscript{18} In the same breath, however, he praises Atatürk for the reforms he imposed on Turkey in top-down fashion, and speaks with understanding of Atatürk’s necessity of maintaining a one-party state during his lifetime. No such understanding is forthcoming for Abdülhamid. The reason is simple. According to Kinzer, Atatürk was out to make the Turks “everything they had never been: modern, secular, prosperous and, above all, truly European.”\textsuperscript{19} Since Abdülhamid’s goal was to bring the Ottomans closer to the rest of the Muslim world and to strengthen the Empire from within without copying European methods, Kinzer can dismiss his reforms out of hand.

Yet other historians, perhaps due to an inability to neatly categorise his reign, tend to ignore Abdülhamid and his contributions to the Ottoman Empire over his long reign. For example, Donald Quataert, in his history entitled \textit{The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922}, virtually skips over this crucial period. In one of the few mentions of Abdülhamid in his book, Quataert asserts that Abdülhamid “took up the autocratic reins” in 1876. In the very next sentence, he skips to the deposition of the sultan by the Young Turks in 1908.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{20} Donald Quataert, \textit{The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65.
Increasingly, however, histories of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey are showing a tendency to give serious consideration to the achievements of the Hamidian era. Erik Zürcher recognises the role of Abdülhamid in expanding the Empire’s network of state schools. Some of these schools, according to Zürcher, “provided the empire (and later the republic) with generations of well educated, outward looking administrators, diplomats, writers, doctors and academics,” among whom were Muslims as well as non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{21}

Here we see an image of Abdülhamid that is unrecognisable when compared with those produced by Orientalist or pro-Kemalist historians.\textsuperscript{22} Not only does Zürcher demonstrate the religious tolerance that, for the most part, prevailed during the Hamidian era, but he also shows that Abdülhamid’s modernisation was anything but an aberration. Instead, the reforms he conducted (such as the expansion of schools) contributed to developments even into the republican period. What is missing from Zürcher’s analysis is an explanation how the expansion of the school network can be situated within Abdülhamid’s concern for the promotion of a state-driven Islam. Furthermore, Zürcher speaks of Abdülhamid here in the abstract, merely mentioning that the expansion of schools took place during his reign, which obscures the leading and active role Abdülhamid took in shaping policy, to some extent in contrast to the Tanzimat-era sultans, under whom the bureaucracy played a much more prominent role than under Abdülhamid.

The mainstream portrayal of Abdülhamid in republican Turkey continued to be highly negative well into recent years. As Claudia Kleinert demonstrates, Turkish historians’ depictions of Abdülhamid have often been a function of their political positions with regard to contemporary Turkey. Until recent decades, most Turkish scholars writing about the era of Abdülhamid held overtly negative views of the sultan; such a position affirmed their loyalty to the republican order established by Kemal Atatürk. Conversely, expressing admiration for Abdülhamid was an effective way to challenge the Kemalist system. Although Turkish historians tended to toe the party line until recently, the Islamist poet and philosopher Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) threw down the gauntlet with his book, *The Great Khan*. Kısakürek is careful to warn the reader from the outset that his work is not that of a historian, but rather that of a thinker.

He describes Abdülhamid as the saviour of the Turks, a role normally occupied in the republican imagination by Atatürk. Kısakürek’s work is marked by a deep anti-Semitism. He argues that the Jews are behind every effort to “belittle, refute, sabotage and foil” Abdülhamid. The sultan’s overt enemies, such as the Russians, the British, the Armenians, and certain Turks were, according to Kısakürek, only doing the Jews’ bidding. Thus, to him, the whole point of the Committee for Union and Progress (the Young Turks), the movement which overthrew Abdülhamid and whose ideology was the

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27 Ibid., 11.
28 Ibid., 331.
precursor to Kemalism, was to “destroy Islam on the orders of the Jews.” Needless to say, whatever insights Kısıkürek gains from interviewing people who were acquainted with Abdülhamid and from his studies into the Sultan’s personality do not make up for his single-minded bigotry. Nevertheless, as Kleinert notes, Kısıkürek made an important contribution by pointing out the need for revisionist studies of Abdülhamid.

Since the 1990s, however, Turkey has witnessed a rise in the popularity of Islamist political movements, a relative (although precarious) drawback by the army from politics, and an increase in the freedom of speech. Along with these socio-political developments came a more open interest among Turkish intellectuals in the past of Turkey and its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire. Along with debates on the massacres of Armenians in 1915 has come more open discussion of the pre-Young-Turk era, including the rule of Abdülhamid II. As part of these changes, it has now become more acceptable in the Turkish context for Turkish historians to challenge old stereotypes about Abdülhamid II. Süleyman Kocabaş’s book, Sultan Abdülhamid II, is one of a number of recent, more-or-less even-handed works on Abdülhamid published in Turkey. Kocabaş devotes a section of his book to the Sultan’s Pan-Islamist projects. However, the evidence he presents in this section is limited by his excessive focus on the personality of Abdülhamid II, to the detriment of other actors shaping the pan-Islamist policies of the sultan. For instance, Kocabaş mentions the fact that İzzet Bey and Jamal al-Din Afghani played important roles in shaping Abdülhamid’s pan-Islamist views, but does not elaborate on it.

Indeed, in this almost sixty-page-long section, there are very few

29 Ibid., 691.
30 Zürcher, “The Ottoman Twilight,” 203.
31 Süleyman Kocabaş, Sultan II. Abdülhamid: Şahsiyeti ve politikası (Sultan Abdülhamid II: His Personality and Policies) (İstanbul: Vatan Yayınları, 1995), 228-229.
personal names other than that of Abdülhamid himself. Nevertheless, curiously, Kocabaş places the origin of Ottoman pan-Islamism not with the sultan or his advisers, but with the Western powers: in his view, pressures on the borders of the empire by the Russians and the British, as well as the Western-supported Balkan provinces, led to the rise of Pan-Islamism as an Ottoman “reaction.”32 While the international context that the Ottoman Empire was operating in is certainly very important to consider, I would argue that these were not sufficient in and of themselves to produce such a significant shift in policy. For this reason, the present dissertation balances an examination of the Empire’s foreign relations with an analysis of the views of Abdülhamid and his advisers on Islam and the Ottoman Empire’s role in the Muslim world.

Most of the sultan’s biographies in Western European languages are several decades old and carry with them the prejudices of the day. Of these, the biography by Joan Haslip, entitled The Sultan, stands out for its attempt at a balanced portrayal of the sultan. For instance, Haslip notes that Abdülhamid was “frugal, almost austere” (which contrasts sharply with the popular image of the “indolent Turk”);33 that he only took half an hour to get dressed, unlike some of his predecessors, who had turned their getting up in the morning into an elaborate ritual;34 and, more importantly, that Abdülhamid was only a “tyrant” only because “he genuinely believed that his people were not yet ready for parliamentary government”35.

Nevertheless, Haslip’s biography of Abdülhamid suffers from the shortcomings of much Orientalist history. Its most important defect lies in the fact that, like Lewis was to

32 Ibid., 227-228.
34 Ibid., 194.
35 Ibid., 151.
do later, Haslip places European powers squarely in the centre of events. Thus, on almost
every other page we read how this or that decision of Abdülhamid was interpreted by the
British, French, Germans or Russians, and what Abdülhamid’s response was to the
European reaction. Secondly, Haslip develops an elaborate and somewhat confused thesis
regarding Abdülhamid’s religiosity, according to which the sultan only pretended to be
religious in public, but nevertheless abandoned decision-making to Islamic clergymen,
such as “sheikhs and mollahs, dervishes and astrologers.” These men, according to
Haslip, inhabited “twisted corridors and small cell-like rooms,” and “fostered prejudice
and superstition.” In Haslip’s view, “by professing to guide [Abdülhamid's] soul, [they]
controlled his political actions”.36 Finally, the very first photograph that appears in the
book is that of a nude woman sitting on a bed; it is not clear what this image has to do
with Sultan Abdülhamid, other than playing its part in an established trope of Orientalist
fantasy.

However, despite Haslip’s overtly negative take on the role of the ulama who
surrounded Abdülhamid and advised him, she does broach the subject, which is worth
pursuing, of the sources or inspirations for Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism. Apart from the
“insidious voice” of an Islamic lecturer and Rifa‘i Sufi from Aleppo named Abul Huda,
Haslip mentions visiting foreigners, such as “any itinerant scholar from Bengal or
Mongol chief from Turkestan”.37 These connections with domestic Sufi leaders and
visiting Islamic leaders and thinkers merit further investigation.

Many historians examining the Hamidian era view either Abdülhamid’s
modernisation or his Islamic piety as a front for his true aims. Niyazi Berkes, in The

36 Ibid., 173.
37 Ibid., 173-174.
Development of Secularism in Turkey (first published in 1964), views Abdülhamid’s reign as a “long period of reaction and isolation” for “Turkey.” Abdülhamid’s religious advisers, according to Berkes, represented “either traditionalism or obscurantism.” As with Haslip, Berkes saw the religious figures surrounding the Sultan as a source of backwardness. Trends in thought at this time, in Berkes’s view, were “naturally opposed to those of the Tanzimat,” and were dominated by “anti-Westernism,” as well as “an attachment to the past and to the old.” In other words, for Berkes, Abdülhamid turned the clock back on the Tanzimat era, and was thus an enemy of progress who established a cult of the past with the help of “obscurantist” Muslim preachers. Such a ruler, of course, could lay no claim to being a moderniser.

On the other hand, in a more recent work, F.A.K. Yasamee views Abdülhamid’s use of religion as a means to an end: a way to “stabilize the state.” For Yasamee, Abdülhamid’s emphasis on Islam was not so much the result of his personal faith as an attempt to “identify the State with Islam in the eyes of his subjects.” In other words, Abdülhamid’s Islam was expedient in a setting where most of his subjects were Muslims. In Yasamee’s view, Abdülhamid’s true “guiding principle” was not Islam but rather “autocracy.” Although Yasamee does not deny that Abdülhamid was religious, in his view the Sultan instrumentalised religion in order to promote his personal rule. Both Berkes’s analysis and Yasamee’s leave much to be desired. Berkes’s simplistic use of Abdülhamid and his advisors as a foil for the secularisers he admires obscures

39 Ibid., 258.
40 Ibid., 260.
42 Ibid., 30.
Abdülmid’s own desire for progress. While Yasamee takes Abdülhamid’s views into account, he does not consider the possibility that perhaps, to Abdülhamid, his personal rule served the cause of Islam, rather than Islam serving the cause of his rule.

Perhaps the most comprehensive synthesis of recent research on Abdülhamid II and his reign can be found in *Abdülhamid II: The Sultan Caliph* by François Georgeon. Georgeon demonstrates that, far from systematically oppressing non-Muslim minorities, Abdülhamid presided over an empire that was at the peak of its diversity, even though it had lost many of its Christian-majority provinces. Georgeon cites a late-nineteenth-century traveller who found, in a single village in eastern Anatolia, inhabitants speaking 15 different languages and belonging to seven religions or sects. After the emphasis on a shared Ottoman civic identity that had been promoted by the state during the Tanzimat era, Abdülhamid once again relied on the Ottoman millet system, whereby each religious denomination had a role to play in society in its own right. In fact, during Abdülhamid’s reign, the Ottoman Empire welcomed large numbers of Ashkenazi Jews fleeing anti-Semitic violence in the Russian Empire, although Abdülhamid prevented them from settling in Palestine so as not to aid the Zionist movement. Thus, in the face of rising nationalisms, Abdülhamid deployed what he saw as an Islamic solution: the reimplementation of an Islamic framework that allowed for diversity and mutual respect, as long as all the elements in the framework remained loyal to the sultan and the state.

Similarly, Abdülhamid promoted education and very significantly expanded the role of the state in this domain. At the same time, he wanted to ensure that the education that Ottoman children and young people were getting was not value-free: hence the

44 Ibid., 319-320.
emphasis on moral and religious lessons in school. The *ulama* gained a more prominent role in the schools, as compared to the Tanzimat era. Thus, instead of a false choice between “tradition,” with education dominated by rural Qur’anic schools and “modernity” on the pattern of the West, Abdülhamid adopted what he saw to be the best elements of these two types of education and implemented them across the empire.\(^{45}\)

Abdülhamid spoke out against haste in reforms. According to the sultan, “Everything must come spontaneously from inside.”\(^{46}\)

Ultimately, Georgeon comes to the conclusion that Abdülhamid’s patronage of notable urban Arab families proved to be the undoing of the empire: by giving the Arabs greater prominence, according to Georgeon, Abdülhamid helped ignite the fires of Arab nationalism. Further, Georgeon argues that Abdülhamid’s attempts to integrate the minorities through Pan-Islamism and the *millet* system were bound to fail in an age of rising nationalism not just among Christian peoples such as the Armenians, but also Muslims, including the Kurds, Arabs and Albanians.\(^{47}\)

In my view, this conclusion relies too heavily on hindsight. I tend to agree with Eraslan, who calls on us to judge the Hamidian period according to the situation prevailing in its own time. Where Georgeon makes a notable contribution, however, is in presenting an inside view of Abdülhamid II and his reforms, and also in listing at least some of the key people who were involved in formulating and disseminating the ideas that resulted in the Hamidian reforms. However, Abdülhamid’s Islamic policies constitute only one of the topics covered in Georgeon’s wide-ranging biography of the sultan; this dissertation differs from Georgeon’s work both in scope and in focus, in addition to methodology.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 389.

\(^{46}\) Quoted in ibid., 240.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 446-447.
Cezmi Eraslan gives Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism an extended treatment in his book *Abdülhamid II and Islamic Unity*. According to Eraslan, had someone other than Abdülhamid ruled the empire at the time, he would also have chosen to pursue “Islamist policies,” since they represented the “most suitable path” for the state at the time. Given that Eraslan’s book was published in 1992, when Islamism was much more controversial in Turkey than it is today, the author is perhaps trying here to rescue Abdülhamid’s legacy from the fanatical image that had been associated to it by the Kemalist school of history. What Eraslan proposes is that, rather than being a blind follower of religious dogma, Abdülhamid consciously chose Islamism as the wisest path from those available to him at the time, namely Ottomanism, Turkism and Islamism. At the same time, however, Eraslan does not depict Abdülhamid as someone cynically manipulating people’s religious sensibilities for political advantage. Rather, according to Eraslan, Abdülhamid was a “pious person, even belonging to a Sufi order.” Believing that the survival of the Ottoman state was necessary for the Muslim *umma* to flourish, Abdülhamid defended the state with the help of Islam. While I find Eraslan’s thesis insightful, this dissertation differs from his work in focus. While Eraslan deals solely with Pan-Islamism, the present dissertation lays equal emphasis on the process of modernisation. In my view, the two went hand-in-hand under the leadership of Abdülhamid. It is thus no coincidence that Eraslan devotes a mere page and a half to the Hijaz Railway, the greatest symbol of Abdülhamid’s Islamic modernisation. As such, Eraslan only tells half the story, although he tells it well.

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48 Cezmi Eraslan, *II. Abdülhamid ve İslam Birliği* (Abdülhamid II and Islamic Unity) (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1992), 396.
49 Eraslan, *II. Abdülhamid*, 397.
50 Ibid., 275-276.
In his book *The Well Protected Domains*, Selim Deringil claims that Islam and Pan-Islamism were both legitimation tools for the Ottoman state under Abdülhamid. If the state were to marshal the efforts of its population in the competition with the Great Powers, it needed to secure their allegiance to a greater extent than before. This is where, to Deringil, the origins of Abdülhamid’s Islamic policies lie. In order to achieve this active allegiance, Abdülhamid turned himself into a symbol round which his people could rally. Furthermore, he expanded the school network in order to teach the young generation what he wanted them to believe in terms of the place of Islam in the Ottoman Empire and the Empire’s place in the world. His governments also undertook efforts to bring hitherto marginal populations, such as Kurdish and Arab tribesmen, into the framework of the state. Lastly, Deringil discusses efforts by the Ottoman government to present a positive image in European capitals.\(^{51}\)

While there is some degree of overlap between Deringil’s work and the present dissertation, Deringil does not devote much attention to the Hijaz Railway. Moreover, he places the Ottoman Empire squarely in the context of developments in Europe, not only stressing the Ottomans’ need to be seen in a favourable light by the Europeans, but also comparing the Hamidian monarchy to those of Austria-Hungary and Russia. While these are certainly legitimate points to make, this dissertation to seeks to decentre Europe to some extent, and to place the Ottoman Empire in the geopolitical context of the Indian Ocean world.

Of all works on the period under study, Karpat’s *The Politicization of Islam* comes closest to this dissertation in terms of the topic covered. Karpat studies the way in

which the old institutions of the Ottoman Empire, under pressure from European
capitalism, were transformed by the state into modern ones. His magisterial study,
focusing especially on the reign of Abdülhamid, also examines the way in which the
Ottoman Empire came to occupy a central place in the Muslim world in the late
nineteenth century. For all that, however, Karpat, like most Turkish historians, views the
Hamidian era not on its own merits, but rather as a precursor to modern-day Turkey. This
approach leads him into overemphasising “identity changes in the major ethnic groups.”
I certainly do not deny the appearance of a vague notion of Turkishness in the late
nineteenth century among certain Turkish-speaking intellectuals. However, outside these
narrow circles, the notion of Turkish ethnicity had very little political significance in this
era. Hence, this dissertation does not share Karpat’s primary concern, which is “the
emergence of the Turks as an ethnic community (and eventually as a nation).”

For Karpat, Ottoman and Islamic identities were “universal” ones, but they were
superseded by the “ethnonational” identities which emerged in the nineteenth century. What this dissertation demonstrates, however, is that Islamic universalism was not only
alive and well during Abdülhamid’s reign, but was also highly effective and successful
politically, inasmuch as it helped hold the Empire together against the threats of
disintegration and foreign occupation. Viewing the reign of Abdülhamid as primarily the
era of the emergence of different ethnic and national identities among the Muslim
subjects of the Ottoman Empire is simply teleological. Again, Karpat claims that, during
Abdülhamid’s rule, “the masses sought liberation” from the rule of the elite, but does not

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53 Idem.
prove that a desire for freedom from authoritarian rule was shared by “the masses.” The impression one gets is that he is looking back from the standpoint of modern-day democratic Turkey with its mass involvement in politics and projecting such involvement into the Hamidian era. Finally, Karpat is prone to hyperbole, as we can observe in his assertion that “no other Muslim ruler in history faced such momentous decisions as Abdulhamid.” Such a statement is, of course, patently unprovable, and reveals more about Karpat’s biases than it does about Abdülhamid. This dissertation, on the other hand, does not treat Abdülhamid’s reign merely as one of the stages in the emergence of modern Turkey, but rather places it in the context of its own time and place.

Among more recent works on the period, Carter Vaughan Findley’s *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity* stands out for avoiding some of the pitfalls that Karpat’s work is subject to. For one, Findley makes a much more modest assessment of Abdülhamid’s reign, calling it “one of the most decisive in Ottoman history.” Findley devotes one chapter of his work specifically to the reign of Abdülhamid. Unlike Karpat, he examines the period on its own merits, providing an interesting discussion of the domestic and foreign challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire, as well as modernisation in various spheres of the Ottoman economy, including agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure. The weakness of Findley’s approach is that it is based almost entirely on secondary sources, and the only two primary sources he uses are works of literature. Perhaps as a result of this limitation, Findley misses certain relevant facts. For instance, while discussing Pan-Islamism, Findley asserts that, “Beyond Ottoman frontiers, what

54 Ibid., 10.
55 Ibid., 15.
Abdülhamid could do was limited. He sent Kur’ans and carpets to mosques. Religious teachers were sent to Muslim communities in South Africa and Singapore.”

As this dissertation demonstrates, however, Abdülhamid could and did do far more than this. His Pan-Islamism was not simply a religious movement, but also most certainly a political one. The activities of Ottoman consuls in the Indian Ocean World went beyond religious instruction and encouraged the Muslims living under foreign rule to imagine a different world.

According to Karpat, one reason for the failure of Abdülhamid’s model is that “the modern Turks” were “more interested in living a good life on this earth than waiting for the bliss of Paradise in the next.” I think this view misses the point that Abdülhamid tried to make religion a path for the improvement of life on earth, at least as far as the Ottoman Empire was concerned. Nothing signifies this commitment as much as Abdülhamid’s effort to improve and dramatically expand public education in the Ottoman Empire, as well as his construction of the Hijaz Railway.

As Karpat himself points out, Abdülhamid was a moderniser. Despite the limitations of terms such as “modernisation” and “progress”, it is clear that Abdülhamid II did believe in change; his reforms in spheres as diverse as education, transportation and the military, characterised by the introduction of new methods and institutions, prove as much. The changes Abdülhamid introduced were modernising in the sense that they led to an expansion of the role of the state in various spheres of life, along with greater mechanisation and a closer integration of the Ottoman Empire into the world-capitalist

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57 Ibid., 149.
system. Hamidian modernisation can be described as an “Asadian” process, whereby “religion, education, economy, and science” are not compartmentalised into separate spheres of life. During the Hamidian era, the Ottoman Empire was faced with competing models of development, including not just the three often mentioned by historians (Islamism, Ottomanism, Young Turkism), but also Islamic traditionalism and its opposite, Salafism, along with early forms of Turkish and Arab nationalism. In choosing Islam as his guiding ideology, I believe that Sultan Abdülhamid was not just trying to find a way to “legitimate” his rule, as Deringil argues. Rather, as this dissertation will demonstrate, he was aiming to find a workable model of development best suited, in his estimation, to Ottoman conditions. Put another way, this policy was what the Sultan thought was needed in order to allow the empire, rather than the regime he headed, to survive.

To see what this model looked like in practice, the present dissertation the expansion of the education and railway networks under Abdülhamid as case studies. Benjamin Fortna’s Imperial Classroom provides an insightful overview of the expansion of the Ottoman education system under Sultan Abdülhamid. In particular, Fortna stresses the Ottomans’ emphasis on morality, which was similar to attempts to increase morality instruction in other modernising states at the time, including the United States and Russia. The teaching of Islamic morality in the expanding network of state schools was thus not an attempt to turn the clock back and return to an idealised past (as Berkes may

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61 Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular, 182.
allege), but rather part and parcel of Abdülhamid’s religiously informed modernisation drive.  

The Hijaz Railway was a case of both modernization and practical Pan-Islamism under Abdülhamid. The number of books on the Hijaz Railway is surprisingly small, given the enthusiasm the railway aroused in the Ottoman Empire and abroad during its construction and its role in both Abdülhamid’s modernisation drive and his promotion of Pan-Islamism. In *The Hijaz Railroad*, William Ochsenwald provides much fascinating information on the financing and construction of the Hijaz Railway under Abdülhamid II. However, he misrepresents the context within which the railway was built. According to Ochsenwald, the Hijaz Railway was “the epitome” of Abdülhamid’s efforts to “achieve traditional goals and oppose Western values.” He does not make clear which Western values were opposed by this railway, but the implication is that a railway which helped pilgrims travel to a holy site cannot, by definition, have anything to do with modernity. In fact, Ochsenwald argues that Abdülhamid’s main goal was “personal political power.” Even a cursory glance at the broader historical record of the era will show, however, that the Hijaz Railway was anything but an instrument to “achieve traditional goals.” It was a new response to a new situation. Neither did it have anything to do with Abdülhamid’s “personal political power,” although it did boost the power of the Ottoman state in the Hijaz.

Jacob Landau’s book *The Hejaz Railway and the Muslim Pilgrimage* largely consists of the translation of a book by the Damascene scholar Muhammad ‘Arif on the

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62 Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35-40.
64 Ibid., 5.
railway project, and also contains a brief introduction by Landau, in which he argues that the Hijaz Railway was built largely in order to “strengthen the sultan’s authority in the Arabian Peninsula.” Landau’s thesis is much more plausible than Ochsenwald’s, but I would argue that Abdülhamid’s goal was to strengthen the Ottoman state’s authority in the Hijaz, rather than his own personal authority. The distinction is an important one. James Nicholson’s book *The Hejaz Railway* is largely concerned with the relationship between the railway and the exploits of the British soldier T.E. Lawrence (1888-1935). According to Nicholson, Lawrence and the railway which he helped destroy are “bound up together, each imparting to the other something unique and strangely compelling.” While the second half of the book is indeed dedicated to the story of the railway’s destruction, in the first half Nicholson conveys a number of important details about the financing and construction of the railway and its impact on the Bedouin tribes living in its vicinity.

The Turkish historiography on the Hijaz Railway is not very large either. What distinguishes it, however, is an extensive use of German archival sources in addition to Ottoman and British ones. In his *Hijaz Railway*, Murat Özyüksel places the Hijaz Railway squarely in the context of Ottoman resistance to Western imperialism. Ufuk Gülsoy, in his book of the same name, presents much detail regarding the history of proposals to build a railway from Damascus to the Hijaz region. Metin Hülagü’s book *The Hejaz Railway* differs from Özyüksel’s and Gülsoy’s in that it is written in English

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and, more importantly, in the fact that it relies mostly on British archives. His work contains valuable details on the resistance of some of the Hijazi Bedouin tribes against the Hijaz Railway project. All three books, however, concentrate largely on the construction of the railway and the challenges associated with the construction project. While they all make valuable contributions to the field, the present dissertation is concerned more with the political context (both domestic and international) within which the railway was built than the actual construction work and the difficulties it presented. Among Arabic works on the Hijaz Railway, the recent book by Johnny Mansur is noteworthy. Mansur places the railway in the context of Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamic policies, but concentrates on the construction and significance of the Haifa branch of the railway. This is an important contribution because the branch line to the Mediterranean (which has not received much scholarly attention, even compared to the railway in general) significantly added to the strategic and commercial value of the railway.

As we have seen above, there is set of disjunctures between the literatures on the Ottoman Empire, on Abdülhamid and on the Hijaz Railway. Histories of the Ottoman Empire, whether written in the West or Turkey, until recently tended to treat the Hamidian era as a time of backwardness, throwing the succeeding Young Turk and republican eras into sharp contrast. While some histories still conform to this pattern, others have significantly complicated our understanding of Abdülhamid’s place in Ottoman history. The literature on Abdülhamid himself has followed a similar trajectory. From a despot surrounded by shadowy religious figures controlling his policies, he has gradually turned into many other things, none quite as black-and-white. Some scholars

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nevertheless continue to view him as a tyrant who used religion as an instrument to retain and enhance control over the populace. Others see a ruler who was genuinely religious, but unwittingly turned Islam into a political ideology, thus weakening its appeal among Ottoman and foreign Muslims. Few books on Abdülhamid devote more than a page or two to the Hijaz Railway, and nowhere does it seem central to their arguments. This omission is paradoxical, given that many of them do acknowledge that this railway was one of the most visible and successful physical manifestations of Abdülhamid’s worldview. As for the literature on the Hijaz Railway itself, it tends (with some exceptions) to grapple only briefly with Abdülhamid’s overall concerns and with the place of the Hijaz in the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim world at large, concentrating instead on the financing, construction and defence of the railway by the Ottomans.

This dissertation thus makes a contribution to our understanding of why the Ottoman state under Sultan Abdülhamid marshalled the efforts of the Muslim community to build this railway, why it built the railway in the Hijaz, and why it did so at the turn of the twentieth century in particular. In doing so, it deepens our understanding of the way in which the ruler of the last powerful independent Muslim state in an age of European imperialism combined Pan-Islamism and modernisation to achieve a new synthesis.

**Sources and Organisation**

This dissertation is based on Ottoman archival sources, both unpublished and published, as well as the memoirs of important figures from the era under consideration, especially Sultan Abdülhamid II. His memoirs, entitled *Avant la débâcle de la Turquie*, were
published in 1914 in French by Ali Vehbi Bey. It is important to point out that these “memoirs” were in fact never meant to be published, and consisted of remarks made over the years by Abdülhamid to his “circle of loyalists.” They thus show Abdülhamid’s thoughts not as he would have liked to present them to his subjects in general, or to a foreign audience, but rather as he expressed them in the privacy of meetings with people he could trust to some extent. Thus, the memoirs give us some degree of access to what the Sultan may actually have thought on the issues discussed there. While it is true that this collection of Abdülhamid’s thoughts comes to us not directly from the Sultan but through Ali Vehbi as an intermediary, Ottomanists have found this work to be reliable. Our window into the Sultan’s mind is enlarged by the use of memoranda that Abdülhamid wrote for the benefit of his ministers and other important figures. I also refer to the memoirs of Abdülhamid’s daughter Ayşe Sultan (1887-1960), his secretary Tahsin Paşa, his grand vizier Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi (1820-1890), and others.

The primary limitation with Ottoman archival documents, as with any government documents, is their state-centred perspective. Beyond that weakness, however, it must be admitted that the documents in my possession represent a sampling rather than an exhaustive survey of Ottoman documents on the subjects under consideration. The unpublished Ottoman documents I have made use of were obtained during my research trip to Istanbul in 2009. Since then the focus of the dissertation has shifted somewhat. As a result, more documents of certain types would be needed to give a fuller picture of some of the issues discussed in the dissertation. For instance, a greater

72 See Karpat, The Politicization of Islam, 445.
range of Ottoman consular reports (a type of document I was not expressly searching for in 2009) would enable me to flesh out the Ottoman diplomatic network in the Indian Ocean world in more detail. An additional trip to the Ottoman archive would remedy these shortfalls where they occur.

In addition to Ottoman sources, I also used unpublished American documents and published British and French documents, as well as contemporary news reports and editorials from Russian and British newspapers. Secondary literature in English, Turkish, Arabic, French, Russian and Polish was consulted as needed.

The structure of this dissertation is meant to highlight the conditions that made the Hijaz Railway possible. Thus, we move from the enthronement of Sultan Abdülhamid and the development of a strategic rivalry with Britain to the adoption of Islamic politics in North Africa, and from there to an examination of Abdülhamid’s views on Islam, with a focus on the practical benefits the Sultan saw in his religion. We then place Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamic views – and, indeed, the Empire itself – in the geographical context of the Indian Ocean world. Finally, we show how the Hijaz Railway was one of a number of modernisation projects that were consistent with Abdülhamid’s views and beliefs, both religious and strategic.

Chapter One of this dissertation lays out the context within which Abdülhamid II came to power. I argue that a Russian Pan-Slavic alliance consisting of the right-wing press as well as influential figures within the government fanned the flames of a Balkan rebellion whose original purpose was to protest against high taxation. Serbia and Montenegro joined in, transforming the rebellion into a Slavic nationalist struggle against the Ottomans. Eventually, the rebellion spread into Bulgaria. Meanwhile, an alliance
between the reforming Young Ottomans, Muslim theological students and sections within the army brought down Sultan Abdülaziz I (r. 1861-1876) and eventually installed Abdülhamid II on the throne. Abdülhamid tried to diffuse the Balkan crisis by promulgating a constitution which guaranteed all his subjects basic rights, but the Great Powers refused to take it seriously. A Russian military intervention followed in 1877 and the Ottomans were defeated by 1878. I argue that the war had two immensely important consequences. Firstly the Ottomans lost much territory in the Balkans and the percentage of Muslims in the Empire rose significantly. Secondly, even though Britain helped the Ottomans cope with the outcome of the war, it was transformed into a rival, actively pursuing a policy of seizing Ottoman territory (Cyprus and Egypt). I further argue that Abdülhamid rose to the occasion by finding a new basis for domestic unity in Islam and by challenging British hegemony through Pan-Islamism abroad.

In Chapter Two, I examine another threat faced by the Ottoman Empire in the early part of Abdülhamid’s reign, namely French expansionism in North Africa. Following its recent defeat by Russia, the Ottoman Empire was not in a position to resist France on the battlefield in North Africa. Nevertheless, Abdülhamid succeeded in halting the French advance using the organising skills of Sufi movements. In this chapter, I trace the history of Sufism in general and Sufi brotherhoods in Ottoman lands in particular. I follow two brotherhoods in particular, the Shadhiliyya Madaniyya and the Sanusiyya, and place them in the geopolitical context of North Africa and the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. I analyse the political thought of Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, a Madani Sufi and Tunisian statesman, whom Abdülhamid invited to Istanbul and appointed grand vizier from 1878 to 1879. I examine France’s occupation of Tunisia in 1881 and
Abdülbahmid’s response. I argue that it was Abdülhamid’s close association with the Madani tariqa and alliance with the Sanusi tariqa which prevented a French invasion of Tripolitania and held the Italians at bay as long as Abdülhamid remained in power. Thus, Tripolitania remained an Ottoman-ruled province despite being surrounded on two sides by French-occupied Tunisia and Algeria, and British-occupied Egypt. This was an example of Abdülhamid successfully modernising existing institutions and putting them to new uses while expanding the role of the Ottoman state and protecting it from foreign encroachment.

In Chapter Three, I examine Abdülhamid’s views on Islam. Most writers on the era take Abdülhamid’s religious views as given and characterise them in a few lines. Given the central importance of Islam during Abdülhamid’s reign (acknowledged by historians on all sides of the debates surrounding the Sultan), it is important for us to understand what exactly Abdülhamid meant by Islam. Instead of referring to a reified “Islam” imagined from today’s perspective or from a seventh-century perspective, I thus look at what Islam as a living discursive tradition meant to Abdülhamid as a Muslim, an Ottoman and a ruler.

I argue that, to him, Islam was primarily a moral code and a call to action. He believed that the Ottoman Muslims had fallen behind Christians in some spheres of life (especially the economy), and the greatness of Muslim civilisation could be revived not by a return to the past but rather by hard work in the present. Abdülhamid firmly believed that the Ottoman Empire ought to belong primarily to its Muslim subjects, while non-Muslims would be tolerated (an Islamic tradition he held to be highly important), as long as they did not hold rebellious designs against the state (which he notably suspected the
Armenians of doing). Abdülhamid believed that Muslim minorities in the Ottoman Empire (such as the Kurds or Albanians) should be integrated more closely into the structure of the state. In this sense, his Islam was a modernist Islam: it promoted centralisation, industriousness, and loyalty to the state. This chapter also provides a brief overview of the views and careers of several of Abdülhamid’s leading advisers, highlighting their contributions to the development of his views on Islam and Pan-Islamism.

In Chapter Four, I examine Abdülhamid’s diplomatic ventures in the Indian Ocean World, ranging from Africa to India and South-East Asia. In all these regions, Abdülhamid opened new consulates to add substantially to the small number of existing Ottoman consulates. I examine the way in which Ottoman consuls (particularly when they were Muslims) appealed for Islamic unity, and the way in which their appeals were received (and sometimes influenced) by the local populations. I argue that, throughout the Indian Ocean rim, Abdülhamid pursued a coherent strategy of challenging European hegemony and encouraging an alternative vision of Islamic universalism centred on the Caliphate. In particular, I highlight the impact of Ottoman diplomacy on political developments among Indians struggling against British colonialism. Abdülhamid hoped that a rebellion would one day break out in India against British rule. Although he did not live to see the establishment of Indian independence, I demonstrate the impact of his policy on political movements led by the likes of M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948).

Lastly, in Chapter Five, I examine the case of the Hijaz Railway in the context of other modernisation projects undertaken by Abdülhamid. In particular, I highlight the rapid spread of the public school network undertaken by Abdülhamid, as well as the
construction of the Baghdad Railway. I argue that both the public education system and the Baghdad Railway were designed to increase the autonomy of the Ottoman Empire with regard to the Great Powers. In the latter case, the Baghdad Railway was also meant to circumvent the Suez Canal and thus challenge British hegemony in the parts of the Indian Ocean world, including the Gulf and perhaps even in India itself. Although the Baghdad Railway did not achieve the success anticipated by Abdülhamid, his other major railway project, namely the Hijaz Railway, fulfilled his hopes to a large extent. By linking the Mediterranean coast (at Haifa) to the Arabian Peninsula, it reduced the Ottomans’ dependence on the British-controlled Suez Canal. It also gave the world a successful example of a massive infrastructure project financed with funds from all over the Muslim world and built largely with Muslim labour and thus demonstrated the Ottoman Empire’s capacity for independent action while challenging the “sick man of Europe” myth. Nevertheless, the railway project aroused the enmity of many of the Bedouin inhabitants of the Hijaz, who viewed it as an unwelcome intrusion by the state and a threat to their livelihood. The railway thus demonstrates both the potentials and the pitfalls of Abdülhamid’s modernising Pan-Islamism.
Chapter One

The Birth of a Reign: The Ottoman Empire, Russia and Britain, 1875-1882

Sultan Abdülhamid came to the throne in 1876 at a time of grave danger for the Ottoman Empire. Much of the Empire’s Balkan portion was in revolt against Istanbul, and Russia was becoming an ever more present danger. Domestically, the political system of the Empire was in flux, with constitutionalism briefly becoming its organising principle. Less than a year after Abdülhamid took power, the inexperienced sultan was persuaded to go to war with Russia, with disastrous results. For a while it seemed as though the Ottoman Empire may disintegrate. Yet, by 1878, with the secession of the bulk of the Ottoman Empire’s Orthodox Christian populations, Russian importance to Ottoman foreign policy waned. Instead, its place was taken by the Ottoman Empire’s erstwhile ally, Britain, which became interested in expanding its empire and power at the expense of Ottoman territory. While the Ottomans did face other threats and rivals, such as France, Austria-Hungary and Italy, it was the overt enmity with Russia which defined the first two years of Abdülhamid’s reign, and the more subtle rivalry with Britain which helped define the rest of his reign.

Hence, this chapter will largely focus on the Ottoman Empire’s relations with these two powers during the years 1875-1882. I begin by examining the uprising in Bosnia (1875-78) and the way in which the Russian Pan-Slavic press helped transform it
into an international issue, setting the stage for Russian intervention. Next, I look at the connection between the Balkan rebellions and the revolution which overthrew Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861-76) and led to the enthronement of Sultan Abdülhamid II a few months later. I then examine the way in which the British press shaped perceptions of the Ottoman Empire, leading Britain to begin to abandon its previous alliance with the Ottomans. After an examination of the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-78, in which Britain offered the Ottomans passive support, I move on to the British conquest of Egypt in 1882. By that stage, Britain was still claiming to be a friend of the Ottomans, but had, in fact, turned into their most serious adversary.

This chapter argues that, by escalating small-scale, local rebellions into an all-out religious war in the Balkans, Russia sought to destroy the Ottoman Empire as a European power. While Russia failed to achieve this goal, the resulting loss of much of the Ottoman Christian population led Abdülhamid to concentrate his efforts on his Muslim subjects. Furthermore, having witnessed the divisiveness caused by nationalism, Abdülhamid decided to promote Islamic unity for the rest of his reign, thus considerably strengthening the Empire. Lastly, I argue that Britain’s success in occupying two Ottoman provinces without going to war against the Ottoman Empire helped provide the context both for Abdülhamid’s modernisation drive and gave added urgency to his goal of integrating the Arab provinces more tightly into the Empire, eventually prompting the construction of the Hijaz Railway in the early twentieth century. This chapter seeks to explain how, within the span of six years, the Ottoman Empire began to look less like an Eurasian power that sought inspiration in European ideas and more like an Indian Ocean
power which sought to build a future for itself on the shores of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean littoral beyond.

Pan-Slavism and Rebellion in the Balkans

What came to be known as the Great Eastern Crisis commenced as an uprising in the Ottoman province of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1875. The sancak (district) of Herzegovina had a population of about 230,000 in the 1870s, out of whom roughly 48 percent were Muslim, 29 percent Orthodox Christian and 22 percent Catholic. Thus, the Christian population had a slim majority. From the beginning of the Tanzimat era (1839-1876), the Ottomans had pursued a policy of keeping the power of the local Muslim landlords in check and increasing the civic and religious rights of the Christians. Since 1864, Bosnia-Herzegovina had a consultative assembly composed of 14 Muslims and seven Christians, and an executive council made up of three Muslim, two Christian and one Jewish members. These councils were both tasked with advising the Ottoman governor of the province. Additionally, the Ottomans had established a joint Muslim-Christian court to which residents of the province, either Muslim or Christian, could bring appeals. Despite these reforms, however, some Christian peasants, unhappy with their tax and rent burden, bore considerable resentment against their Muslim landlords, to whom they had

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73 Mitja Velikonja, Religious Separation & Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina (trans. Rang‘ichi Ng’inja) (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 89.
74 Ibid., 85-87.
to pay up to half of their crop.\textsuperscript{76} As a result of a rise in Serb and Croat nationalism that was taking place simultaneously, this resentment, which initially had an economic foundation, came to be translated into ethnic and religious terms.\textsuperscript{77}

Thus, in July 1875, when a Christian peasant uprising broke out in Herzegovina, it quickly took on the overtones of a national liberation struggle. Initially, the uprising consisted of a group of armed peasants taking to the mountains in order to avoid paying the taxes on their crops. Within a few months, the uprising spread to other parts of the province. Meanwhile, Pan-Slavic volunteers from the autonomous principalities of Serbia and Montenegro poured into province to help the rebel peasants, adding fuel to the fire.\textsuperscript{78} Montenegro’s participation was quite opportunistic, as it had already been planning to seize an opportunity to enlarge its territory at the expense of the rest of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{79} The international response to the uprising was led by Russia and Austria-Hungary.

As the Russian newspaper \textit{Moskovskie vedomosti} later reported, Russia intervened diplomatically in the conflict because of “its primordial sympathies towards Eastern Christians,” while Austria did so because it shared a border with Bosnia-Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{80} Secretly, elements within the Russian foreign ministry encouraged Serbia to send volunteers to Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to support the insurgents and keep the

\textsuperscript{77} Velikonja, \textit{Religious Separation & Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina}, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{78} Malcolm, \textit{Bosnia}, 132.
\textsuperscript{80} Moskovskie vedomosti, 1 Jan. 1876 (O.S.). Note that in the nineteenth century, old-style (Julian) dates were 12 days behind new-style (Gregorian) ones.
rebellion going.\textsuperscript{81} Officially, however, Russia took a much more cautious approach, despite its Pan-Slav leanings. In 1873 it had become part of the League of the Three Emperors, an alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany, and was thus bound to act in concert with its allies. Austria felt threatened that the revolt might result in autonomy for Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would, in turn, embolden Slavic nationalists on Austrian territory. Thus, Russia proposed in August 1875 that the Ottomans undertake political and tax reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, in exchange, that the League of Three Emperors persuade the rebels to lay down their arms. While the Ottomans agreed to this idea in principle, no agreement could be reached with the insurgents.\textsuperscript{82}

By January 1876, 80,000 refugees had fled Bosnia-Herzegovina, according to \textit{Moskovskie vedomosti}, taking refuge in Serbia, Montenegro and Austrian Dalmatia. Meanwhile, the Ottoman grand vizier, Mahmud Nedim Paşa (1818-1883), declared that the Ottoman Empire would not accept any foreign interference concerning reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina.\textsuperscript{83} Later that month, the new Ottoman governor of Herzegovina promised a general amnesty to the rebels, and an indemnity worth 30 percent of the value of the goods lost during the rebellion.\textsuperscript{84}

Austria-Hungary was still aiming to impose a European solution on the Ottoman Empire, and thus persuaded its allies Russia and Germany, but also Britain and France, to accept the so-called Andrássy Note (drafted by the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Count Gyula Andrássy). The Note asked all of these countries to agree on five basic principles in their negotiations with the Ottoman Empire regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina:

\textsuperscript{82} Ković, \textit{Disraeli and the Eastern Question}, 90.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Moskovskie vedomosti}, 1 Jan. 1876 O.S. (13 Jan. 1876 N.S.).
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Moskovskie vedomosti}, 6 Jan. 1876 O.S. (18 Jan. 1876 N.S.).
(1) freedom of religion; (2) tax reform; (3) relief measures for peasants; (4) using some of the revenue of the province for internal development; (5) forming a committee of local Muslims and Christians to oversee the implementation of the above reforms. The official Austrian journal, *Wiener Abendpost*, promised that the Ottoman Empire would gain a double benefit by giving in to the European powers’ demands. For one, it would make peace possible in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, secondly, it would preserve the Caliphate. Britain put pressure on the Ottomans to implement reforms in the rebellious areas. On 19 February 1876, Sultan Abdülaziz issued a decree accepting most of the provisions of the Andrássy Note. The Sublime Porte emphasised its acceptance of the “friendly advice of the Great Powers” and expressed the hope that order could quickly be reestablished among the “misguided” Ottoman subjects in the rebellious provinces.

However, if the Ottomans believed that the Russians would be satisfied with the implementation of the reforms proposed by Austria-Hungary, they were mistaken. Within Russia, the loudest voices speaking on Balkan issues were those of nationalists and Pan-Slavists, such as the editor of *Moskovskie vedomosti*, Mikhail Katkov. Katkov (1818-1887) had taken over as editor of that newspaper, one of Russia’s most influential, in 1863. Following an anti-Russian uprising in Poland, Belarus and Lithuania that year, Katkov quickly became outspoken on Slavic issues, insisting that the Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians be forced to remain within the Russian Empire through the Russification of their lands. In 1867, under Katkov’s leadership, *Moskovskie vedomosti* expressed the

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87 BOA, Y.E., 77/6, 3 Muharram 1293 (30 Jan. 1876).
88 “The Sultan’s Answer to the Andrassy Note,” in *The Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad for the Year 1876* (London: Rivingtons, 1877), 207.
dream that the Orthodox Greeks, Romanians and Slavs living under Ottoman rule would become independent. Since all three were “united to Russia by all the ties of religious and national life,” their independence would mean Russian greatness on the world stage.\(^90\) It is thus not surprising that in the Herzegovina uprising of 1875, Katkov found another *cause célèbre* and an outlet for his imperialist views.\(^91\)

In his editorials in *Moskovskie vedomosti*, Katkov advocated autonomy not just for Bosnia-Herzegovina – which would represent a relatively minor Russian diplomatic victory over the Ottoman Empire – but rather for all Ottoman provinces in Europe and, ideally, those in Asia as well. At the very least, and only for the time being, he wanted Russia to accept full self-government in Bosnia-Herzegovina and a withdrawal of Ottoman troops from the province, a wish which went far beyond the requirements of the Andrássy note, and which the Ottomans were not at all likely to grant.\(^92\) A few days after the Ottoman Empire announced that it would try to meet the conditions of the Andrássy Note, a *Moskovskie vedomosti* editorial once again underscored the need (in Katkov’s view) for reforms to be carried out throughout the empire, not just in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The most important one of these reforms would be granting Ottoman Christians the right to bear arms and serve in the army. Without such equality, in Katkov’s opinion, the future of the Ottoman Empire itself was in doubt.\(^93\)

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\(^90\) Quoted in Edmund Ollier, *Cassell’s Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War, Vol. 1: From the Commencement of the War to the Fall of Plevna, Including an Historical Sketch of the Russian and Turkish Empires* (London: Cassell, 1885), 21.

\(^91\) Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 81.

\(^92\) *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 4 Feb. 1876 O.S. (16 Feb. 1876 N.S.).

\(^93\) *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 10 Feb. 1876 O.S. (22 Feb. 1876 N.S.).
Moskovskie vedomosti was just one of the Russian publications calling for greater Russian pressure on the Ottoman Empire, but it was one of the most important ones, as it was taken seriously by politicians not just in Russia but as far afield as Serbia, and also enjoyed a large circulation. The Russian historian and jurist Boris Chicherin (1828-1904) described Mikhail Katkov as “almost the ruler of Russia,” and someone before whom government ministers “trembled.”

Eventually, in April 1876, the insurgents declared that they would only accept the reforms if Russia and Austria-Hungary oversaw their implementation. The Ottoman government found this demand unacceptable, and was supported by Austria-Hungary, which feared an increase in both Russian and Serbian influence on its doorstep. Austria-Hungary was interested in a quick resolution to the Bosnia-Herzegovina rebellion and wanted to prevent the spread of Pan-Slavic sentiments, precisely the kind of sentiments being stoked by Russia. Thus, Russian pressure for greater concessions from the Ottoman Empire, taking the form of both covert government action and over declarations in the press, drew a negative response in the Austrian press. The Vienna-based Neue Freie Presse complained that,

Russia itself is maintaining peace, Russian armies are not marching out, Russia is not interfering, but it is lighting, feeding and fanning inside Turkey a terrible and all-consuming fire, which, combined with the weakness, financial collapse, helplessness and insanity reigning in Turkey, can result only in its fall.

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94 Tuminez, Russian Nationalism since 1856, 93. For circulation figures see ibid., 81.
95 Quoted in Akop Arutunovich Ulunian, April’skoe vosstanie 1876 g. v Bolgarii I Rossiiia (Russia and the April Uprising of 1876 in Bulgaria) (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 117.
96 Ković, Disraeli and the Eastern Question, 102.
97 Quoted in Moskovskie vedomosti, 17 Apr. 1876 O.S. (29 Apr. 1876 N.S.).
While Russia had outwardly gone along with the Andrassy Note, it seems that Pan-Slav elements within the Russian government, aroused by the prospect of dealing a large blow to the Ottomans, had in fact sabotaged it.

On 2 May 1876, a new front was opened in the brewing Balkan war with a rebellion near Filibe (Plovdiv) in Bulgaria against Ottoman rule. Unlike the revolt in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the rebels withdrew into the mountains and rejected Ottoman rule, the Bulgarian revolt took a bloodier form from the outset: the rebels began by massacring Muslims living in the area. In the view of some Bulgarian historians, the uprising was launched with the express aim of provoking the Ottomans into killing a large number of Christian civilians, which, in its turn, would provoke a European intervention. In this sense, the uprising was to prove spectacularly effective.

On 6 May 1876, the situation in the Balkans was destabilised further with the murder of the French and German consuls by a Muslim mob in Thessaloniki. A Bulgarian girl who wanted to convert to Islam had arrived in Thessaloniki the previous day from the village of Avret Hisar (today’s Paleo Gynekokastro, Greece) and was being taken by a police escort to meet the governor of the city in order to proclaim her conversion before him before marrying a Muslim. On the way, she was seized by about 50 Greeks, who tore off her veil and, with the help of the American vice-consul, Lazzaro, who himself came from a local Christian family, carried her off to the American consulate, from where she was moved to the residence of the German consul. The following morning, a large group of Muslims (estimated by the local governor to number

5,000 people), gathered first in front of the governor’s palace and then at a mosque to demand the return of the girl and the punishment of her abductors. The French and German consuls, who were on their way to see the governor, walked into the middle of the scene and were pushed into the mosque by some of the Muslims, who held them there as hostages to be exchanged for the girl. The local police was not able to stop the attack because they possessed an insufficient number of men. The governor then summoned Ottoman soldiers from the nearby citadel as well as from the Ottoman frigate Edirne, and rushed to the mosque accompanied by the qadi, where he asked the crowd to disperse, but in vain. Matters got out of hand when several members of the crowd broke off the bars in the windows of the mosque and used them to kill the two consuls. The German consul’s staff released the convert to the Muslims based on orders he issued a few minutes before being killed, and soon after the girl’s appearance the troops arrived as well, and succeeded in dispersing the crowd; those who had taken part in the murder were soon arrested. 100

All the Great Powers were in a state of shock at this incident. 101 Although in his report to London the British ambassador to Istanbul, Henry Elliot, primarily blamed the Greek abductors of the Bulgarian convert for the incident, in his communications with the Sublime Porte he accused “a portion of the Turkish press, which is preaching the duty of a holy war against the Christians” of creating an atmosphere in which such a deplorable

100 NA (USA), Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, M46: Despatches from U.S. Ministers to Turkey, 1818-1906, Reel 30, Maynard to the Secretary of State, 12 May 1876.
event could take place. Indeed, leading Ottoman newspapers such as *Vakit* were indeed calling for a Muslim attack on Christian Europe in revenge for its interference in Ottoman internal affairs.

In Russia, too, the attack on the consuls was seen as a reflection of the state of Ottoman Muslim public opinion. A *Moskovskie vedomosti* editorial opined, in light of events in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria, that “the degenerate Muslim minority” in the Balkans was growing ruthless because it feared an end to its domination in the region. In Katkov’s view, the Ottoman Empire’s inability to suppress the peasant rebellion in Bosnia-Herzegovina proved that it was no longer a “sick man,” but had, in fact, become a “dead man.” The newspaper once again called for autonomy to be granted to all the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, while maintaining “the principle of the supreme authority of the Sultan.”

If the murder of the two consuls put the European powers on their guard regarding developments in the Ottoman Empire, subsequent developments in Bulgaria cost the Ottomans all the remaining sympathy they enjoyed in Europe. The Ottomans, whose army was still trying unsuccessfully to put down the rebellion in Bosnia-Herzegovina, could not send any additional troops to Bulgaria to defend the Muslim civilian population and suppress the new rebellion. As a result, they ended up largely relying upon Circassian refugees, who had originally fled the Caucasus after Russian expansion in the region and

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103 Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans & Britain (1877-1924)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 43.

104 *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 29 Apr. 1876 O.S. (11 May 1876 N.S.). Katkov was both conservative and Pan-Slavic; hence, he wanted the monarchical form of government to be preserved in the Ottoman government, but wanted the Christian Slavs to become self-governing in practice.
had been resettled in Bulgaria in the years 1862-1865.\textsuperscript{105} Early in 1876, as a preemptive measure, the Ottoman grand vizier, Mahmud Nedim Paşa, formed 12 Circassian battalions in the Balkans, each numbering 750 men. These battalions were given a large degree of autonomy and were not integrated into the regular Ottoman army. Rather, they were kept as a reserve force to discourage Serbia to intervene openly on the side of the rebels in Bosnia-Herzegovina. From the outset, though, the Bulgarian Christian population was fearful that the Circassian battalions would end up getting used against it instead.\textsuperscript{106} That is indeed what eventually ended up happening.

A few days after the outbreak of the uprising, the Circassian battalions, along with locally hired militias known in Turkish as \textit{başbozuk} (broken-headed), attacked several Christian villages in Bulgaria and massacred a large proportion of their civilian populations; the Ottoman army claimed that the irregular troops were acting against their orders.\textsuperscript{107} In total, thousands of Bulgarian Christians were killed in the conflict, with the estimates ranging from 3,100 according to the Ottomans to ten times or even thirty times that number according to the Bulgarians.\textsuperscript{108} According to Stanford and Ezel Shaw, the Russian ambassador to Istanbul, Count Nikolay Ignatyev (1832-1908), encouraged Mahmud Nedim Paşa to use a heavy hand against the Bulgarian rebels, in order to encourage the revolts to spread.\textsuperscript{109} Mahmud was in fact so close to Ignatyev, that he


\textsuperscript{106} Moskovskie vedomosti, 3 Jan. 1876 O.S. (15 Jan. 1876 N.S.).

\textsuperscript{107} James J. Reid, \textit{Crisis of the Ottoman Empire: Prelude to Collapse, 1839-1878} (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 147.


\textsuperscript{109} Shaw and Shaw, \textit{History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey}, 162.
acquired the mock-Russian nickname “Nedimoff” among the people of Istanbul.\textsuperscript{110} It thus stands to reason that he would have taken Ignatyev’s advice on how to deal with the Bulgarian rebels. However, it is even more likely that the situation in Bulgaria was simply bungled by a Sublime Porte preoccupied with Bosnia-Herzegovina and its international implications. In the end, the Bulgarian uprising would prove to have greater implications for the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and for the political fortunes of its leadership.

Three Sultans in One Summer

While the tensions provoked by the two uprisings in the Balkans led indirectly to the murder of the French and German consuls in Thessaloniki, in Istanbul popular anger among Muslims was directed more towards the Ottoman government and the Sultan. Public opinion in Istanbul had had enough of the tales of defeat coming from the Balkans. The educated denizens of Istanbul perceived Sultan Abdülaziz and his ministers as weak because of their inability not only to defeat the poorly armed rebels in the Balkans, but also to withstand European pressure for reform, which threatened to alter the status quo between the religious communities in the Balkans. As for Mahmud Nedim Paşa, many suspected him of outright treason. In this atmosphere, support for the constitutionalist ideas of the Young Ottomans (a group of Ottoman Muslim intellectuals who argued for individual liberty based on the Qur’an) spread among the educated members of society,

\textsuperscript{110} Ármin Vámbéry, \textit{The Story of My Struggles} (London: Unwin, 1904), 142.
and in particular among the softas, the students of the religious schools. On 8 May 1876, thousands of softas began demonstrating in the squares of Istanbul to protest against the Sublime Porte and demand constitutional government. Four days later, Abdülaziz granted one of their major demands by firing Mahmud Nedim. The softas were not satisfied, however, and kept up protests against the Sultan in the mosques. Abdülaziz retaliated by temporarily cutting telegraphic communication, but that did not help; the protests continued unabated for most of May.111

The Istanbul correspondents of European newspapers were taken aback by the softa demonstrations and sought to discredit them and their aims; they simply did not fit into the accepted narrative of the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe.” Thus, the French newspaper Le Temps reported that the softas’ main demand was to implement the letter of the Qur’an in daily life. In the reporter’s view, they were nothing but fanatics, because “the most learned of the ulama from the Turkish point of view would be considered complete ignoramuses in Europe.”112 The reporter did not mention anything about the softas’ demand for a constitutional government responsive to public opinion, a topic which Moskovskie vedomosti did address.

The Moskovskie vedomosti correspondent in Istanbul argued that “the Turks” would not be capable of benefiting from constitutional government, given their “deep ignorance… laziness and debauchery.”113 Furthermore, in his view, it is impossible that

112 Quoted in Moskovskie vedomosti, 11 May 1876 O.S. (23 May 1876 N.S.).
113 Moskovskie vedomosti, 18 May 1876 O.S. (30 May 1876 N.S.).
the *ulama* would knowingly demand a constitution limiting the rights of the sultan, since they view him as “the successor of the Prophet and… their pope.” Consequently, he concludes that the *softas* have no idea what their demands actually mean, and are a mere tool being manipulated by foreign powers, Britain in particular.  

Thus, the coverage of the anti-government protests in Istanbul in the leading newspapers of France and Russia took a decidedly Orientalist tint. As Edward Said explains in *Orientalism*, the Orient was imagined in much of nineteenth-century European scholarship as “passive…, even silent and supine.”

When the *softas* showed themselves as neither passive nor silent, the reporters covering their demonstrations were unable to move beyond established stereotypes of fanaticism and lack of initiative.

On 30 May 1876, Sultan Abdülaziz was overthrown by the Ottoman minister of war, Hüseyin Avni Paşa (1819-1876) together with high-ranking military officials and the *şeyhülislam*, who was sympathetic to the protesters. Hüseyin Avni shared one of the protesters’ main grievances: Abdülaziz seemed to be either unwilling or unable to stand up to Russia’s influence in the Balkans, despite the removal of the pro-Russian Mahmud Nedim Paşa. In Abdülaziz’s place, the junta installed his nephew, Murad V (r. 1876). The day after Murad came to power, a *Moskovskie vedomosti* editorial expressed worry over the possible triumph of constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire. Katkov, being a supporter of autocracy in the Russian Empire, expresses the belief that the principle of autocracy should be applied to the Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire as well.

In his view, Ottoman Christians “suffer not so much from the whims of the sultan as from

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114 Idem.
116 Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 480-481.
117 On Katkov’s support for the principle of autocracy in Russia, see Ulunian, *Aprel’skoe vosstanie*, 118.
oppression by the Muslim horde dominating the empire.” Thus, according to Katkov, the sultan’s power served as a check on the bloodlust of the Muslim masses. The popular revolt which led to the overthrow of Abdülaziz would, according to Katkov, place the sultan’s authority in the hands of his ministers, and ultimately in the hands of the softas, which he sees as a terrifying prospect.\textsuperscript{118}

In one sense, however, the Russian press was right to fear the softas: the students were quite aware of Russian manipulation of the Balkan Christians, and were determined that such manipulation stop. Therefore, as we have seen, they were not willing to keep playing along with Russia’s game of reforms, whose ultimate aim seemed to be the setting up of a string of puppet states and a rollback of the Ottoman presence in Europe. On the day when Abdülaziz was deposed, a lecturer in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul told an audience of 500 students, declared the Russians to be the “irreconcilable enemy” of the Ottomans, adding that the Russians’ aim was “the destruction of our state.” Hence, in his view, the Russians would never be satisfied with the level of rights given to the Christians of the Ottoman Empire, and would keep pressing them to demand more, no matter how many reforms the Ottoman authorities carried out.\textsuperscript{119} The attitude of the rebels in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who turned down Abdülaziz’s offers of amnesty and reforms a month previously, certainly bore out the speaker’s words.

As mentioned above, the rebels in Bosnia-Herzegovina, unlike those in Bulgaria, initially saw their rebellion as a protest against high taxes, rather than a religious struggle. The Pan-Slavists of Russia, however, did their best to depict their fight in starkly religious terms, arguably making reconciliation with Istanbul more difficult for the

\textsuperscript{118} Moskovskie vedomosti, 19 May 1876 O.S. (31 May 1876 N.S.).
\textsuperscript{119} Idem.
rebels. A Moskovskie vedomosti correspondent wrote a report from Dubrovnik (in the Austrian province of Dalmatia, close to the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina), casting the rebellion as a war between the “Christian family” and “Mohammedanism,” and depicted the rebels’ cause as an attempt to end “Mohammedan proselytisation” in the region. According to him, being a Christian under Ottoman rule meant being reduced to a virtual state of slavery and always being at the mercy of the whims of Muslims. The reporter expresses his hope that the “Orthodox Christians” will soon be able to put an end to Muslim rule, as long as “Christian Europe” (khristianskaia Evropa) does not intervene on behalf of “the Turks.” He is furthermore convinced that a victory on the part of the rebels will bring the “Slavic apostates,” that is, the Bosnian Muslims, back into the Church. Thus, it becomes clear that, in the Russian Pan-Slavic vision, there is no room left for peaceful coexistence between Christian and Muslim Slavs, let alone Christian Slavic subjects and the Ottoman authorities. The reporter also encourages Serbia and Montenegro to take an active role in the struggle, calling them “the elder children” of the above-mentioned “Christian family.”

The pressure the Russian press was putting on Serbia and Montenegro to fight on behalf of their coreligionists in Bosnia-Herzegovina was matched by pressure from the Russian government. Russian representatives in the two autonomous Ottoman principalities used various means, from ideological persuasion to outright bribery, to cajole their rulers into declaring war on the Ottoman Empire. While Russia claimed to be doing so in order to defend the rebellious provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria, in reality it was positioning itself for what it saw the inevitable end of the Ottoman Empire. A number of Russian generals were also clamouring for Russia itself to join the

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120 Moskovskie vedomosti, 5 June 1876 O.S. (17 June 1876 N.S.).
war; these were mostly officers who suffered defeat at the hands of the Ottomans in the Crimean War (1853-56) and now wanted a chance to avenge themselves.¹²¹

Unlike the Crimean War, when the Ottomans could count on the support of the British and the French, they now found themselves alone against the looming Russian threat. This isolation came about largely as a result of a spectacular Ottoman defeat in the court of European public opinion. By June 1876, the Bulgarian uprising had been suppressed. The massacres of Muslims undertaken by the Bulgarian rebels hardly aroused any interest outside the Ottoman Empire.

However, the massacres of Bulgarian Christians by the Circassian and başıbozuk irregulars had a great impact on the European imagination, particularly in Britain. As we have seen above, Russian public opinion had already been inflamed by events in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since the fighting there was not accompanied by large-scale massacres on either side, however, it did not deeply touch public opinion in the non-Slavic countries of Europe.¹²² The case of Bulgaria was different because the massacres there made it easy to depict one side (the Ottomans) as brutal murderers and the other (the rebels) as heroic defenders of liberty, even to an audience with no prior Pan-Slavic sympathies.

The massacres of Christians in Bulgaria were quickly dubbed the “Bulgarian horrors” in Britain and received heavy coverage in the press starting in June 1876. The story was broken by the “cheap” Daily News, but soon the more respectable papers such as the Manchester Guardian and the Times. The Daily News was widely read in Britain

¹²¹ Tuminez, Russian Nationalism since 1856, 77. On Russian plans to carve up the Ottoman territories in the Balkans, see the Neue Freie Presse, quoted in Moskovskie vedomosti, 6 June 1876 O.S. (18 June 1876 N.S.).
¹²² The Moskovskie vedomosti correspondent in Istanbul reported that the Bulgarians “lost more in one month than the Herzegovinians and the Bosnians in a year.” See Moskovskie vedomosti, 8 June 1876 O.S. (20 June 1876 N.S.).
because of its relatively low cost. Thus, its coverage, which combined harrowing accounts of rape and mass murder along with condemnations of Benjamin Disraeli’s pro-Ottoman foreign policy, soon had a significant impact on public opinion. Meetings were held in different parts of Britain to debate what should be done to help the Bulgarians, and an association named the League in Aid of the Christians of Turkey was set up. The league started lobbying the British government to intervene on behalf of the rebels. Even Queen Victoria was deeply affected by the coverage, and told Prime Minister Disraeli, “I cannot rest quiet without urging the prevention of further atrocities.”\(^\text{123}\)

In June 1876, just as Europe was becoming incensed over the Bulgarian issue, Serbia issued an ultimatum to the Sublime Porte, demanding that Serbia be allowed to occupy Bosnia and that the sancak of Herzegovina be handed over to Montenegro. When Istanbul rejected the demands, Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire in early July.\(^\text{124}\) François Georgeon argues that Russia provoked the war in response to the deposition of Abdülaziz.\(^\text{125}\) His assertion is most likely accurate because the Serbian and Montenegrin declarations of war came after a period of intense Russian worries about the contents of the Ottoman constitution proposed by Midhat Paşa (1822-1884), a former grand vizier and a supporter of the Young Ottomans. Moskovskie vedomosti was particularly outraged by Midhat’s idea of making the Christians equal participants in Ottoman civic life.\(^\text{126}\) At first glance, such an attitude is paradoxical, given

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\(^{124}\) Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 165.


\(^{126}\) Moskovskie vedomosti, 11 June 1876 O.S. (23 June 1876 N.S.).
Russia’s long advocacy of Christian rights in the Ottoman Empire. However, equality for Christians would take away Russia’s primary excuse for interference in Ottoman affairs.

A greater source of instability than the war with the Balkan principalities, however, was the mental condition of Sultan Murad V (Abdülağiz’s successor). Murad suffered from hallucinations, had trouble sleeping, developed a dependence on alcohol, and would not venture out of his palace, even to receive the sword of office according to Ottoman dynastic custom. With the sultan incapacitated, the constitution could not be finalised. In August 1876, the Ottoman government invited an Austrian psychiatrist to examine the Sultan. On 13 August, the doctor issued a report, saying that Murad suffered from depression and alcoholism, which could be cured in three months. However, given the situation the Ottoman Empire had found itself in, there was no time to let Murad heal at his own pace. Midhat Paşa paid a visit to Murad’s brother Abdülhamid and secured an understanding that Abdülhamid would be ready to take over should Murad be overthrown. Crucially, Abdülhamid promised Midhat that, were he to become sultan, he would promulgate a constitution, call elections and grant the people political freedoms. On 30 August, Midhat Paşa met the rest of the cabinet and argued that Murad needed to be removed from power, because the war with Serbia could not be conducted properly without an active sultan in power. Finally, on 31 August, the şeyhülislam issued a fatwa declaring Murad mentally incapacitated, and Abdülhamid II began what was to be his thirty-three-year reign.  

Abdülahmid thus came to power at a time of war with two rebel principalities, and the greater threat of war with Russia looming on the horizon. The Ottoman war with

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Serbia and Montenegro was a war of regular standing armies, unlike the civil wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria. The Ottomans suffered several defeats at the hands of the Montenegrins, until the latter halted their advance after threats from Austria-Hungary. Serbia, on the other hand, fared much worse. Although its army was led by an experienced Russian general, it proved to be no match for the Ottomans and by October the Ottomans were on the verge of capturing the Serbian capital, Belgrade. At this point, Russia threatened war against the Ottomans unless a ceasefire was arranged; the Ottomans agreed, and a ceasefire came into effect on 1 November 1876.\footnote{Erik Goldstein, \textit{Wars \& Peace Treaties, 1816-1991} (Abingdon: Taylor \& Francis e-Library, 2005), 29.}

The Constantinople Conference of 1876-77, the Ottoman Constitution and Abdülhamid

If anything, however, the position of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans became even more precarious during the autumn of 1876 due to a continuing shift in British public opinion in favour of the insurgents and against the Ottomans. In September 1876, at the height of the war with Serbia and Montenegro, two major publications emerged which made it impossible for the Disraeli government to offer Sultan Abdülhamid any material support in the impending war with Russia. The first was a pamphlet entitled \textit{Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East} by the Liberal politician, William Gladstone.

In this essay, Gladstone launches an emotional attack on Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli’s attempts to remain even-handed and divide the responsibility for the atrocities
between the two sides. Relying on accounts by Eugene Schuyler (the US consul in Istanbul), Gladstone argues that the Ottoman government and the Circassians were both responsible for atrocities against the Bulgarians, while the Bulgarian Christians had not committed any atrocities against the Muslims. Gladstone paints a lurid portrait of conditions in Bulgaria, accusing the Ottomans of “elaborate and refined cruelty” and “abominable and bestial lust,” while absolutely dismissing an Ottoman report (submitted to the Ottoman government by a group of Muslim and Christian notables from Filibe and forwarded to Gladstone by the Ottoman ambassador to London), which alleged similar cruelty on the part of the Christian rebels.\footnote{129} Gladstone expresses support for the cause of Serbia and Montenegro in their war against the Ottomans, while paying lip service to the notion of Ottoman territorial integrity which, he says, must be subservient to the demands of “justice,” that is, the interests of the rebels.\footnote{130}

Gladstone goes on to claim that no injustice in the history of mankind was of a magnitude comparable to the massacres of Christian civilians in Bulgaria. The only solution, in his view, is for Bulgaria to be freed of Ottoman rule, since a continuation of Ottoman rule would mean the possibility of the massacres being repeated.\footnote{131} For Gladstone, the Ottomans’ “race,” combined with their religion, make them entirely untrustworthy, even more so than other Muslims. In his view, The Turkish race... are not the mild Mahometans of India, nor the chivalrous Saladins of Syria, nor the cultured Moors of Spain. They were... from the black day when they first entered Europe,
the one great anti-human specimen of humanity.... As far as their dominion reached, civilisation disappeared from view.\textsuperscript{132}

In condemning the Ottomans in such overtly racist tones, Gladstone had two grand aims. The first was to get the British public to demand that their government abandon its pro-Ottoman approach and support the Bulgarian rebels’ demands.\textsuperscript{133} The second one was to turn public opinion not just against the Ottomans but against the Disraeli government in Britain. Indeed, Glandstone asserts, regarding the ascension of Abdülhamid, that it was not a new sultan or new Ottoman ministers who can make a difference to the future course of events in Bulgaria, but rather new British ministers.\textsuperscript{134} In raising the ire of the British public against both the Ottomans and their own government, Gladstone was promoting his own political career, aiming to become the leader of the Liberal Party once again.\textsuperscript{135}

Gladstone certainly succeeded in his immediate aim: discrediting Disraeli’s approach to the Ottoman Empire. A few days after the publication of his pamphlet, Gladstone addressed a crowd of 10,000 on the massacres in Bulgaria. In the speech, he hinted at the need for European military intervention in Bulgaria, saying, “Honour be to the Power, whatsoever be its name, that first steps in to stop them.”\textsuperscript{136} Gladstone’s publisher, who initially printed 2,000 copies of the pamphlet, increased the print run to 200,000 less than a month later.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{135} A.N. Wilson, \textit{The Victorians} (New York: Norton, 2004), 397.
In vain did the ruling Conservative Party try to respond with a pamphlet of its own, bearing the same title. Henry Munro Butler-Johnstone, a Conservative politician, writes in his *Bulgarian Horrors, and the Question of the East*, that Gladstone’s depiction of the Ottomans is a “caricature” and a “travesty.” Butler-Johnstone also points out the hypocrisy of Gladstone’s selective reading of history, which ignores the massacres carried out by the English in Scotland in previous centuries. In Butler-Johnstone’s view, Gladstone was being intentionally dishonest in order to “excite prejudice against the Turks” and “scare the people of England out of all remaining sympathy for the Turk.” Finally, Butler-Johnstone accuses Gladstone of calling for a crusade against the Ottoman Empire.

Such level-headed responses as Butler-Johnstone’s largely fell on deaf ears. This was especially so after the release on 19 September 1876 of the Baring Report, prepared by an official at the British embassy in Istanbul. Baring sided largely with the rebels’ version of events rather than the Ottoman one. In all, he counted 12,000 Christian and only 200 Muslim deaths in the Filibe district. Although Baring acknowledged the Bulgarian rebels’ plans to kill all Muslims who offered them resistance, he laid the bulk of the blame on the Ottoman authorities for resorting to *başbozuk*s instead of deploying regular troops. The result of this mistake, according to Baring, was that 50 Bulgarian Christian civilians were killed for every rebel. The report came amid a wave of public

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139 Ibid., 9.
140 Ibid., 14.
141 Ibid., 17-18.
meetings and demonstrations at which the Ottomans were denounced and the British government was criticised for supporting them.\textsuperscript{142}

Pressure grew on Disraeli after the publication of the Baring Report not just from the public, but also from Queen Victoria. She was appalled by the death toll and wrote that the massacres were “causing dreadful excitement and indignation in England, or indeed in Great Britain.”\textsuperscript{143} Disraeli stressed the principle of Ottoman territorial integrity, but increasingly this position found very few supporters.\textsuperscript{144} As Maria Todorova notes, British outrage over the events in Bulgaria was possibly a displacement of guilt over British atrocities in India and Ireland, as well as problems closer to home, such as widespread poverty in British cities.\textsuperscript{145}

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, with a complete defeat of Serbia looming, Russia issued an ultimatum against the Ottomans on 31 October 1876, giving them two days to declare a ceasefire with Serbia. The Ottomans accepted the ultimatum and proclaimed a ceasefire on 1 November not just with Serbia, but with Montenegro and the rebels in Bosnia, thus showing their willingness to resolve their difference with the rebellious Slavic territories through negotiation.\textsuperscript{146} The Great Power then decided to hold a conference in Istanbul (known as the Constantinople Conference), as a last-ditch effort to resolve the issue peacefully. In the run-up to the conference, Disraeli gave a speech in Britain in which he threatened Russia with dire consequences should it decide on a course

\textsuperscript{142} New York Times, 20 Sept. 1876.
\textsuperscript{143} Quoted in Bass, Freedom’s Battle, 263.
\textsuperscript{144} Idem.
\textsuperscript{145} Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100.
\textsuperscript{146} Ković, Disraeli and the Eastern Question, 166.
of war. In his words, “although the policy of England is peace, there is no country so well prepared for war as our own.”

Disraeli knew very well, however, that in reality he did not have the public backing for a new war against Russia: the anti-Ottoman publicity that resulted from the “Bulgarian Horrors” made a repeat of the Crimean War impossible. Under pressure from an increasingly strident public opinion as well as the monarch, the British government decided that it would not be in a position to intervene on behalf of the Ottoman Empire in case Russia declared war on the Ottomans in support of the Bulgarian rebels. An exception would be made, however, if Russia attempted to capture Istanbul, since possessing the city would give Russia control over the strategically vital Bosphorus.

The Constantinople Conference opened on 23 December 1876, and representatives from the Great Powers discussed the European proposal (which would involve an occupation of Bulgaria by Belgium, a neutral power allied with neither Austria-Hungary nor Russia) with the Ottomans. The European delegates were taken by complete surprise when the proceedings were interrupted by cannon being fired in Istanbul to signal the granting of a constitution to the people of the Ottoman Empire by Sultan Abdülhamid II. The Ottoman representatives then declared that the purpose of conference had been achieved, since the constitution granted equality to all Ottoman subjects, thus meeting the demands of the rebels in Bosnia and Bulgaria.

The Constitution of 1876, at least on paper, did indeed grant all Ottoman subjects equal rights, without distinction of religion (Article 17). As we have seen above, perhaps the most important of the demands of the pan-Slavic lobby in Russia was that Ottoman

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147 Ibid., 170.
148 Ibid., 181.
149 Ibid., 183; Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 65.
Christians (especially in the Balkans) be given the same rights as Muslims. Another one of their demands is that Ottoman Christians not be subjected to arbitrary punishment by Ottoman authorities. This demand, too, was addressed in Article 10, which declared the “personal liberty” (hürriyeti şahsiye) of each subject to be “protected from every kind of attack.” Furthermore, Article 14 granted all Ottomans the right to submit petitions to the parliament (which was to be convened under the auspices of the new constitution) if their rights were violated by government officials. According to Article 19, any Ottoman could get government employment based on ability, the sole restriction being that a knowledge of Turkish (Türkçe) was obligatory for any government job (Article 18). Article 24 abolished all arbitrary exactions of money or property, which had also been a major cause of complaint on the part of the Bosnian rebels. Article 26 made torture (işkence) illegal.\footnote{150 “1876 Kanunu Esası” (1876 Constitution). Reprinted in Kemal Gözler, Türk Anayasaları (Turkish Constitutions) (Bursa: Ekin Kitabevi Yayınları, 1999), 29-65.}

While the constitution was a liberal one when it came to the rights of Ottoman subjects, it did not go so far as to establish a liberal democracy (on the British or French model) as the empire’s political system, although it was comparable to many other European constitutions of the time.\footnote{151 Tomasz Wituch, Tureckie przemiany: Dzieje Turcji, 1878-1923 (Turkish Changes: The History of Turkey, 1878-1923) (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980), 41.} Its most important innovation was the creation of a parliament, known as the National Assembly (Meclisi Umumi), made up of two houses: an upper house called the Chamber of Notables (Heyeti Ayan) and a lower house called the Chamber of Deputies (Heyeti Mebusan) (Article 42). Both the government and the parliament could initiate bills (Article 53). The Chamber of Deputies was to have one member for every 50,000 male Ottomans, with no separate religious quotas. People who
possessed foreign nationality or claimed foreign protection were ineligible as candidates. All candidates had to speak Turkish, and learn to read and write it within four years (Article 68). The most important power vested in the Chamber of Deputies was to vote on the budget and changes to the constitution (Article 80). The Chamber of Deputies could not elect its own speaker (reis) or deputy speakers; the deputies would give the Sultan the names of nine candidates for these positions, and the Sultan would have the sole right to choose these officials (Article 77). As for the Chamber of Notables, the Sultan would name all of its members (Article 60), who would then serve for life. The Chamber of Notables would be composed of people who had already had distinguished careers in the government, bureaucracy, courts, armed forces or diplomatic corps. The upper house would also include the heads of the Orthodox Christian and Jewish communities (Article 62).

Despite the considerable powers of the parliament, it would not have much say in the day-to-day running of the empire, because there was no obligation for the government to be formed on the basis of a parliamentary majority. Rather, the Sultan had the prerogative to name whomever he wanted to the position of Grand Vizier and all other ministerial positions (Article 27). The government had the task of examining all “important domestic and foreign matters” (dahili ve harici umuru mühimme) (Article 28). The decisions of the cabinet would be implemented after being confirmed by a decree issued by the Sultan (idem).

As regards provincial administration, the constitution promised some degree of decentralisation (Article 108). Each province would have its own provincial general assembly (Vilayet Meclisi Umumiyesi), which would be in charge of matters such as
communications, agriculture, industry, trade and education. The cities of the empire, including Istanbul, were to have their own municipal councils (Belediye Meclisleri) (Article 112). However, the constitution gave the government the right to suspend the laws in any province if there was fear of an uprising (ihtilal) there. Furthermore, the Sultan reserved the right to deport anyone who threatened the security of the empire (Article 113). There was thus a definite limit to the amount of autonomy any province could expect under the new constitution: should the order of the empire be threatened, the limited autonomy offered by the constitution could be suspended, and the local leaders could be exiled.

As later events were to show, Abdülhamid was not a great believer in the efficacy of constitutional monarchy, preferring to rule without the constraints imposed on him by the constitution of 1876. As the Sultan later recalled in his memoirs, he was offended by Midhat Paşa’s claims that the constitution signified “the triumph of civilisation in the Ottoman Empire.”

Why, then, did he approve a constitution at all? According to François Georgeon, he did so for a combination of domestic and external reasons. He had been brought to power by Midhat Paşa and his supporters, who, as we saw above, overthrew Abdülhamid’s brother, Sultan Murad V, when he was found to be mentally incapacitated. One of the main reasons Midhat had wanted a more stable sultan on the throne is in order to proceed with his plan to introduce constitutional government to the Ottoman Empire; clearly, as long as the reigning monarch was of dubious sanity, a major constitutional overhaul would have lacked legitimacy. Moreover, as long as Midhat remained powerful, Abdülhamid, as a young and inexperienced monarch who owed

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Midhat his throne, was obliged to try to please him. Secondly, a constitution could help Abdülhamid repel interference by the Great Powers, who demanded to see political and administrative reforms enacted, in particular in the Christian-majority provinces of the Ottoman Empire: equal rights granted to the Christians would make it harder for the Powers to claim that they had to protect Ottoman Christians. Lastly, it is possible that Abdülhamid hoped, by opting for a constitutional monarchy, the form of government practised in Britain, to thereby secure British support in the escalating quarrel with Russia.  

The commission that was to draft the constitution of 1876 was set up in October of that year. Apart from Midhat Paşa, it included Young Ottoman leaders like Namık Kemal (1840-1888) and Ziya Bey, the military reformer Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa (1838-1892), the Ottoman Greek diplomat Alexander Karatheodori Paşa (1833-1906) the Ottoman Armenian political reformer Krikor Odian (1834-1887), and less constitutionalist statesmen like the ‘alim Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (1822-1895) and the military reformer and diplomat Mehmed Namık Paşa (1804-1892). The constitution-writing effort was thus meant to include different Ottoman points of view, both conservative and liberal, both Muslim and non-Muslim. After consulting many sources,

153 Georgeon, Abdüllhamid II, 62.
both Ottoman and foreign, including the constitutions of several foreign countries, and deliberating over every detail, the commission completed a draft in about a month, and submitted to Sultan Abdülhamid in November 1876.155

Perhaps as a result of its haste to complete the constitution, however, the commission failed to achieve a true consensus. As he was in the beginning, Midhat Paşa emerged as the main backer of the document. He had the support of the liberal members of the commission, such as Süleyman Paşa, but lost the support of Mehmed Namık Paşa. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa was also not prepared to accept the draft constitution as it stood, because it weakened the authority of the Sultan. Ultimately, however, the opinion that mattered was that of Abdülhamid. Midhat Paşa was forced to accept the Sultan’s conditions, which included removing the idea of the government being responsible to the prime minister (instead, each minister would be responsible separately to the Sultan). Furthermore, Abdülhamid insisted on inserting an article that would allow him to send any troublesome individual into exile. The Sultan believed that these measures were necessary in order to maintain the supreme authority of the head of state. The liberal members of the constitutional commission were, in their turn, opposed to the changes but were powerless to scuttle the compromise. On 17 December 1876, Abdülhamid accepted the constitution. Two days later, he gave Midhat the post of grand vizier. Since Midhat was the face of reformism in the Ottoman Empire, such a move was calculated both to appease the Young Ottomans and to reassure the Great Powers of the seriousness of the new constitution.156 As we will see below, however, the Sultan was highly suspicious of Midhat Paşa and would waste no time in getting rid of him when the opportunity arose.

156 Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 63-64.
Why was there a delay of six days between Sultan Abdülhamid’s acceptance of the constitution and its promulgation? The answer undoubtedly lies in the Sultan’s desire to influence the outcome of the Constantinople Conference in favour of the Ottoman Empire. The fact that the promulgation of the constitution was announced to the public at the exact moment that the first plenary meeting of the conference was taking place speaks in favour of this view. As mentioned above, the constitution was meant to put a speedy end to the conference, since most of the long-standing Russian demands (such as autonomy for the Christian provinces of the Ottoman Empire and equality for the Christian minority), which were, at the moment, being backed by all the Great Powers, had, at a stroke, been achieved. Formally, every Ottoman subject was now equal to every other, and every province had a degree of internal autonomy, as well as the right to elect deputies to the imperial parliament.

However, more than the European powers, it was the residents of Istanbul, including the Christian minorities, who were thoroughly impressed by the new constitution. In a gesture of interfaith unity, Midhat Paşa read the document out to the public in the presence of the Mufti of Istanbul, as well as the Greek and Armenian Orthodox patriarchs. His inclusiveness, as well as the reforms introduced in the constitution, were well received by the people of the capital, both Muslim and Christian. Residents lit up their houses at night in celebration. Students took part in demonstrations in front of the Dolmabahçe Palace and the European embassies, chanting slogans in both Turkish and Greek in support of the constitution, the Sultan, and Midhat.\textsuperscript{157} The Greeks and the Armenians of Istanbul thus did not share in the demands of Slavic Christians such as...

\textsuperscript{157} Mansel, \textit{Constantinople}, 303-304.
as the Serbs and the Bulgarians. Furthermore, the Christians in Istanbul understood the importance of conveying their acceptance of the constitution to the Great Powers, who were, at that moment, in the process of determining the fate of the Empire’s possessions in the Balkans.

It does not seem, however, that the Great Powers took the views of non-Slavic Ottoman Christian communities into account when deciding on the measures to be implemented in the Balkans. Nor, for that matter, did they believe that the Ottoman government itself was taking the constitution seriously. As far as they were concerned, the new constitution was simply a public relations ploy. Thus, at the Conference, the Great Powers advocated the creation of new Bulgarian provinces where people would be grouped together on the basis of “race” and language; one of the Ottoman representatives, Edhem Paşa, objected that doing so would be contrary to the constitution. Other reforms proposed by the European powers included the cession of Ottoman territory to Serbia and Montenegro, a European veto over governors appointed in the Balkans, the creation of a gendarmerie staffed by non-Ottoman Europeans, and the creation of international commissions to oversee the implementation of these reforms. All of these proposed reforms ran counter to the letter and spirit of the new Ottoman constitution, but the Great Powers did not see this issue as relevant. Both Britain and France believed that the true reason for the Ottomans’ refusal to accept the European demands was the personal ambition of the grand vizier, Midhat Paşa. Sultan Abdülhamid encouraged the Great

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158 As far as Ottoman Greeks were concerned, the rise of Slavic nationalisms in the Balkans ran counter to Ottoman unity; for those Ottoman Greeks who supported dreams of a greater Greece, Slavic nationalism was dangerous because it laid claims on some of the same land that Greek irredentists wanted to be annexed to independent Greece. See Ioannis Zelepos, “Amateurs as Nation-Builders? On the Significance of Associations for the Formation and Nationalization of Greek Society in the Nineteenth Century,” in Hannes Grandits, Nathalie Claye and Robert Pichler (eds.), *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 78.
Powers in this belief.\textsuperscript{159} He probably did so in order to avoid being personally associated with the likely failure of the conference, since he realised the Europeans were unlikely to accept the Ottoman position on Balkan affairs.

Facing what they saw as Ottoman intransigence, the European powers gave the Ottomans an ultimatum, according to which the Ottomans had to accept their demands by 20 January 1877. On 18 January, Midhat Paşa convened a “grand council” made up of 240 appointed members, a quarter of them Christians. They included bureaucrats as well as Muslim \textit{ulama} and Christian clerics. The council voted to reject the European demands, despite a recognition that such a vote would likely lead to war with Russia.\textsuperscript{160} The Constantinople Conference thus ended in failure, as no compromise was found between the Ottomans and the Great Powers.

Meanwhile, in a move to strengthen his domestic position, Midhat allegedly wrote a letter to the Sultan on 30 January, calling on him to rule in the interest of the empire rather than his own interest, and reminding him that one-man rule had ended with the promulgation of the constitution. In response, Abdülhamid decided that the time had come to act against the grand vizier. On 5 February, he invited Midhat Paşa to a meeting. When the latter arrived at the Dolmabahçe Palace, he was placed on a yacht and deported to Italy. Abdülhamid explained his actions by saying that Midhat had become a threat to public order and to his authority as Sultan. There was no protest from Europe about the Sultan’s treatment of his grand vizier, since Midhat had become thoroughly unpopular in

\textsuperscript{159} Georgeon, \textit{Abdülmid II}, 66-67.  
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 66.
Europe because of his opposition to the European demands at the Constantinople Conference.\textsuperscript{161}

With Midhat Paşa gone, Sultan Abdülhamid was able to move towards consolidating his position at the helm of the state. However, his Balkan policy was not notably different from that of Midhat. For one, he continued Midhat’s peace negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro, achieving a peace settlement with Serbia on 28 February. However, when it came to compromise, he ultimately proved no more ready to give up Ottoman territorial integrity than Midhat had been, and used similar techniques to justify his position. The peace negotiations with Montenegro hit a snag when the principality refused peace without territorial expansion. Abdülhamid put the issue to a vote in the newly convened Ottoman parliament, which had been convened for the first time on 19 March and comprised 71 Muslims, 44 Christians and four Jews. The parliament resolutely voted on 29 March against any territorial concessions to Montenegro.\textsuperscript{162}

The Sultan’s policy, which combined engagement and firmness, seemed to be paying off on the more important European front. If anything, the Great Powers seemed to be toning down their demands. The London Declaration, issued by the Powers on 31 March, praised the Ottomans for their peace agreement with Serbia and asked them to conclude a similar agreement with Montenegro. The declaration still insisted on reforms in Bulgaria, but, instead of calling for foreign troops to be stationed there, said that the Ottomans could keep a light military presence there in order to maintain order.\textsuperscript{163} It is possible that the Powers were actually impressed with the new Ottoman parliament, more than a third of whose members were Christians. Additionally, most of the Powers were

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 70-71.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 71-78.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 76.
probably concerned with the potential consequences of a Russian victory over the
Ottoman Empire. Whatever their motivations, the Great Powers toned down their
criticism of the Ottoman Empire and made their demands more palatable.

**War and Defeat**

Sultan Abdülhamid, however, seriously miscalculated his position. The arrival of a new
British ambassador in Istanbul on 31 March gave him the illusion of British support in
the event of war. Apart from the parliament, which seemed to be ready to go to war,
several ministers, chief among them the minister of war, Redif Paşa, urged the Sultan to
stand firm in the face of the Great Powers. Redif gave the Sultan a largely unrealistic
impression about the state of preparedness of the Ottoman army. Lastly, public opinion in
Istanbul and other parts of the empire was buoyant and favoured a decisive military
showdown with Russia. There was a widespread belief that, in the event of war, the
Ottomans would be helped by Central Asian Muslims and Poles, who would attack
Russia from east and west, respectively and that, furthermore, Britain and France would
help the Ottomans. Crowds of *softas* gathered in front of the Yıldız Palace, chanting pro-
war slogans. Consequently, on 10 April, the Sublime Porte sent the Great Powers a reply
to the London Declaration, completely rejecting their demands.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 76-78; Ömer Faruk Yılmaz, *Belgelere Sultan İkinci Abdülhamid Han* (Sultan Abdülhamid II Khan in Documents) (İstanbul: Osmanlı Yayınevi, 2000), 38-40, 57-59; Abdul-Hamid, *Avant la débâcle de la Turquie*, 50. Abdülhamid was so disappointed by Redif’s performance as minister of war that, even two
decades later, he remembered him as “a miserable person.”
On 24 April 1877, in a move away from multilateralism, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire and invaded its territory. The Russians waged this war on two fronts: in the Balkans and in Anatolia. As Sultan Abdülhamid recollects in his memoirs, the war was “a real mess” and “terribly enervating.” According to him, the war made the already “troubled state” of the Ottoman Empire even worse.¹⁶⁵ The Ottomans were hoping for British help, which failed to materialise. This was partly because of the indignation over the “Bulgarian Horrors” raised by the press and by William Gladstone, which meant that any action in defence of the Ottomans would be risky for the British government from a public relations perspective. Perhaps of equal importance was the fact Britain’s strategic interest in the Ottoman Empire was no largely concentrated on the Suez Canal (which had been opened in 1869). The canal quickly became indispensable to Britain, to the extent that its defence trumped that of Istanbul in British strategic planning.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, the new British ambassador, Austen Layard, told the new grand vizier, Edhem Paşa, “that Turkey could not look forward to any help” from Britain.¹⁶⁷ As the weeks passed, it became clear that the war was going badly for the Ottomans. Despite repeated British statements to the contrary, Ottoman military leaders kept expecting a British intervention in their favour.¹⁶⁸

As we saw above, the British government was not negatively inclined towards the Ottomans at this stage, but had quickly lost the public relations war at home on this issue

¹⁶⁵ Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 42-43.
and thus found that it had its hands tied. As Layard points out in a secret report to the British foreign minister, Lord Derby, “The marvellous ability… shown by Russia and her agents in misleading public opinion in England and elsewhere has been amply rewarded.” For their part, according to Layard, the Ottomans did very little to counter Russian propaganda on the Bulgarian question: “The Porte… neither employs the press, nor competent agents for such purposes.” As a result of the Ottoman absence from the press battle and the success of Russian propaganda, hardly anyone in England knew that the latest British government estimates of the number of civilians killed in Bulgaria in 1876 was 3,500 (including Muslims), rather than the 60,000 alleged by Gladstone.169 Layard reports on conversations with Bulgarian leaders who assured him that they were well satisfied with the establishment of the Ottoman parliament, where they could “freely express their opinions and expose their grievances.” Indeed, in Layard’s view, the Ottoman parliament and constitution were one of the main reasons for the Russian invasion: since the Russians did not have a constitution themselves, they thought that the Ottomans having one cast Russia in a negative light. According to Layard, Ottoman Muslims and Christians would suffer equally and needlessly from a prolongation of the war. Since Britain could not intervene militarily, Layard saw it as his mission to “prepare the way for peace” by giving Sultan Abdülhamid an honest view of how “hopeless” the war really was for the Ottomans.170

While the Sultan himself did not at first object to Layard’s entreaties, he seems to have instructed his government to do so. Edhem Paşa met Layard in June and reminded him that Britain was supposed to be an ally of the Ottoman Empire. He categorically

170 Ibid., 13-16.
rejected any attempts to force the empire into a pro-Russian peace agreement against its will. Edhem characterised the war being waged by the Russians as a “crusade,” and asked why the Great Powers did not want the Ottomans to defend themselves, when even an animal had a recognised right of self-defence. In July, as the military situation failed to improve, Abdülhamid directly asked for British military help. Layard told him that he could not give him any “hope for assistance.”

In late July, however, the situation turned temporarily in the Ottomans’ favour, as the Ottoman forces successfully defended the fortress of Plevna and prevented the Russians from crossing the Balkan Mountains. Following these successes, Edhem Paşa once again met Layard. During the meeting, Edhem once again reminded Layard of Britain’s status as an ally of the Ottomans, and accused it of betraying the Ottomans’ trust. In his words, as quoted by Layard, “A friend who deserts you in the hour of need is much worse than an open foe.” He also accused Britain of hypocrisy: the British were refusing to help the Ottomans because of the massacres of Christian civilians by the başbozuksthe previous year, but did not seem to object to the more atrocious massacres of Muslim civilians being carried out in Bulgaria by Russian forces. Finally, Edhem asked Layard a question which, unbeknownst to the two men at the time, was to set the tone for Ottoman-British relations for decades to come. Layard quotes Edhem as saying, “If England will not offer mediation [with Russia], to whom are we to look? Should it be Germany or Austria?”

Indeed, it was the unwillingness of Britain under the Disraeli

\[173\] Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 84.
government to go against the tide of public opinion and come to the Ottomans’ aid which eventually led to the dissolution of the long-standing Anglo-Ottoman friendship and the beginning of an Ottoman-German alliance which was to last until the end of the First World War.

Meanwhile, in November 1877, Russia once again began gaining ground in its war with the Ottoman Empire and continued to do so through the winter. The Ottomans followed through on their plan to ask Germany to mediate; Chancellor Bismarck, however, refused to get involved. In a last-ditch effort, Abdülhamid went over Disraeli’s head and wrote directly to Queen Victoria on 10 January, asking for her help in persuading the Russians to sign an armistice. Victoria supported the Sultan’s request, but all Disraeli would agree to was to warn Russia that Britain would not allow it to capture Istanbul. 175 On 14 January, fearing the loss of the capital, Abdülhamid ordered that a special committee be convened to discuss the steps to be taken if Russia conquered “the centre of the Caliphate and the Sultanate (God forbid).” 176

A British fleet entered the Dardanelles on 24 January to give substance to Britain’s earlier warning to Russia; however, it was understood by all concerned that the fleet was there to intimidate the Russians more than to support the Ottomans. An envoy of the Central Asian khanate of Kashgar, residing at this time in Istanbul, reported to the British in late January that the Muslims of Istanbul and Sultan Abdülhamid himself were highly displeased by Britain’s behaviour, and warned of “very serious consequences” to

175 Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 84-87.  
British-Ottoman relations. Meanwhile, the Russian advance finally halted on 24 February at San Stefano (known as Ayastefanos in Ottoman Turkish and Yeşilköy in Modern Turkish), a village located barely 10 km from Istanbul. Subsequent Ottoman assessments showed that the reason for this abject failure on the part of the Ottoman army consisted of unpreparedness for the war, and poor leadership in the field.

On 3 March 1878, a treaty was signed in San Stefano putting a halt to the war. Under the provisions of this treaty, the Ottoman Empire recognised Montenegro, Serbia and Romania as independent states (Articles II, III and V, respectively). The bulk of the treaty concerned Bulgaria, which was to become a large autonomous principality, covering a substantial part of Ottoman territory in the Balkans (like Serbia or Montenegro earlier), and ruled by a “Christian Government” (Article VI). The Ottoman army was to be replaced there by a “national militia” (Articles VI and VIII). The Ottomans were to introduce reforms in Bosnia (Article XIV). The Ottoman Empire would abandon the right to blockade the Straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles in times of war (Article XXIV). Lastly, the Ottomans would be obliged to give up the Anatolian cities of Ardahan, Batum, Beyazit and Kars, and also pay heavy war reparations to Russia (Article XIX).

Two important consequences immediately resulted from the military collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the face of Russian aggression. Domestically, the constitutional arrangement arrived at in 1876 now came to an end. In February, as the Russian army

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178 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 42; Süleyman Kocabas, Sultan Abdülhamid: Şahsiyeti ve Politikası (Sultan Abdülhamid: His Personality and His Policies) (Istanbul: Vatan Yayınları, 1995), 68; Yılmaz, Belgelerle Sultan İkinci Abdülhamîd Han, 41-43.
was drawing ever nearer to Istanbul, several deputies of the Ottoman parliament submitted a no-confidence motion against five ministers, including the new grand vizier, Ahmed Hamdi Paşa (1826-1885). They also demanded that several Ottoman military commanders be put on trial for their wartime failures. The next day, Abdülhamid replaced the grand vizier with a new one, Ahmed Vefik Paşa (1823-1891).180

However, that was by no means the end of the issue. On 13 February, when Abdülhamid asked the parliamentarians and other dignitaries how to respond to the British fleet’s entry into the Dardanelles, a deputy named Astarcı Hacı Ahmed, a tailor by profession, began openly criticising the Sultan and accusing him of dealing with the war too tardily. Abdülhamid replied that he was prepared to sacrifice himself for the empire, and that he would assume direct rule, as his grandfather Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) had done. True to his word, Abdülhamid wasted no time in putting an end to the constitutional experiment. On 15 February, the parliament was dissolved, and the leading deputies were asked to return to their home provinces. There would be no further sessions of the Ottoman parliament until after the Young Turk revolution of 1908. Ahmed’s bold words to the Sultan were certainly not the only reason for the latter’s decision to dissolve the legislature. In general, Abdülhamid expressed a distrust of the deputies, particularly the Christian ones, and also believed that the Ottomans were not ready for democracy.181

On the same day, the commander of Ottoman forces in the Balkans, Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa (d. 1892) was arrested, and was soon put on trial for his alleged role in the defeat.182

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180 Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 88.
181 Yılmaz, Belgelerde Sultan İkinci Abdülhamid Han, 51-53; Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 88-89.
182 Süleyman Paşa, İmdatü’l-Hakaik (Principles of Truths), Çilt 6: Balkanlardan ricat (Vol. 6: Retreat from the Balkans) (İstanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1928), 426-428. Süleyman defended himself vigorously, calling his imprisonment illegal and pointing the finger of blame at other officers. Nevertheless, he was eventually exiled to Baghdad. See also Frederick William von Herbert, The Defence of Plevna, 1877: Written by One Who Took Part in It (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: Adamant Media, 2004), 449.
Abdülhamid thus made it clear that he would hold the army responsible for its failures, and would no longer be directed by his military advisers.

The second short-term consequence of the Ottoman defeat at the hands of Russia was a rush by Britain and Austria-Hungary to roll back the Russian gains secured under the Treaty of San Stefano and to partake in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. Thus, Britain, which had been a valuable ally of the Ottoman Empire for several decades prior to the 1876 Bulgarian uprising, and had since become a supposedly neutral observer of events in the Empire, now began to transform itself into a rival while still masquerading as a friend. As we will see, beginning in 1878 and for the rest of his long reign, Abdülhamid was forced to deal with various British intrigues, some more serious than others, in order to preserve Ottoman territorial integrity. Disraeli set the new tone by replacing Lord Derby as foreign minister with Lord Salisbury (1830-1903), who had been the British delegate at the Constantinople Conference of 1877 and was known for his anti-Ottoman views.183

Just a few days after the signing of the San Stefano Treaty, the Great Powers agreed to hold a conference in Berlin in order to revise it and force Russia to take the other powers’ positions into consideration, even before the complete text of the treaty had been transmitted to the European capitals.184 Austria-Hungary was especially anxious that Russia not end up dominating the Balkans to its detriment. In compensation for what it saw as Russian gains in Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary sought to occupy Bosnia-

183 Ian St John, Disraeli and the Art of Victorian Politics (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 179-180.
Herzegovina. Russia was unhappy with the prospect of part of its victory being snatched from it through negotiation. Emperor Alexander II tried to undermine Austria-Hungary’s diplomatic position in the run-up to the Congress of Berlin. For instance, he told the French ambassador in St. Petersburg that once Austria entered Bosnia, “she will try not to leave again… while we, true to our engagements, will have to evacuate Bulgaria.” The ambassador reports that Russia held an even more negative view of Britain, which had, after all, prevented the Russians from capturing Istanbul.185

Britain, which had failed to provide the Ottomans any active assistance (except for keeping the Straits out of Russian hands), now sought to maintain the illusion that it still had the best interests of the Ottoman Empire at heart. It offered the Ottomans a renewed alliance, promising to uphold the Ottoman position at the Congress of Berlin. Prior to the defeat of the Ottomans by Russia, it had been the public position of the Disraeli government that Britain supported Ottoman territorial integrity on the basis of the 1856 Treaty of Paris.186 Now, however, Britain demanded steep payment from the Ottomans in order for continued diplomatic support: the Ottomans were to give up Cyprus, which would be turned into a British naval base. Alarmed by Russian successes on the battlefield, Britain was determined not be left out of the de-facto partition of Ottoman territories then taking place. Thus, on 25 May 1878, Britain resorted to blackmail against Sultan Abdülhamid, telling him that if he did not agree to a British occupation of Cyprus within one day, Britain would allow the Russians to complete what

they had started and occupy Istanbul. After the disastrous defeat at the hands of Russia, Abdülhamid was in no position to resist. Furthermore, the British chose the time of their ultimatum exceptionally well: Abdülhamid was recovering from an assassination attempt that had been carried out the previous day by the Young Ottoman journalist Ali Suavi (1838-1878). Hence, in less than a day, the Sultan agreed to the British demands, and asked his government to do so as well.\footnote{George Hill, A History of Cyprus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 283-285.}

The agreement formally giving Britain the right to occupy Cyprus was signed by the British ambassador, Layard, and the Ottoman foreign minister, Safvet Paşa, on 4 June 1878. This brief treaty specified that the British Empire and the Ottoman Empire were to form a defensive alliance; Britain promised to defend the Ottomans “by force of arms” against any future invasion of the Asian territories of the Ottoman Empire by Russia. In exchange, the Ottomans would hand over Cyprus, which would be “occupied and administered by England” (Article I).\footnote{“Convention of Defensive Alliance between Great Britain and Turkey, 4 June 1878.” Reprinted in Murat Metin Hakki (ed.), The Cyprus Issue: A Documentary History, 1878-2007 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 3-4.}

Thus, where the Russians had had to fight a bloody war to force the Ottomans to cede territory (most of which would not end up in the Russian Empire), the British secured Cyprus without firing a shot and without even formally breaking their alliance with the Ottomans. Unlike Russia in the Balkans, Britain had no religious or ethnic ties with the inhabitants of Cyprus. Neither did it have significant commercial ties with the island.\footnote{In 1873, the entire value of goods traded between Britain and Cyprus constituted a mere £4,045. See Phil Robinson, Cyprus: Its Physical, Economical, Historical, Commercial, and Social Aspects (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1878), 31.}Instead, Britain wanted Cyprus as a strategic base from which to guard the approach to the Suez Canal, which in turn would help Britain keep the sea route from...
Europe to India under its control. Britain was genuinely concerned that Russia’s recent gains in eastern Anatolia would enable it “to advance upon our Indian frontier,” making the maintenance of the sea route all the more essential to British policy.

Eventually, the desire to maintain its supremacy in the Indian Ocean region would lead Britain into a new and more significant colonial adventure in Egypt. Meanwhile, however, Britain participated in the Congress of Berlin, which began on 13 June 1878, with the knowledge that it would not be left empty-handed at the division of the spoils. Other than Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Britain, the Powers represented at the Congress were Austria-Hungary, France, Italy and the hosts, Austria-Hungary. Britain accorded so much importance to the conference that Disraeli himself, along with Salisbury, represented his country in Berlin. Having obtained a satisfactory result with regard to Cyprus, Britain once again acted as a public friend of the Ottoman Empire. Disraeli, in his first address before the Congress, declared that the presence of Russian troops near Istanbul was “abnormal and perilous,” and constituted a “danger” to all of Europe.

From 17 June, the Ottoman delegation was headed by Alexander Karatheodori Paşa, Sultan Abdülhamid’s advisor and an ethnic Greek. It is quite possible that the Sultan decided to name Karatheodori to this position to demonstrate to the Great Powers the extent to which Christians were integrated into the political life of the Ottoman

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190 Hubert Faustmann, “The Colonial Legacy of Division,” in James Ker-Lindsay and Hubert Faustmann (eds.), The Government and Politics of Cyprus (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 45.
192 Les Protocoles du Congrès de Berlin avec le Traité préliminaire de San-Stefano du 19 février (3 mars) 1878 et le Traité de Berlin du 13 juillet 1878 (The Protocols of the Congress of Berlin with the Preliminary Treaty of San Stefano of 19 February (3 March) 1878 and the Treaty of Berlin of 13 July 1878) (St-Pétersbourg: Imprimerie Trenké & Fusnot, 1878), 1.
193 Ibid., 2-3.
194 Ibid., 6.
Empire. It seems that Abdülhamid’s move embarrassed the European delegations and forced them to realise that the only Greek present at the Congress was representing the Ottomans. Britain and Russia started sparring verbally over which of them had the best interests of the Greeks at heart.\(^{195}\) Thus, if Abdülhamid’s aim in dispatching Karatheodori was to introduce a wedge between the Powers, he succeeded to some extent.

Eventually, after a month’s worth of sometimes acrimonious deliberations, in which the British fought the Russians over every point and the Ottomans tried their best to roll back the effects of the Russian military victory, a new treaty on the Balkans was signed in Berlin on 13 July by the Ottomans and all the European Powers. According to the Treaty of Berlin, Bulgaria was still to be an “autonomous principality” with a “Christian government,” but with a much reduced area (Articles 1 and 2). About half the territory that was to be included in Bulgaria under the Treaty of San Stefano would now instead be placed in a new province called Eastern Rumelia, which would remain under direct Ottoman rule, but with a Christian governor (Articles 13 and 14). Thus, at a stroke, the size of Russia’s gains in the Balkans was cut in half. Moreover, Russia had to withdraw all its troops from Ottoman territory, including Bulgaria, within nine months (Article 22).\(^{196}\)

Austria-Hungary had its main demand satisfied at the Congress when the Powers consented to its occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Article 25). In this way, Austria, like Britain, managed to occupy a chunk of Ottoman territory without going to war with the Ottomans, and while claiming to be a friend. Unlike Britain, however, Austria’s ambitions did not extend much further. For the most part, Austria-Hungary wanted

\(^{195}\) Ibid., 9-10.

\(^{196}\) For the full text of the Treaty of Berlin, see ibid., 108-116.
Bosnia to serve as a bulwark against the continuing rise of Pan-Slavism, an ideology which threatened its hold on Slavic lands such as Croatia.197

New Directions and New Challenges

Despite the loss of Bosnia-Herzegovina in addition to Bulgaria and Cyprus, Sultan Abdülhamid was happy with the results of the Congress of Berlin. In his view, the Treaty of Berlin represented a “thorough” revision of the humiliating Treaty of San Stefano. The changes in the Ottoman Empire’s favour, which Abdülhamid obtained “with difficulty,” allowed the Ottomans to “preserve, to a certain degree, our prestige as a great power.”198 Unlike the Treaty of San Stefano, which was the result of Russian diktat, the Treaty of Berlin was negotiated by the Ottomans, at least officially, as equals. Regardless of the limited Ottoman success in Berlin, however, the defeat in the Russo-Ottoman War had a very demoralising effect on Ottoman morale. According to Abdülhamid, following the war, “the most absolute pessimism” affected the Ottoman army and bureaucracy. As for the people, they had sunk into “apathy,” not wanting to be bothered any more with political affairs.199 One may object that the Sultan is exaggerating the degree to which the growth in indifference towards politics was an outcome of the war: it also may have had much to do with Abdülhamid’s recent dissolution of the elected Ottoman parliament. Nevertheless, it is true that the Ottoman Empire found itself at a low point in 1878.

198 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 42-44.
199 Ibid., 43-44.
To extricate the Empire from this lamentable situation, Sultan Abdülhamid changed the direction of the state. He would not be a constitutional ruler and imitate the European Powers; neither would he merely imitate the example of his grandfather Mahmud II, which he claimed he would do before dissolving the parliament. Rather, Abdülhamid embarked on a course of creatively reformulating what it meant to be Ottoman. He was to place Islam front and centre as social cement, and emphasise his role as caliph over and above that of sultan. From then on, the Muslim identity of the majority of Ottoman subjects, rather than a shared sense of Ottoman-ness, would be used by the state in an effort to preserve its territorial integrity.²⁰⁰

The social and political use of Islam as an organising principle under Abdülhamid will be discussed more fully in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. At this point, however, it is important to point out the relationship between Abdülhamid’s Islamic turn and the Russo-Ottoman War. Without the war, the Sultan’s new Islamic ideology would have been impossible to construct. According to the Ottoman census of 1844, Christians numbered at least 39 percent of the Ottoman population. In Rumelia, that is, the European portion of the Ottoman Empire, the Christians constituted approximately 70 percent of the population.²⁰¹ Thus, a nation-building project explicitly based on Islam could hardly be successful in serving a unifying function prior to the monumental


changes introduced to the Ottoman map by the war of 1877-78 and its conclusion (it is no coincidence that during the Tanzimat era the state attempted to draw on the loyalties not just of Muslims of Christian Ottomans as well). After the war, however, the Ottoman Empire emerged with an overwhelmingly Muslim population. As we have seen, several of the European provinces with Christian majorities seceded or were occupied by outside powers. Furthermore, many of the Muslim inhabitants of the Balkans streamed into those parts of the Ottoman Empire where central authority still held sway, including Istanbul. As the first census carried out under the orders of Sultan Abdülhamid demonstrated, the Christians now constituted at most 27 percent of the population. Thus, as a result of the war, they had gone from being over a third of the Ottoman population to being just over a quarter. More importantly, however, most of the parts of the empire with an overwhelmingly Christian population were now no longer under its control. It was only under these conditions that an ideology centred on loyalty to the state through Islam would make sense.

Contrary to what one might expect from a ruler who had just lost a war and almost lost his capital, Abdülhamid held no bitter feelings towards the Balkan countries after the war of 1877-78. In his memoirs, he approvingly recounts a parable that his gardener told him, in which the latter compared Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia and the Ottoman Empire to different trees growing in the same place and quarrelling over sunlight. God hears their dispute and informs them, “Each of you has a reason to exist, no

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202 See, for example, Erich-Jan Zürcher, “The Late Ottoman Empire as Laboratory of Demographic Engineering,” *Il mestiere di storico* 1 (2009): 9.
204 On the crucial role of the 1877-78 territorial changes and migrations in shaping Abdülhamid’s Islamist ideology, see Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 43-44.
tree is better than any other....” Abdülhamid also claims to have no regrets over the secession of the Balkan Christian provinces because they had been a burden on the Ottoman Empire: they were “difficult to govern” and “exhausted our national strength.” Instead, he believes the Ottoman Muslims should rely on themselves and search for “new strength inside,” that is, inside themselves and also inside the Muslim areas of the Ottoman Empire. Only by doing so, in Abdülhamid’s view, could the Ottomans finally become a “strong man” instead of being the “sick man” of Europe.  

To be sure, Abdülhamid is making a virtue of necessity here: far from being a burden, the provinces recently lost by the Ottomans had actually in many ways been the economic and demographic heartland of the Empire since the 15th century, if not earlier and held great emotional significance to the Ottomans. It is true, however, that ever since Abdülhamid had ascended the Ottoman throne in 1876, the Balkan provinces had been a source of much instability and a magnet for foreign, particularly Russian, intervention. In any case, the loss of much of its Rumelian territory along with its population provided the Ottoman Empire with an opportunity to experiment with a new nation-building project, which Abdülhamid now embarked upon.  

As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this project contained ideological aspects, such as the promotion of the concept of the caliphate and the office of caliph among both Ottoman and foreign Muslims, as well as infrastructural aspects, involving the expansion of state-directed networks of all sorts, including educational institutions, rail and

206 Ibid., 56.
telegraph lines, and so on. The aim of all of these measures was to tie the different parts of Ottoman territory more closely together (including especially the previously somewhat neglected Arab and Kurdish provinces), to strengthen the Empire from within, and also to secure its borders from external threats.

Following the war and subsequent negotiations, Russia ceased to be an active enemy of the Ottoman Empire; it had obviously made all the gains it could and could not hope to expand further at Ottoman expense without raising the anger of other European powers, especially Britain. In fact, several members of the Russian royal family visited the Ottoman Empire in 1880 and 1881, including Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna (1853-1920), the daughter of Emperor Alexander II and daughter-in-law of Queen Victoria. The first significant external test of Abdülhamid’s new policies came in the shape of the French invasion and takeover of Tunisia in 1881 (discussed in detail in the next chapter). Unable to prevent the invasion or the imposition of a French protectorate over the autonomous province, Abdülhamid commandeered the aid of two Sufi brotherhoods, whose activities made it clear to the French that they could not continue across North Africa by invading Tripolitania or Cyrenaica (the provinces which constitute modern-day Libya).

For the rest of his reign, though, it was not Russia or France but Britain which was to prove to be the most significant foreign adversary to the Ottoman Empire. In April 1880, William Gladstone had replaced Benjamin Disraeli as British prime

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208 BOA, Y.A.HUS., 166/4, 2 Muharram 1298 (5 Dec. 1880); BOA, Y.EE., 12/18, 29 Dhu al-Hijja 1298 (22 Nov. 1881).

209 Tahsin Paşa, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları (Memories of Abdülhamid and Yıldız) (İstanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1931), 52.
As mentioned above, Gladstone considered the Ottomans to be “anti-human,” and was one of the major instigators of the wave of anti-Ottoman public indignation which played a part in preventing Britain from taking a more active role to defend the Ottomans against Russia. Now, as prime minister, Gladstone was in charge of the British response to developments in Egypt, which Britain was heavily invested in.

Egypt had been an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire since 1840, when Sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839-61) officially ceded control over it to Muhammad ‘Ali (r. 1805-1848) and his descendants. Egypt gained a new degree of strategic significance for Britain with the construction of the Suez Canal, which was completed in 1869. Muhammad ‘Ali’s grandson, Khedive Isma’il (r. 1863-1879) racked up an unsustainably high amount of debt by borrowing from Britain and France. Alexander Schölch argues that Ismai’il had essentially been led into a debt trap by European bankers, with Egypt receiving only two-thirds of the nominal amount but paying crippling interest on the whole. In an attempt to reduce the debt, Isma’il sold his portion of the shares of the Suez Canal to Britain in 1875. In 1876, Isma’il, who was still heavily indebted to the European powers, started appointing European officials (including British ones) to various offices in the Egyptian bureaucracy and ended up by leaving both government income and expenditure in the hands of the British and French. On 18 February 1879, there was a public demonstration by a group of army officers who had been dismissed from service without receiving the pay that was owed to them. It was clear that Isma’il was losing control of the province financially and militarily. On 26 June, after coming under pressure from both Britain and France, Sultan Abdülhamid II

\[210\] Matthew, *Gladstone*, 351.

Tawfiq, however, proved no more adept at governing the province than his father had been. In August 1879, he once again handed over Egypt’s financial affairs to British and French control. On 1 February 1881, there was once again a protest organised by Arab army officers who complained about the fact that ethnic Turkish and Circassian officers were being given preferential promotions in the army while the Arabs were discriminated against. They forced Khedive Tawfiq to fire his minister of war and to release several officers, including their leader Ahmad ‘Urabi (1841-1911), who had been arrested in January for making the same demands. The course which events were taking made Britain and France concerned that the army was becoming too powerful. In April, a joint Egyptian-European commission deliberated on how to respond to the army’s grievances; ‘Urabi was one of its members. The deliberations of the commission did not lead to a satisfactory outcome for ‘Urabi, however, and on 1 June he announced that he may stop obeying the government. Britain and France took his warning seriously but could not do anything without provoking a military clash. Finally, on 9 September, ‘Urabi led another military demonstration, demanding the resignation of the government. His demands were backed by several members of the dissolved Egyptian legislative
assembly. Tawfiq was forced to dismiss his cabinet and replace it with one approved by ‘Urabi on 14 September. Furthermore, the assembly was reconvened.\(^{213}\)

These developments worried Sultan Abdülhamid almost as much as they worried Britain and France. Abdülhamid certainly did not want a pretext to be created for an Anglo-French invasion of yet another autonomous Ottoman province, barely four months after the French takeover of Tunisia. Moreover, he could not have been pleased at the direction Egyptian politics was heading in: the army revolt leading to the convening of a parliament was very similar to what happened in Istanbul just a few years previously, as described above. Thus, the Sultan sent two representatives, Ali Fuad Bey and Ali Nizami Paşa, to Egypt on 2 October to convey his support to Tawfiq. Britain and France, however, saw Abdülhamid’s gesture as interference in Egypt’s internal affairs and urged him to recall his envoys. Furthermore, they assured Tawfiq that they would not allow the Ottoman Empire to have a say in the way the Egyptian government was run in the future.\(^{214}\) Britain and France thus lost an important opportunity to cooperate with the Ottoman Empire on a matter of mutual interest. Although their position in Egypt was weakening, they had no desire for their protégé, Khedive Tawfiq, to be strengthened by the Ottomans.

In January 1882, the members of the assembly submitted a constitution to Tawfiq. Britain and France reacted by submitting a communiqué calling for the Khedive’s authoritarian power to be restored. Instead, the Khedive accepted the constitution in


February, and ‘Urabi was made the new minister of war. Further, the government fired all Europeans working in the Egyptian bureaucracy. In May, after Tawfiq put pressure on his government to make peace with the Europeans, the prime minister, Mahmud al-Barudi, resigned, together with most ministers, but not ‘Urabi. Thus, ‘Urabi effectively took control of the government, prompting the Khedive to flee from Cairo to Alexandria.215

At this stage, Abdülhamid intervened once again. On 3 June, he dispatched a general called Derviş Paşa (who had developed a fierce reputation by putting down a revolt in Albania) to Egypt to try to reconcile ‘Urabi and Tawfiq and, failing that, to send ‘Urabi to Istanbul. Derviş promised ‘Urabi that the Sultan would treat him like a father if he went to Istanbul, and issued a declaration calling on the Egyptians to obey the Khedive. The mission ended in failure, however, as neither ‘Urabi nor his numerous supporters were prepared to abandon their movement for political reform at the request of the Sultan. Events began to spin out of control on 11 June, when several British and French citizens, both military and civilian, were killed during a riot in Alexandria. After this tragic event, ‘Urabi promised to tone down his rhetoric and restore calm. This was not enough for Britain and France, however; they started asking the Ottomans to send a military force into Egypt under British and French command, in order to remove ‘Urabi from power. By 23 June, Abdülhamid decided not to participate in the invasion and go to war with fellow-Muslims. This answer disappointed Britain, which had been hoping to get its aims achieved under the cover of the Ottoman flag. Finally, in early July, the Gladstone government decided to launch an invasion of Egypt in order to ensure Britain’s access to the Suez Canal (and, by extension, the route to India and Australia), and also to protect British capital investments in Egypt. Britain bombarded Alexandria on 11 July.

Abdülmâned made a last-ditch offer to the British: if they agreed to remove Khedive Tawfiq from office, the Ottomans would form a closer alliance with them. Instead, Britain invaded Egypt in August, and was in control of the province by September.  

Originally, the British claimed their occupation of Egypt would be short, but in fact they ended up holding on to the province for decades afterwards, well past the lifetime of Sultan Abdülmâned and, indeed, the Ottoman Empire itself. Abdülmâned dubbed Britain “perfidious Albion” in his memoirs, and said, in connection with Egypt, that “no promise is sacred” to the British. Abdülmâned’s secretary Tahsin Paşa confirms in his memoirs that “the country that Sultan Hamid [sic] was the most wary of was England.”

Conclusion

Abdülmâned was right to be concerned about Britain: for the remainder of his reign, Britain played a subversive role in the Arabian Peninsula, endeavouring to have various local rulers cast their lot with London instead of Istanbul (as we shall see, for instance, in the case of Kuwait in Chapter Five). Britain’s efforts had two important consequences as far as Abdülmâned was concerned. Externally, he had to look for an ally to counterbalance Britain, and he ended up finding one in Germany, which eventually lent

218 Tahsin Paşa, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 62.
its expertise for the modernisation of the Ottoman armed forces and the construction of the Hijaz Railway (which we also see in Chapter Five). Internally, Abdülhamid stepped up his Pan-Islamist policies, which not only sought to integrate the Arabs more closely into the Empire, but also had an important foreign-policy component and earned the Ottomans the support of many Indian, African and other Muslims (examined in detail in Chapter Four). The Ottoman Empire would thus seek to enhance its strength not through irredentism in the Balkans, but rather by building up its presence in the Indian Ocean world, both domestically and internationally. The map of the Ottoman Empire was to remain largely stable for the remainder of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s reign. But it was the turbulent early years of his reign which set the stage for all the struggles and successes to come.
Chapter Two

Sufism and the Ottomans in North Africa during the Reign of Abdülhamid II

As we saw in Chapter One, when the Ottoman Empire faced the challenge of rebellions in the Balkans, the Great Powers lost no opportunity to intervene in the crisis and attempt to extract some sort of advantage from the situation for themselves. In addition to Russia, which went to war with the Ottomans over the Balkan issue, such was the case with ostensibly friendly powers like Austria-Hungary, which occupied the source of the conflict, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Britain, which occupied Cyprus. France, too had its designs on Ottoman territory, and it would not be long before it would seize an opportunity to expand its holdings in North Africa at the expense of the Ottomans by seizing the autonomous province of Tunisia in 1881.

This chapter examines the threat posed by France (and later Italy) to Ottoman territorial integrity in Africa, and Sultan Abdülhamid’s countermeasures. In particular, the focus is on the Sultan’s alliance with two Sufi orders, the Madaniyya and the Sanusiyya, and the attempts by the Ottomans under Abdülhamid to harness the social capital and political potential of these *tariqas* for the sake of the Ottoman state. I begin with an examination of the origins of Sufis and the organising role of Sufi orders in Islamic history. I then trace the rise of the Madani and Sanusi orders, and examine the Sultan’s early engagement with the Madanis. I use the Madani Sufi Khayr al-Din (who held the office of Grand Vizier under Abdülhamid II) as a case study of Islamic
modernism and a thinker who believed that European-style institutions could easily be adapted to the needs of Muslim societies. I argue, however, that Sultan Abdülhamid’s Islamic modernism was quite different from that of Khayr al-Din. Abdülhamid believed that the Ottomans ought to strengthen their own, existing institutions, rather than adopting European ones. Even though the Sultan and Khayr al-Din eventually parted ways politically, Abdülhamid’s political alliance with the Sufis continued, and proved instrumental in preventing any French expansion in Ottoman territory after the conquest of Tunisia, and in preventing an Italian invasion of Libya as long as Abdülhamid remained in power.

**Sufism and Its Social Dimensions**

Sufism has been one of the major manifestations of Islamic spirituality since at least the second century AH (eighth century CE).²¹⁹ Being focused on the inner dimensions of Islam, Sufism is *a priori* hard to define. Martin Lings understands it as the realisation of the oneness of God, in the sense that there is no reality other than God. By unravelling the esoteric meaning contained in the five pillars of Islam, the seeker can extinguish his self within the Self of God.²²⁰ According to William Chittick, Sufism is “the way by which man transcends his own individual self and reaches God.”²²¹

First arising in Iraq at the height of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate among individual mystics and ascetics, Sufism gradually underwent a transformation into an institutionalised form involving a master-disciple relationship and prescribed mystical practices. These practices centred on the achievement of stations of closeness to God, each marked by a particular spiritual state. This transformation was complete in Iraq by the ninth century CE. Over the subsequent centuries, Islamic mystical movements that had arisen independently in other parts of the caliphate, such as Persia and Central Asia, came to conform to the overall institutional framework first elaborated by the Sufis of Iraq.222 At the same time, however, there was a significant degree of diversification in the practices of Sufis, and numerous Sufi orders or brotherhoods (turuq, sing. tariqa) arose, some more prominent than others in particular parts of the Muslim world.223

A detailed examination of the development of Sufism over the thousand years between the ninth and nineteenth centuries is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. What we should note, however, is that, eventually, different Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire became known for their different Sufi orders. In Iraq, the predominant orders were the Suhrawardiyya, the Rifa‘iyya and the Qadiriyya (all three founded in the twelfth century CE), in Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa it was the Badawiyya, the Burbaniyya and the Shadhiliyya (all founded in the thirteenth century CE), as well as the Wafa‘iyya (founded in the fourteenth century). Both the Iraqi and North African orders spread into Syria and Arabia, particularly the Hijaz, soon after they were founded.224

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much newer Sufi tariqa, the Sanusiyya, which was founded in the nineteenth century in the Hijaz, eventually gained prominence in North Africa.\textsuperscript{225}

Although the ultimate goal of the Sufi practitioner (dervish) is to annihilate the ego or the self (a state known as \textit{fana’}), this goal is usually achieved only after many years of intense spiritual exercises.\textsuperscript{226} These exercises often take the form of a \textit{dhikr} (remembrance) ceremony, where Sufis seek to actively remember God by repeating His names; in fact, G.P. Makris calls it “the center of the liturgical life of all Sufi brotherhoods.”\textsuperscript{227} \textit{Dhikr} ceremonies are collective and celebratory, and take place in a shared space, the \textit{zawiya} or \textit{tekke} (Sufi lodge). The ceremony is led by the shaykh of a particular \textit{tariqa}, who often resides in the \textit{zawiya}, along with some of his disciples or dervishes. Other followers of the \textit{tariqa} visit the shaykh to pay their respects and participate in \textit{dhikr}. The \textit{zawiya} may possess an endowment (\textit{waqf}), controlled by the shaykh, which assures the financial independence of the establishment. Often a \textit{zawiya} contains the tomb of a past shaykh of the \textit{tariqa}, which sometimes becomes the object of pious pilgrimages.\textsuperscript{228}

A \textit{tariqa} is almost never limited to a single \textit{zawiya}. Instead, close disciples of the shaykh often open new \textit{zawiyas} in other parts of the region where the \textit{tariqa} operates, or even in other parts of the world. Thus, a network of \textit{zawiyas} is established, more or less loosely affiliated to the founding shaykh and his \textit{zawiya}, while maintaining some degree

\textsuperscript{225}Abun-Nasr, \textit{Muslim Communities of Grace}, 158.
of unity through a shared spiritual lineage (silsila).\textsuperscript{229} Malise Ruthven describes the structure of the tariqa as being characterised by “authoritarian leadership and organized self-discipline.”\textsuperscript{230} While this may be true in some instances, I believe Itzchak Weismann is more accurate in his description of a particular Sufi brotherhood (the Naqshbandiyya) as being “a fairly loose network of masters and disciples in their lodges, who share a set of foundational principles and practices while constantly modifying and reinterpreting them according to changing circumstance and personal preference.”\textsuperscript{231} Although the above is admittedly an analysis of the structure of the Naqshbandiyya in particular, it can also be applied in a general sense to most Sufi tariqas.\textsuperscript{232}

Sufi tariqas have thus historically functioned as dynamic networks, connecting their members to each other and to their spiritual leadership (shaykhs and their representatives) in ways that transcended political boundaries delineated by the state,\textsuperscript{233} whether it be an “Islamic” state like the Ottoman Empire or a European colonial empire. While acknowledging the significant exception of Sufi tariqas that eventually themselves morphed into states (for instance, the Safawiyya in Persia), it is important to point out that most tariqas existed outside state structures, unlike the Sunni ulama, who were incorporated into the bureaucracy in most Muslim lands. The shared practices of a tariqa not only gave rise to solidarity among its members, but also helped delineate them from those outside the tariqa. According to Marilynn Brewer and Michael Silver, “social

\textsuperscript{230} Malise Ruthven, Islam in the World (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 278.
\textsuperscript{231} Itzchak Weismann, The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 13.
\textsuperscript{232} See, for example, M.D. Gilsenan, “Some Factors in the Decline of the Sufi Orders in Modern Egypt,” Muslim World 57, no. 1 (1967): 12.
identification” with a group is the first step towards “collective mobilization.” In the case of the Sufi tariqas, the “social identification” of their members with the group, as well as the tariqas’ relative independence from the state, allowed the Sufi brotherhoods to function as forms of civil society. Indeed, as Susanne Hoeber Rudolph points out, “Sufi orders, Catholic missionaries, and Buddhist monks” were some of the earliest “versions of civil society.”

It should thus come as no surprise that, while Sufism as the mystical dimension of Islam is primarily concerned with the relationship between the individual and God, Sufism as a set of social networks certainly has a very earthly side as well. As Paul Heck points out,

Sufism has been involved in all we think of as politics: conceptions of authority and power, legitimacy and contestation of rule, formation of the socio-moral order of a community or nation, competition for patronage, prestige, and control of a society’s wealth, the mobilization of people and resources in support of or against the status quo, and so on.

Thus, although Sufi tariqas have traditionally functioned outside the realm of government, this does not at all mean that they separated themselves from politics in general. Talal Asad defines an Islamic “discursive tradition” as “a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with


reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.” Each tariqa was one such Islamic discursive tradition, for it served as the guardian and transmitter of the practice of collective dhikr or remembrance of God, passed on from shaykh to disciple; it set the rules for the performance of this ritual and modified it as necessary; furthermore, it sought to assure the future of the practice by initiating new members into the tariqa. Thus, the tariqas sought to link past, present and future through an Islamic discourse, namely the need to actively seek the Divine. As Asad points out, a discursive tradition does not merely reproduce the past for the sake of keeping it alive. Rather, it is bound up with the here and now, and as such becomes a device through which those who adhere to it can understand the present moment. Thus, it is inescapable that a tariqa, as a discursive tradition, evolves over time to respond to the changing needs of the society it operates in. The flexibility of Sufism as a set of discursive traditions has allowed Sufis to formulate different responses to changes in the political sphere, depending on the time, place and circumstances.

The Rise of the Madaniyya and Sanusiyya Orders

The Shadhiliyya tariqa was founded by Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali b. ‘Abd Allah al-Shadhili (d. 656/1258), a descendant of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 40/661), the fourth Caliph of the Muslim community. ‘Ali b. ‘Abd Allah was born in the Rif region in northern Morocco. After

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going on different pilgrimages, he set out on a spiritual quest to find the *qutb* in Iraq.\(^{238}\) However, one of the shaykhs of Iraq informed him that the current *qutb* actually lived in ‘Ali’s homeland in the Maghreb. ‘Ali thus returned to North Africa, where he met Shaykh Abu Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam b. Mashish al-Hasani. The shaykh trained ‘Ali, conferred his spiritual authority upon him, and sent him to modern-day Tunisia, where ‘Ali initially settled in a town called Shadhila, thus acquiring the *nisba* al-Shadhili.\(^{239}\) In 642/1244, Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili migrated to Alexandria with some of his disciples. Until his death, he would travel the length of Egypt in order to preach his message. Upon his death, Abu al-Hasan was succeeded by his Andalusian student, Abu al-‘Abbas al-Mursi (d. 686/1287). Mursi was succeeded by his disciple, Ahmad b. ‘Ata’ Allah al-Iskandari (d. 709/1309).\(^{240}\) Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili left few writings of his own, and his followers started dividing into different branches soon after his death.\(^{241}\) Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah helped consolidate the *tariqa*, however, by stressing the idea of Abu al-Hasan’s “transcendent and universally valid spiritual authority,” in the words of Jamil Abun-Nasr.\(^{242}\) Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah simultaneously taught Sufism and *fiqh* in Cairo, and thus gained both esoteric and exoteric authority. His writings became widely read even by those Muslims who did not adhere to organised Sufism.\(^{243}\)

\(^{238}\) *Qutb*, which means “pole,” refers to the highest Sufi master of the age, who, according to Sufi belief, is spiritually connected to all other Sufi *shaykhs*. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 66-67.


\(^{242}\) Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*, 97.

Starting in the fourteenth century, the Shadhiliyya \textit{tariqa} spread once again into the Maghreb, from where it had originally started. Eventually, Moroccan Shadhili shaykhs split off to form several new \textit{turuq}, among them the Burhaniyya \textit{tariqa} in Sudan and East Africa, the Nasiriyya in the Sahara and West Africa, and the Darqawiyya, which spread to Greater Syria and all the way to Russia and Indonesia, but enjoyed the greatest influence in North Africa.\footnote{Ibid., 26-27.} The latter was founded by Mawlay al-‘Arabi b. Ahmad al-Darqawi (d. 1823). Another branch of the Shadhiliyya, known as the Madaniyya, was founded by a Darqawi shaykh named Muhammad b. Hasan al-Madani (d. 1847). Shaykh Muhammad was born in Mecca. He travelled to North Africa seeking spiritual knowledge in 1807, and became a follower of Mawlay al-‘Arabi in 1809. After studying under several other Sufi shaykhs, he established the Madaniyya order in Tripolitania around 1920.\footnote{Baron d’Estournelles de Constant, \textit{Les Congrégations religieuses chez les arabes et la conquête de l’Afrique du nord} (Religious Congregations among the Arabs and the Conquest of North Africa) (Paris: Maisonneuve et Ch. Leclerc, 1887), 24; Rev. Canon (Edward) Sell, \textit{The Religious Orders of Islam} (Wilmington, De.: Scholarly Resources, 1976), 73; Leslie Canavid, “Fatima al-Yashrutiyya: The Life and Practice of a Sufi Woman Teacher” in Vincent J. Cornell (ed.), \textit{Voices of Islam} (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 176; Canavid, “Fatima al-Yashrutiyya,” 198.} After his death, the leadership of the order passed to his son, Shaykh Zafir b. Muhammad al-Madani.

Like the Madaniyya \textit{tariqa}, the Sanusiyya initially appeared as an offshoot of the Shadhiliyya order, at least tangentially. The \textit{tariqa} was founded by Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Sanusi (1787-1859), who was born near Mustaghanim, Algeria. Sanusi studied Maliki jurisprudence in Fez for seven years. While in Fez, Sanusi frequented a Taibiyya Shadhiliyya \textit{zawiya} and became interested in Sufism. He later moved to Cairo in order to attend al-Azhar University, but soon after left on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Sanusi claimed that he was directed to go to Mecca by the \textit{qutb} of the age, who appeared to him one day...
in Cairo. However, another factor which probably influenced the move was the hostility some of his unconventional religious views aroused at al-Azhar. In Mecca, Sanusi became a disciple of the Shaykh Ahmad b. Idris al-Fasi (d. 1836) of the Qadiriyya tariqa. Upon his master’s death, Sanusi inherited the leadership of Shaykh Ahmad’s branch of the Qadiriyya. Sanusi lived in Mecca until 1843 and gathered followers. He renamed his order the Sanusiyya after himself, but saw it as a branch of the Shadhiliyya (which he had originally been affiliated with), as opposed to a completely separate Sufi order.246

After the initial period of consolidation in Mecca, the Sanusiyya started actively proselytizing in Africa and opened zawiyas in Egypt, Sudan, Senegal and the Gambia, Tunis, Algiers and Tripolitania.247 In so doing, Sanusi and his followers ran into the active opposition of the ulama of Mecca, Cairo and Istanbul. For example, a Maliki mufti of Cairo, Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad (d. 1881), was so concerned about the spread of the tariqa in the traditionally Maliki areas of North Africa that he published a whole book of fatwas against the Sanusis. The book alleged that Shaykh Sanusi did not attend Friday prayers, that he did not pray according to the rules of the Maliki madhhab and, more importantly, that he did not follow the opinions of any of the four imams who founded the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.248 This last allegation was undoubtedly true, because Shaykh Sanusi believed that the “gate of ijtihad” should be open and that he could arrive at judicial rulings independently of past scholars.249

247 Tripolitania was known as Tarabulus in Arabic and Trablusgarp in Turkish. I use the English name for the region throughout the dissertation.
248 Ibid., 87.
As a result of the opposition of the ulama to the spread of his tariqa, in 1855 Sanusi closed down most of his zawiyas and withdrew with his close followers to the oasis of Jaghbub in Cyrenaica. In this relative isolation, the Sanusiyya order was able to proselytize among non-Muslim tribes and spread its influence from the Mediterranean coast in the north to Lake Chad in the south. One of Shaykh Sanusi’s favourite means of gaining followers was to buy slaves or to capture them by raiding slave caravans, train them in his zawiya and then set them free. Sanusi established a university at Jaghbub, drawing students not just from among his followers, but from all over the Muslim world. The Sanusiyya order, which operated in a tribal environment, was able to transcend tribal divisions among its members. Thus, by the time Sanusi died in 1276/1859, his followers constituted an entity that was in transition between a religious order (a form of civil society) to a proto-state, and this state formation continued under his sons and descendants.

One of Shaykh Muhammad al-Sanusi’s sons, Muhammad al-Mahdi b. Muhammad al-Sanusi (1845-1902), took over the formal leadership of the Sanusiyya. Despite his young age, Al-Mahdi had received a thorough religious education from his father, along with his younger half-brother, Muhammad al-Sharif b. Muhammad al-Sanusi (d. 1895). Until Muhammad al-Mahdi reached the age of majority, he was aided in his task by a council made up of his father’s friends and associates. Once al-Mahdi reached adulthood, he decided to continue making use of the council, and worked in tandem with his brother Muhammad al-Sharif. While al-Mahdi continued to serve as the overall leader of the Sanusis, al-Sharif became the head of the council, which met at least

251 Martin, Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa, 114.
once a year. The different members of the council had different tasks, such as proselytizing, building zawiyas, keeping track of finances, providing hospitality to visitors, and so on. By 1886, under al-Mahdi’s leadership, there were 121 Sanusi zawiyas, each under the control of a local representative or muqaddim who reported to the shaykh in Jaghbub. This represented a fourfold increase in the number of Sanusi zawiyas since the time of Shaykh Muhammad al-Sansusi.

Each of the zawiyas was a walled compound that included a well, a mosque, the residence of the muqaddim, his family and slaves, rooms for performing dhikr, a school, a stable, a bakery and a guesthouse. Outside the walls of the zawiya was agricultural land that was farmed by the dervishes. If necessary, the zawiya could defend itself in war, and could also provide soldiers to the shaykh of the tariqa. In this way, Shaykh al-Mahdi could command an army of up to 25,000 men and a cavalry of 1500. The tariqa derived its income by collecting zakat from all its wealthy followers. Begging was banned in the zawiyas. All the dervishes of the order, whether rich or poor, had to perform a certain amount of physical labour for the tariqa, as agricultural labourers, builders or messengers. Adult male (and occasionally female) members of nomadic tribes in whose domains the order operated would spend some time receiving religious instruction in the zawiya and then return to their tribe; sometimes, they would also send their children to receive education in the zawiya school. Thus, the Sanusiyya order started taking on more and more of the attributes of a state. As a result of the transformation of the Sanusiyya

252 Ibid., 114-15.
from a religious movement into a proto-state, Shaykh al-Mahdi came to have more political weight in Cyrenaica than the Ottoman governor of the province.\textsuperscript{256}

**The Loss of Tunisia and Its Implications**

Relations between the palace and Sufi orders acquired special importance for the Ottomans under the reign of Abdülhamid II, but this importance was heightened to the degree of strategic significance as a consequence of French activity in North Africa in general, and Tunisia in particular. France conquered Algeria beginning in 1830 made preparations for a conquest of neighbouring Tunisia as early as 1867. France was drawn to Tunisia not only out of strategic considerations, that is, to secure the eastern border of its Algerian colony, but also because of its commercial potential.\textsuperscript{257} However, it did not manage to follow through on these plans due to the political situation in Europe at the time, with its interests being threatened in Italy.\textsuperscript{258}

It was a realignment in European politics that eventually allowed France to fulfill its ambitions in this nominally Ottoman possession. At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Great Powers sought to arrive at a territorial settlement in the Balkans that would please Russia, which had defeated the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of

1877-78, while also preserving some Ottoman territory in Europe.\textsuperscript{259} Soon after the Congress of Berlin, Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of Germany, encouraged France to occupy Tunis. In a meeting in Berlin January 1879, Bismarck told the French ambassador to Germany, Count Saint-Vallier, “I believe the Tunisian pear is ripe and it is time for you to pick it…. This African fruit… may well now be wasted or picked by someone else if you leave it too long on the tree.”\textsuperscript{260} Bismarck apparently did so largely in order to divert France’s energy away from any attempt to regain Alsace-Lorraine, which it lost to Prussia in 1870.\textsuperscript{261} Britain supported the idea, so as to avoid French interference with the British takeover of Cyprus.\textsuperscript{262}

In March 1881, France decided to act, using the pretext of a raid into French-held Algeria by a Tunisian tribe. In April, France invaded Tunisia, ostensibly to punish the tribe.\textsuperscript{263} Muhammad Sadiq Bey (r. 1859-1881), the autonomous ruler of Tunis, appealed to Sultan Abdülhamid II for help, and the sultan made plans to send a fleet to Tunis in May. When France learned of these plans, it delivered a warning which Istanbul could not afford to ignore. Instead, the sultan sent troops to the neighbouring province of Tripolitania, in order to indicate to the French that he would resist any attempt to spread their occupation beyond Tunisia. Abdülhamid could not rely on the army alone to guard the porous border with Tunisia; he decided to appeal to the people of Tripolitania in order to form a solid barrier against further French penetration. The sultan-caliph appealed to

\textsuperscript{262} Abun-Nasr, \textit{A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period}, 289.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 291.
the people in Islamic terms, through the mediation of Sufi shaykhs, who had networks of support they could draw upon. One such shaykh was Shaykh Zafir al-Madani, who had been living in Istanbul for a while, and whose role in North African political affairs will be examined below.

On 12 May 1881, the French signed the Treaty of Bardo with the Bey, ostensibly allowing him to maintain Tunisian autonomy, but placing the province under a de facto French protectorate. Control over Tunisian foreign affairs passed to France. Muhammad Sadiq Bey’s successor ‘Ali Bey signed the Treaty of al-Marsa, further expanding French powers over Tunisia. After Algeria, Tunisia was the first Muslim province of the Ottoman Empire to pass under Western control; it presaged the fate of Egypt (which was to be occupied by Britain in 1882), and, eventually, many other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, though, Sultan Abdülhamid was determined that the neighbouring province of Tripolitania remain in Ottoman hands. In subsequent years, Tripolitania and the other Libyan provinces (Benghazi and Fezzan) became the focus of Abdülhamid’s pan-Islamic policies. These policies were largely carried out through members of the Madaniyya and Sanusiyya Sufi orders.

The Shaykh, the Statesman and the Sultan: Zafir, Khayr al-Din and Abdülhamid


Shaykh Zafir b. Muhammad al-Madani (d. 1905) was born in Tripolitania. He played an important role in the Madaniyya *tariqa* during the lifetime of his father (the founder of the order) and initiated a future Maliki mufti of Tunis named Shaykh Qabadu into the order in the early 1830s.\footnote{Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, “The Islamic Influence on Khayr al-Din of Tunis” in Donald Presgrave Little, *Essays on Islamic Civilization: Presented to Niyazi Berkes* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 15.} Shaykh Zafir took over the leadership of the *tariqa* after his father’s death in 1847. In 1873, the British Consul General in Tunis, Richard Wood, noted in a report to Earl Granville, the foreign secretary, that the Sufi orders in Tunis “require… to be watched with greater vigilance,” since they have a “politico-religious character.”\footnote{FO CP 2621/17, Wood to Granville, 4 Oct. 1873, Reprinted in David Gillard (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print: Part I: From the Nineteenth Century to the First World War: Series B: The Near and Middle East, 1856-1914. Vol. 8: The Ottoman Empire in North Africa: The Suez Canal, Red Sea, and Tunisian Problems, 1859-1882* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1984), 382-84.} Of these orders, Wood sees the Darqawis to be “the most zealous, the most bigoted and the most… uncompromising” in their “unrelenting enmity to the Christians.” According to Wood, the aim of the Darqawiyya and other Sufi groups in Tunisia and elsewhere was, among other things, “the emancipation of the countries which have fallen under Christian rule.” Wood makes the supposition that the Sufis are receiving the support of the Ottoman government.\footnote{Idem.} It is quite likely that, when mentioning the Darqawiyya, Wood is referring to Shaykh Zafir and his followers. For one, Shaykh Zafir’s father Shaykh Muhammad had been a follower of the founder of the Darqawi *tariqa*, Mawlay al-‘Arabi, and the Madaniyya consequently acknowledged itself to be an offshoot of the Darqawiyya. Furthermore, today’s Madanis in Tunisia also claim that
Darqawi teachings were first brought to the area by Shaykh Zafir al-Madani’s followers.269

Shaykh Zafir achieved a prominent role in Ottoman politics in the Hamidian era largely thanks to the statesman Mahmud Nedim Paşa (1817-1876). In 1860, during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz I, Nedim Paşa was appointed governor of Tripoli, and remained in that position until 1867.270 Nedim believed that the ideology of Ottomanism that took shape during the years of the Tanzimat was driving a wedge between the sultan and his Muslim subjects, since it provided a source of legitimacy to the sultan outside Islam. This split could be countered, according to Nedim, through a “union of hearts” between the sultan and the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire. Such a union could only be based on Islam. Nedim did not trust the ulama, viewing some of them as fanatics. In order to facilitate the bond between ruler and people which he sought to promote, Nedim Paşa tried instead to build up relations with Sufi shaykhs, whose charisma and social capital he sought to harness for his cause. Thus, as governor of Tripoli, he formed a friendship with Shaykh Zafir.271 When Nedim was eventually promoted to the position of grand vizier in 1871, he invited Zafir to visit Istanbul, which the shaykh did. After Nedim Paşa became grand vizier once again in 1875, he once again invited Zafir to Istanbul.272 Zafir’s relationship with Nedim Paşa shows that the British were correct to some extent in thinking that North African Sufis were receiving state patronage. However, the

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relationship between Istanbul and the Sufis was to become much more important after the enthronement of Abdülhamid II.

Shaykh Zafir returned to the capital in early 1876, and was to remain there until his death. In Istanbul, he met Abdülhamid before the latter ascended to the throne. The shaykh was impressed by the prince and, at a time when Ottoman politics was in a state of flux, he correctly predicted that Abdülhamid would end up becoming sultan. Once Abdülhamid did rise to power, he built a zawiya for Shaykh Zafir near Yıldız Palace, and made him one of his senior advisers, along with another Arab Sufi leader, Shaykh Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi from Syria (d. 1909). He did this partially to give the Arabs a greater voice in the affairs of the empire, since they were underrepresented in other imperial institutions, whether it be the bureaucracy or the army. He chose Sufi shaykhs to fulfill this role because he believed that the Sufis could connect him to the people and convey his ideas to them.  

While some scholars have recently sought to minimise the role played by the Sufi shaykhs at Abdülhamid’s court and play down their political significance, the extent of Zafir’s influence with the sultan can be gauged by the appointment of his protégé Khayr al-Din (known in Turkish as Tunuslu Hayreddin Paşa) to the grand vizierate in 1879. Khayr al-Din, an Ottoman patriot and a firm believer in the compatibility of Islam and a


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European-style political order, offered a path to modernity that was different from that ultimately pursued by Abdülhamid, but one that the Sultan nevertheless briefly experimented with within limits set by himself.

As Khayr al-Din (ca. 1819-1890) says in his memoirs, written around 1888 and intended to be read by his children, he was of Circassian origin, but was separated from his parents at an early age. He spent his childhood in Istanbul and left for Tunis in 1839 or 1840 to work for Ahmad Bey (r. 1837-1855). During his first few years at Tunis, Khayr al-Din studied the Islamic sciences at the Bey’s palace. Khayr al-Din’s teacher at this time was Shaykh Qabadu, who, as mentioned above, had been initiated into the Madaniyya tariqa by Shaykh Zafir. Shaykh Qabadu was a worldly Sufi who, apart from his native Arabic, spoke Turkish and French. From 1839, he was in charge of formulating the humanities syllabus of future military officers in Tunis, and laid emphasis on Arabic and Islam. While Khayr al-Din was his student, Shaykh Qabadu initiated him into the Madaniyya order. This initiation would prove highly significant to Khayr al-Din’s later work.

In 1842, Khayr al-Din joined the Bey’s army. He quickly rose through the military ranks, becoming a major-general in 1855. While serving in the army, Khayr al-Din was sent to France by Ahmad Bey on a diplomatic mission in 1853, and remained there until 1857. Upon his return, he was named Minister of the Navy by the new Bey, Muhammad (r. 1855-1859). In 1861, after the proclamation of a constitution by the next Bey, Muhammad al-Sadiq (r. 1859-1882), Khayr al-Din became the speaker of the new

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Tunisian parliament, the Grand Elected Council, which had been established under the Tunisian constitution of the same year. In 1862, he married the daughter of the Tunisian prime minister, Mustafa Khaznadar (who served in this role from 1837 to 1873). Despite his new family relationship with Khaznadar, however, Khayr al-Din came to the conclusion that his father-in-law, as well as Muhammad Sadiq Bey, were using the parliament as a means of avoiding responsibility for their own “misdeeds,” such as excessive state indebtedness as a means of achieving a life of personal luxury. Thus, a few months after his marriage, he resigned both his political offices.

In 1864, a revolt broke out in Tunisia against the Turko-Circassian Ottoman elite of the province. According to Khayr al-Din, the Arab majority in the province was fed up with the Muhammad Sadiq Bey and Khaznadar’s misrule, and the rebellion spread all over Tunisia. Lacking the means to put down the rebellion, Sadiq expected the imminent fall of the capital, and even his palace. Nevertheless, the situation was resolved in favour of the Bey when Sultan Abdülaziz dispatched a fleet with soldiers who put down the revolt and, moreover, forced the Arabs of the province to pay a heavy fine to the Tunisian government.

In subsequent years, Khayr al-Din refused to accept political positions from Muhammad Sadiq Bey, in whom he had lost confidence, but did accept numerous diplomatic assignments from him. His trips on behalf of the Bey took Khayr al-Din to nine different European countries, which demonstrates the range of the Tunisian government’s contacts in Europe at the time. These trips allowed Khayr al-Din to conduct research on a subject of particular interest to him, namely “European civilization,” as

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well as the institutions of the Great Powers. Over the course of several years, he wrote in Arabic what he considered a “politico-administrative work,” entitled *Aqwam al-masalik fi ma‘rifat ahawal al-mamalik* (The Surest Path in the Knowledge of the Conditions of Kingdoms). In addition to his study of European life, which he mentions in his memoirs, Khayr al-Din was also influenced in this work by Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima* (written in 1377), which he had studied under Shaykh Zafir al-Madani’s disciple Shaykh Qabadu before embarking on his political and military careers. Khayr al-Din completed the book in 1867 and presented it to Muhammad Sadiq Bey. After a few months, the Bey and Khaznadar both approved it, and, in 1868, it was published by the Tunisian government press. In the same year, its introduction was translated into French under Khayr al-Din’s supervision and published in France.

In the French translation of *Aqwam al-masalik*, Khayr al-Din argues that, in the new era which was dawning on the world, it was imperative for different countries to learn from each other’s experiences in order to achieve similar goals of progress and development. In his view,

In our days, with the speed of transportation and the even greater speed of the transmission of ideas, it is necessary to consider the world with regard to nations as one single country inhabited by different races, in ever more frequent contact between

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281 Wasti, “A Note on Tunuslu Hayreddin Paşa,” 5.
themselves, having identical interests to satisfy and competing, albeit separately, to the common advantage.\footnote{Ibid., 3-4.}

Thus, Khayr al-Din believed that relations between states should be cordial rather than antagonistic, that international competition should be channelled toward “the common advantage;” he was, one may argue, ahead of his time in thinking that the world had already become “one single country.” Thus, in his view, there was nothing wrong for Muslim countries to learn from the experiences of “others, particularly those that are around and near us.”\footnote{Ibid., 3.} By these “others,” Khayr al-Din means the European powers that were located near Tunisia and had become quite influential there and, in particular, France, which Khayr al-Din knew well from his numerous trips there and through knowledge of the French language.

However, Khayr al-Din notes “regretfully” that the classes one would traditionally look to for political guidance in the Islamic world, that is, the statesmen and the \textit{ulama}, had fallen behind the times and had nothing new to offer to invigorate their countries. According to him, the majority of the \textit{ulama} of his day had failed in their duty to develop an “intelligent” understanding of the Shari‘a, suitable for the modern age. The \textit{ulama} were making little effort to learn about the conditions of either their country or other countries, and thus lacked the crucial knowledge of the socio-economic context within which to apply their rulings. He finds it unacceptable that “those who are meant to be the doctors of the nation are unaware of the nature of the disease.” Similarly, in Khayr al-Din’s view, among “Muslim statesmen” there were some who were as ignorant as the \textit{ulama}, and others who only pretended to be ignorant so that they could maintain their
“despotism.” These are certainly bold words in a book whose very first readers were two “Muslim statesmen,” Muhammad Sadiq Bey and his prime minister, Mustafa Khaznadar. The fact that they allowed the book to be published by the Tunisian government press despite this sharp criticism directed at them is indicative of the esteem in which they held Khayr al-Din, even though he evidently did not have much respect for them.

Khayr al-Din’s aim in writing his book was to give the ulama the tools they needed in order to perform what he considered to be their public role, and also to “return to the right path the misguided, whether statesmen or simple individuals” by explaining to them how to run “our affairs at home and abroad” and by inspiring in them the desire to collect statistical and other information useful to the running of a state. Khayr al-Din believes that achieving this goal would be beneficial “for the future of Islam.” In other words, he thought that it was highly undesirable for Muslims, whether in Tunisia or elsewhere, to close themselves off from the rest of the world and especially from the “politico-administrative” reforms being carried out by the European powers. It was his view instead that those European reforms which were “in conformity with or at least not contrary to” the Shari‘a should be adopted in Muslim lands, in order “to enable us to re-conquer that which we have lost and to extricate us from our present condition.” By “that which we have lost,” Khayr al-Din means not territorial losses, but rather the loss of a pre-eminent position once enjoyed by Muslim powers in the world, when the Muslims had been leaders in “the sciences, progress and national prosperity.”

285 Ibid., 4.

286 Ibid., 5-6.
In presenting his argument for political reforms in Muslim states, Khayr al-Din counters the views of those who believed in the impermissibility of appropriating ideas or institutions from non-Muslims. Khayr al-Din calls such people “misguided Muslims,” and believes they were making “the greatest of errors.” In Khayr al-Din’s view, “if that which comes from outside [the Muslim world] is good and is in conformance with reason, particularly if it is something which had already existed among us and was borrowed from us [by non-Muslims], not only is there no reason to repel it and neglect it but, on the contrary, there is an obligation to recover it and profit by it.” According to Khayr al-Din, the Europeans, by contrast, “do not cease to borrow from foreigners, without distinction of race or religion, that which is good in itself, and have arrived, through this conduct, at… the prosperity which is seen today.” Khayr al-Din appeals to both reason and Islamic precedents in order to justify his stance. He argues that “every individual of good sense, before opposing himself to an innovation, must weigh it with impartiality and examine with the insightful eyes of intelligence, and if he finds it to be good, he must adopt and apply it, whether its author is a believer or not.” In addition to being guided by “reason,” “intelligence” and “insight,” a Muslim should remember that “it is one of the principles of our belief that one should take science where it is found.” The authorities that Khayr al-Din cites in this regard include the Caliph ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), and the theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), along with ulama of the Maliki and Hanafi schools.\(^\text{287}\) The choice of these two particular schools of law on the part of the author is significant, since most of the Arabs of Tunisia followed the juridical

\(^{287}\) Ibid., 8-9.
opinions of the Maliki school, whereas members of the Turko-Circassian elite in Tunis followed the Hanafi school.  

Furthermore, Khayr al-Din points out that those Muslims (presumably including both ulama and statesmen) who were “disdainful” of Europe and refused to adopt European institutions, nevertheless were happy to consume European products. In fact, “their clothing, their furniture, their arms, their war materiel and a thousand other things necessary to life do not come except from abroad.” Khayr al-Din calls this dependency on Europe “humiliating,” because “the need to resort to foreign countries for objects of the greatest necessity demonstrates the backward state of the crafts in our country.” He also considers it “anti-economical,” since “it favours foreign industry to the detriment of national industry, which cannot engage in the processing of domestic products; this processing is one of the principal sources of public wealth.” The problem of dependency on foreign, that is, European goods, is not simply an economic one, but also a political one, according to the author. He believes that “the necessity for one state to resort constantly to another is an obstacle to independence and a source of weakness, particularly if this necessity is connected to arms and war materiel.” Thus, Khayr al-Din realised that in an industrial age, avoiding dependency on the industrialised powers was impossible without Tunisia’s itself undergoing some measure of industrialisation.

In Khayr al-Din’s view, adopting European institutions was vital precisely so that Muslim lands would not continue falling prey to European powers, whereas following the wishes of those Muslim thinkers who wanted to avoid all non-Islamic ideas would expose

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more Muslim domains to European colonisation. This is because, according to Khayr al-Din,

We only possess, in our current state, primary products. In effect, in our country, animal husbandman, the cotton cultivator and the silk farmer spend the whole year in painful labour, and finish by selling their raw produce at low prices to the Europeans who, in short order, resell it to them, transformed by their industry, at a price ten times as high.290

The reason behind this vast disparity in economic power between Europe and the Muslim countries lies, according to Khayr al-Din, in “the superiority and the progress of the European in knowledge, whose development is favoured by political institutions based on justice and liberty.”291 Khayr al-Din is convinced that “it is the law of Providence that justice, good administration and good political institutions are the causes of an increase in wealth, in population, and in wellbeing in general.” For Khayr al-Din, this is a “truth,” demonstrated by “Muslim and other historians.” The author supports himself with a hadith according to which the Prophet Muhammad said that “Justice is the glory of the faith: in it, the sovereign finds his greatness, and the nation finds its strength.”292 These statements are not only an expression of admiration for European administration on the part of Khayr al-Din, but also a strong condemnation of the state of affairs then prevalent in Tunisia.

The chief institution that Khayr al-Din proposes in his book is a strong constitution. He cites the French politician and historian Adolphe Thiers, who was prime minister briefly in 1836 and again in 1840, as saying that “the government of one person is always dangerous.” He finds Thiers’s work to be “the most beautiful historical work of

290 Ibid., 10-11.
291 Idem.
292 Ibid., 14.
our epoch.”293 In particular, Khayr al-Din admires the role of European parliaments and believes that the Ottomans ought to have one as well. He argues that a constitutional, parliamentary form of government would be the best realisation of the principles of the Shari‘a in his times.

Khayr al-Din attempts to demonstrate the need to apply the Shari‘a by reminding his readers of the earthly glories achieved by the Islamic caliphate in its early days. According to him, the Muslims had been at their best in the days of the four rightly guided caliphs. At that time, “a wise administration was in place under vigilant leaders, based on [the Shari‘a] and conforming to the principles of justice.”294 The Muslim society of those days was, according to Khayr al-Din, characterised by “prosperity, wealth and military power, flowing from justice and concord, from the integrity of magistrates in public administration, from the protection accorded to the letters, to the arts and to the sciences, all of which are things that the Europeans have almost always borrowed from us.”295

After this golden age, however, the Muslim territories split up into rival empires and eventually into small rival principalities, which led to the “decadence” of Muslim lands. According to the author, it was the Ottoman dynasty which began restoring the Muslims to their former glory, particularly under Sultan Süleyman I the Lawgiver (r. 1520-1566).296 It is noteworthy that Khayr al-Din chose Sultan Süleyman as the starting point of a Muslim upsurge, rather than Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444-1446; 1451-1481), who conquered Constantinople from the Byzantines, or Selim I the Stern (r. 1512-

293 Ibid., 27-28.
294 Ibid., 27-29.
295 Ibid., 31.
296 Ibid., 32-33.
1520), who was the first Ottoman sultan to claim the caliphate. It was under Süleyman I that the Ottomans first conquered Tunis, in 1534. Incidentally, the conquest was carried out by Khayr al-Din’s namesake, Hayreddin Barbarossa (ca. 1478-1546). 297 According to Khayr al-Din, the whole Ottoman dynasty was characterised by “their good administration, their wise policies, their respect for the law, and their vigilance in protecting the rights of [their] subjects,” and also by “their surprising conquests, which could only be compared to those of the first caliphs.” However, of all the Ottoman sultans, Süleyman stood out the most for Khayr al-Din because of his law code (issued ca. 1540), which collected and complemented the laws issued by previous Ottoman sultans.298

According to Khayr al-Din, under Süleyman, “the administration of the empire [was] placed under the care of the ulama and ministers.” The ministers and the ulama had the right to protest if they thought the sultan was not ruling properly, since “sovereignty is based on politico-religious law which… orders the leader to take counsel before acting and formally prescribes for everyone to impede evil.” According to the code, as understood by Khayr al-Din, the ulama and the ministers could take matters into their hands if the sultan did not wish to listen to their reproaches. In this case, they could complain to the military authorities, who had the right to depose a sultan deemed by the civil and religious authorities to be ruling unjustly. Once the unjust sultan had been removed, the ulama and ministers would then “elect in his place another member of the ruling family.” Khayr al-Din relates these laws to his own day by saying that “according

298 Caroline Finkel, Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923 (New York: John Murray, 2006), 146.
to the prescriptions and the spirit of this code, the political role of the *ulama* and the ministers is the same as that played today, in the constitutional governments of Europe, by chambers of representatives." Thus, Khayr al-Din comes to the conclusion that representative institutions are not all a European invention, but are rather part of the forgotten heritage of the Muslims themselves. Moreover, by singling out Sultan Süleyman I for his praise and then praising the checks and balances he placed on his own authority, Khayr al-Din is advocating constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire of his own time, albeit without seeming like a revolutionary. As we shall see below, his ideas on this score were quite different from those of Sultan Abdülhamid.

Khayr al-Din does also praise more recent Ottoman sultans: he says that the Ottoman Empire would have come to “complete ruin,” had it not been for Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839), for abolishing the Janissary corps in 1826); Abdülmecid I (r. 1839-1861), for beginning the *Tanzimat* reforms in 1856); and Abdülaziz I (ruling at the time the book was written), for continuing his brother Abdülmecid’s reforms. According to Khayr al-Din,

> The liberal path which these three sovereigns embarked on and the salutary reforms which they undertook, have substantially improved the affairs of the empire and increased the happiness of [its] subjects, so that every impartial man who compares the current state of things with the one preceding these reforms will be forced to recognise that they have produced good results.

Nevertheless, many subjects of Sultan Abdülaziz, both Muslims and non-Muslims, were unhappy with the state of affairs in the Ottoman Empire at the time that Khayr al-Din was

300 Ibid., 36.
301 Ibid., 38.
writing his book. Their main demand was the establishment “an assembly composed of members elected by the entire nation.” In a very bold statement, Khayr al-Din asserts that “we approve of these demands in principle.” Here, Khayr al-Din is not merely challenging the political actions of the Bey of Tunis or his prime minister; he is challenging, to some extent, Sultan Abdülaziz himself. He does so with one important proviso, however. Khayr al-Din fears that allowing non-Muslims to sit in parliament alongside Muslims may lead to greater demands for autonomy on the part of the non-Muslim provinces of the empire since,

After having obtained their present liberties, they have not given any proof of devotion to and affection for the empire and… on the contrary, they have shown tendencies to come closer to people of the same race and religion as themselves, looking for every occasion to proclaim themselves oppressed, and even fomenting partial revolts, helped in this by the incessant suggestions of several foreign governments.

Thus, in Khayr al-Din’s view, a democratic political system should only be established in the Ottoman Empire after a consensus arises among Ottoman Muslims and non-Muslims about the need to maintain the territorial integrity of the empire. Another problem which must be considered before establishing a parliament, according to Khayr al-Din, is that “the subjects of the Ottoman government are divided into several races, which differ by religion, language and mores; most do not know the official language [that is, Ottoman

302 Ibid., 39.
303 Idem.
304 Ibid., 39-40. Here, the author is referring to the Christian Ottoman principalities of the Balkans, such as Serbia and Montenegro, which occasionally revolted against Ottoman suzerainty during the Tanzimat era, even after winning greater autonomy from Istanbul. See Finkel, Ottoman’s Dream, 464-65. According to Finkel, “concessions to non-Muslims. [during the Tanzimat era]… signally failed to bear the anticipated fruit of strengthening their loyalty to the Ottoman state…. Nor did the new regulations governing the provincial administration satisfy them.”
Nevertheless, Khayr al-Din believes that, once these practical difficulties are overcome, and, more importantly, once Ottoman Christians have demonstrated their loyalty to the state, a constitutional system, one in which “any man having the requisite capacities” can come to power or gain important positions, should be established in the Empire.

Khayr al-Din tackles at length an argument that may be raised against his proposals, which is that of “the ignorance and incapacity of the masses” to handle political responsibility. Khayr al-Din responds by saying that “when other nations which, thanks to their institutions, have arrived at the highest point of civilisation, began their upward movement, the masses there were more backward than ours are now.” In other words, if the ordinary, uneducated Frenchman of the 18th century could handle political freedom, then so could an ordinary, uneducated Ottoman of the 19th century. Khayr al-Din claims that the glorious past achievements of the Muslims would enable the Ottomans of his day to “walk faster than anyone else on the path of progress,” once they were granted institutions that are “truly liberal.”

The “truly liberal” political system envisaged by Khayr al-Din is one which would allow its citizens “which consists of the recognised right of all citizens to dispose of their persons and their goods as they wish, to enjoy equality before the law and complete security for their persons, their wealth and their honour.” This type of civil liberty, according to Khayr al-Din, exists everywhere in Europe, except Russia and the Papal States. He also believes that citizens ought to be given “political liberty,” which means “the right… to participate in political affairs and to express their opinions on what

305 Général Khérédine, Réformes necessaries aux États musulmans, 40-41.
306 Idem.
307 Ibid., 54.
best suits the interests of the nation.” Khayr al-Din believes that the elected representatives of the people should have the right “to discuss and vote on laws and taxes.” He also thinks that citizens should have other rights that he admires in Europe, namely the “freedom of assembly,” “the freedom of the press,” and the right “to address petitions” to government bodies.\(^{308}\)

Three generalizations can be made about Khayr al-Din’s work, Aqwam al-masalik. Firstly, it demonstrates his belief in an Islamic modernity. He rejects out of hand any arguments that claim that all institutions in the Muslim world should have Islamic roots in order to be legitimate. Instead, he sees nothing wrong in appropriating beneficial knowledge from the Europeans, just as they had appropriated knowledge from the Muslim world in centuries past. Secondly, he believes that European-style modernity, with all its accompanying freedoms, is fully compatible with Islam. Adopting the institutions of liberal modernity, such as a constitution or a parliament, or a free press, would, in his view, not be religiously dangerous for Muslims. On the contrary, it was a religious obligation, in his view, for Muslims to adopt these, because that is the way in which they could make material progress and regain their self-sufficiency. Thirdly, Khayr al-Din emerges as a political thinker who is loyal to the Ottoman Empire, despite seeing some faults in its current political organisation. This loyalty was to serve him well in his further career.

Between 1862 and 1869, the Tunisian public debt rose from zero to 240 million Tunisian piastres (riyals). The government under Mustafa Khaznadar had borrowed this money from different European countries at an annual interest rate of 12 percent to 15 percent. Khayr al-Din attributed this policy to Khaznadar’s “disastrous and immoral

\(^{308}\) Ibid., 70-72.
administration.” Eventually, debt repayment placed such a heavy burden on the Tunisian treasury that it could no longer afford to pay “the Bey’s family, nor the employees, nor the army, nor the interest on the debt.” As a result, France, supported by Italy and Britain, demanded in 1869 that a commission be set up to reorganise Tunisian finances. The commission would be made up of representatives of these European powers, but would be headed by a Tunisian. Muhammad Sadiq Bey asked Khayr al-Din to become president of the commission and, despite his disagreements with the Bey and Khaznadar, Khayr al-Din accepted this post, which carried a ministerial rank in the Tunisian cabinet.309 It seems that, by giving Khayr al-Din this responsibility, the Bey was giving him the opportunity to put into practice some of the reforms that he had envisaged in his book *Aqwam al-masalik*.

In 1871, Khayr al-Din was sent to Istanbul by Muhammad Sadiq Bey to negotiate a new decree defining the status of Tunisia. According to Khayr al-Din, relations between Tunis and Istanbul had not been well defined, and the ambiguity gave rise to European ambitions with regard to the province. The Bey chose Khayr al-Din because he was “known in Tunis as the most energetic defender of the idea of attaching the Regency to the Turkish Empire.” In the end, though, Khayr al-Din, Fuad Paşa (the Ottoman grand vizier) and Ali Paşa (the Ottoman foreign minister) negotiated an imperial decree which recognised a remarkable degree of Tunisian autonomy. The Bey also retained the hereditary right to rule over Tunisia, as long as he recognised the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan and governed according to “fixed laws” which guaranteed the welfare of the people.310 Khayr al-Din had thus succeeded in placing legal impediments to the kind

310 Ibid., 24-26.
of “disastrous” and “despotic” political and economic policies that the Bey and his prime minister Khaznadar had, in his view, been following.

In 1873, the Bey decided to make a complete break with Khaznadar and placed all his bets, for the time being, on Khayr al-Din. Khayr al-Din became the prime minister of Tunisia, a post he was to hold until 1877, while Khaznadar was placed under house arrest, where he remained until his death in 1878. As prime minister of Tunisia, Khayr al-Din undertook profound modernising reforms of the state, which he found to be in a shambles when he came to power. His first task was to reduce taxes, in order to reignite “the love of work in the population.” This policy succeeded so well that he was able to increase government revenue while reducing taxes, and did not have to resort to new debts. The countryside especially benefited from his policies, with land under cultivation increasing from 60,000 hectares to a million hectares in the four years of his administration. By encouraging the cultivation of commercial crops like dates and olives, Khayr al-Din started integrating rural Tunisians into the world economy. Attacks by Bedouin tribes were reduced through a carrot-and-stick approach: on the one hand, the reduction in taxes made peaceful animal husbandry more profitable; on the other, the Tunisian authorities became more severe towards tribes accused of banditry. According to Khayr al-Din, the countryside became so safe during his administration that women could go alone “from village to village without fear.”

In the city of Tunis, Khayr al-Din had the streets paved, and built another symbol of modernity: two prisons, containing baths and mosques for the prisoners. This signified both the increasing power of the state with regard to the subject, but also the modern idea

that even prisoners had certain inalienable rights. Khayr al-Din had primary schools expanded, and founded the Sadiki College (similar to the lyceum found in some European countries such as France) in 1875. The school had 150 students, who received “solid instruction” in Arabic, the Islamic sciences, “different modern sciences,” as well as other languages important for Tunisia, namely Turkish, French and Italian. Khayr al-Din opened a public library on European lines, to which he personally donated 1,100 manuscripts. Under Khayr al-Din, the government also started supervising the quality of instruction at al-Zaytuna Mosque, one of the Muslim world’s most ancient seats of religious learning.  

Despite all of these attempts at modernisation, Khayr al-Din lacked the authority to undertake the reforms that were the dearest to him, that is, to modify the political system and introduce the rule of law, which, as we see in his book *Aqwam al-masalik*, he passionately believed in. As noted above, the imperial decree which confirmed Tunisian autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in 1871, had done so with the condition that the Bey rule through “fixed laws” in the interests of the common people. Khayr al-Din reminded the Bey of his obligation to introduce these laws numerous times, and suggested that the Bey allow him to draft these laws himself. The Bey, however, refused flatly, and the Ottoman government did nothing to bring the Bey into line. Thus, Khayr al-Din found himself virtually alone in advocating legal reform and closer relations with Istanbul. Meanwhile, Mustafa b. Isma‘il (ca. 1850-1887), a friend of the Bey and an otherwise “unknown young man, as… ignorant as he was ambitious and corrupt,” started lobbying the Bey for the removal of Khayr al-Din from power. In this, Mustafa b. Isma‘il was

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313 Ibid., 36-37.
supported by the French consul, who was worried about an improvement in relations between Tunis and Istanbul.\textsuperscript{314}

Khayr al-Din’s assessment of the French position is confirmed not only by subsequent events, but also by British diplomatic documents. According to a British Foreign Office memorandum of 1874, the French “have desired to see the Bey independent of the Sultan” since their conquest of Algeria in 1830, and France was very unhappy at the Ottoman imperial decree granted to the Bey (through Khayr al-Din) in 1871.\textsuperscript{315}

French machinations were exacerbated when the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 broke out in April 1877. The imperial decree of 1871 confirming Tunisian autonomy had also obliged Tunisia to supply the Ottomans with troops in case of war. Thus, when war broke out with Russia over the rights of Balkan Christians, Istanbul asked Tunis for troops. According to Khayr al-Din, the Bey wanted to refuse the request without explanation, whereas Khayr al-Din’s cabinet wanted to send a more diplomatic refusal, citing “the precarious state of [Tunisia’s] finances and the insufficiency of its army.” However, Khayr al-Din, as the main Tunisian negotiator behind the decree, felt that a complete refusal would be unfair and contrary to “my religious sentiments [and] my political convictions.” Not finding the required support within his own cabinet, Khayr al-Din asked the Bey to convene an extraordinary council of 100 members, made up of “high officials, ulama and notables.” Khayr al-Din recognised that Tunisia could not send any troops to the front, but he did persuade the extraordinary council to recommend raising funds among the public for the Ottoman war effort. As a result, 1.7 million French

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 39-40.
francs was raised in Tunisia and sent to Istanbul, along with several hundred horses and mules, before the end of Khayr al-Din’s administration in July 1877. Khayr al-Din’s efforts to help the Ottoman Empire in the war worried France, and, according to Khayr al-Din, the French, working with Mustafa b. Isma‘il, persuaded the Bey to turn against him. The Bey’s newly “hostile attitude” forced Khayr al-Din to offer his resignation.316

Khayr al-Din’s resignation came on 21 July 1877. A few days later, on 25 July, he wrote a letter to Shaykh Zafir al-Madani, who was the head of the Madaniyya tariqa to which Khayr al-Din belonged and, as we have seen, was also Sultan Abdülhamid’s trusted adviser. In his letter, he informs Shaykh Zafir that “the vali of Tunis,” that is, the “governor” (the official Ottoman title for the Bey), had removed him from power (idare-i hukümet-i tunusiyye), and complains about the influence of Genç (that is, “young”) Mustafa (meaning Mustafa b. Isma‘il as opposed to Mustafa Khaznadar).317 Khayr al-Din’s political career seemed to be over, and his hope for redress now lay with his tariqa, which, as he well knew, had considerable influence at the imperial court in Istanbul. Khayr al-Din did not have to wait long for a response. Shaykh Zafir, using his direct access to Sultan Abdülhamid, gave the Sultan a copy of Khayr al-Din’s book, Aqwam al-masalik.318 Abdülhamid was deeply impressed with Khayr al-Din’s book, combining as it did a deep reverence for Islam and its traditions with a thirst for modernity and justice. The Sultan himself shared these ideals although he did not share Khayr al-Din’s enthusiasm for constitutionalism. Despite this disagreement, Abdülhamid decided that he could use someone of Khayr al-Din’s dedication and intellectual prowess in Istanbul.

317 BOA, Y.EE., 80/22, 14 Rajab 1294 (25 July 1877).
On 26 August 1879, about a year after Khayr al-Din sent his letter to Shaykh Zafir, the former received a telegram from Hamdi, Sultan Abdülhamid’s First Chamberlain. Addressed, in highly respectful French, to “His Excellency General Haïreddin Pasha,” the telegram informs Khayr al-Din that “Méhémet Zaphr Efendi,” that is, Shaykh Zafir, had “presented to His Imperial Majesty the Sultan some works of Your Excellency,” and that the Sultan “expressed his complete satisfaction” with Khayr al-Din’s book. As a result, Hamdi conveys to Khayr al-Din the Sultan’s “order to present yourself on leave in Constantinople to spend some time there.”

On 6 September, Hamdi sent Khayr al-Din a follow-up telegram, reminding him that Abdülhamid was waiting for him. The first telegram makes it clear to Khayr al-Din how the Sultan came to be interested in him. It is not because of his role in negotiations with the Ottoman government on behalf of Tunis (in 1871), nor because of his recent prime ministership of Tunis, but rather because of the good offices of Shaykh Zafir, and the Sultan’s approval of his book which, as we saw above, promotes Islamic modernism.

Having received Muhammad Sadiq Bey’s permission to depart, Khayr al-Din arrived in Istanbul on 21 September 1878. Sultan Abdülhamid insisted on seeing him the day of his arrival, talked to him “for a very long time,” and invited him to dine with him at the Yıldız Palace. He then sent an imperial boat to Tunis to fetch Khayr al-Din’s family, which shows that the initial favourable impression of Khayr al-Din the Sultan had formed by reading his book was confirmed during their first meeting, and Abdülhamid now decided to keep him in Istanbul longer than merely “some time,” as

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322 Khérédine Pacha, “À mes enfants,” 52.
indicated in the telegram. Hence, on 1 October, the Sultan named Khayr al-Din a minister without portfolio. Khayr al-Din tried to tell various Ottoman officials that he wanted to return to Tunis and was not prepared for a political career in Istanbul, but his protests fell on deaf ears. On 4 December 1878, a few days after Khayr al-Din’s family arrived in Istanbul, the Sultan, despite “all my objections and all my prayers,” appointed him Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire.323

A detailed examination of Khayr al-Din’s term as grand vizier is beyond the scope of this chapter. Khayr al-Din accepted the office at a time when the Ottoman Empire was facing severe difficulties: it had just lost the war with Russia and Russian troops were still occupying part of the Empire, there were tensions in Ottoman relations with Britain and Austria, as well as Persia on the east, and “380,000 immigrants [that is, refugees from the Balkans] without resources inundated the capital.”324 During his short tenure as grand vizier, Khayr al-Din achieved peaceful resolutions of conflicts with Russia, Austria and Persia. He conducted negotiations with Greece regarding the border between it and the Ottoman Empire. He also suggested that Khedive Isma‘il (r. 1863-1879) be dismissed for defaulting on Egypt’s debts to the European powers. Sultan Abdülhamid agreed, and had Isma‘il replaced with his son Tawfiq. Khayr al-Din introduced fiscal reforms, removing the worthless paper currency, the kaime, from circulation, and he also reformed the judiciary. He managed to find new homes for the above-mentioned refugees who had arrived in Istanbul as a result of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78. Despite his achievements, or perhaps because of them, he made many enemies among the Sultan’s circle. He wrote to Shaykh Zafir that “most of the courtiers

323 Ibid., 52-54.
324 Idem.
are trying to render me unsuccessful.” When the Sultan refused to accept Khayr al-Din’s new proposals for government reform, the latter resigned from office on 29 July 1879. Thus, Khayr al-Din was the kind of committed reformer that he had aspired to be from the time he wrote *Aqwam al-mamalik*. He was also a devoted Muslim, committed to the Madaniyya order and communicating regularly with Shaykh Zafr. These two traits: Islamic religiosity combined with reformism and modernism, were shared by Khayr al-Din and Abdülhamid. Where the two differed, however, was in the mode of reform and their ultimate goals. For Khayr al-Din, the path to justice lay through constitutionalism and an end to arbitrary rule by the authorities, up to and including the sultan. The example that Khayr al-Din looked up to in particular was his main adversary, France. Abdülhamid, on the other hand, believed in centralising power in the hands of the monarch, and was deeply suspicious of constitutionalism. In his memoirs, he calls the Ottoman constitutional experiment of 1876 “frightful” and “a farce.” In the Sultan’s view, his subjects were simply not ready for democratic governance. According to him, differences of faith, ethnicity and language among the diverse inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire meant that a parliamentary regime would lead to chaos, as it did, in his view, in Austria-Hungary. Unlike France or Britain with their constitutional governments, Abdülhamid admired the German model of strong government. Both models provided paths to modernity, but Abdülhamid sought a path which would leave him unquestionably in charge.

327 Ibid., 88-89.
Although he was not inclined to share power with him in Istanbul, Abdülhamid believed that Khayr al-Din could be beneficial as ruler of Tunisia, particularly at a time when the province was becoming the object of increasing French interest. Following the French takeover of Tunis in the spring of 1871, Shaykh Zafir and the Madanis, including Khayr al-Din, acquired a new significance. As a tariqa based in North Africa, the Madaniyya was in a position to stir up public opinion amongst the Muslims of the region not only against the French invasion, but also against colonialism in general. Abdülhamid was forced to give up the idea of sending Khayr al-Din himself back to Tunisia, since France promised to stop him from disembarking if he did make the journey back. Instead, a few days before the Treaty of Bardo was signed (in 1881), the Sultan sent Shaykh Zafir to Algeria and Tunisia, carrying a letter from the Ottoman şeyhülislam to the leaders of tribes, whose names had been supplied to him by Khayr al-Din – or so the French believed.

Ottoman documents show that Shaykh Zafir’s brother and a high-ranking member of the Madaniyya, Shaykh Hamza, was trying to arouse public opinion in Tripoli against the French in November 1882. He did so largely among refugees from Tunisia, whom he was persuading not to go back and fight what the Ottomans knew to be a lost war in Tunis, but instead to stay in Tripolitania and defend it against a possible French invasion. Evidently, Shaykh Zafir and Shaykh Hamza’s activity in North Africa worried the French considerably. Thus, the head dragoman of the French embassy,

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331 BOA, Y.A.HUS., 172/5, 10 Muharram 1300 (21 Nov. 1882).
Longeville, met Shaykh Zafir and Shaykh Hamza to discuss Tunisian politics with them; the French ambassador was happy with the results of the meeting,\textsuperscript{333} which indicates that the Ottomans had to appear conciliatory, just as they had with the issue of sending Khayr al-Din back to Tunisia. Although Shaykh Zafir did not enjoy a very wide following among the Bedouin,\textsuperscript{334} the French still enumerated at least 17 Madani zawiyas in Tripolitania. It was through these zawiyas that the Madanis preached loyalty to the “Caliph and head of the religion,” that is, Abdülhamid, and encouraged the inhabitants of the province to oppose any attempts by Europeans to conquer them.\textsuperscript{335}

The role of the Madaniyya in defence and foreign policy was reflected in their increasing profile in the capital. In 1877-78, the Ottoman treasury financed the construction of a new Madaniyya zawiya in Istanbul, as well as family quarters (harem) for Shaykh Zafir.\textsuperscript{336} By 1890, Shaykh Zafir’s son-in-law Ahmad Efendi had become a member of the City Council (Şehremneti Meclis).\textsuperscript{337} Shaykh Hamza received a Haremeyn-i Muhtarameyn medal for his services and, in 1891, it was raised to a higher degree.\textsuperscript{338} The Egyptian journalist al-Muwaylihi (d. 1906) reports in 1895 in \textit{al-Muqattam} that Abdülhamid had joined Shaykh Zafir’s tarīqa and pledged his allegiance to him. According to Muwayhili, Zafir would perform religious rituals at Yıldız Palace, with the Sultan in attendance. He also reports, in shocked tones, that “the Shaykh’s sons say that the Sultan even kissed the Shaykh’s hand on one occasion.” Muwayhili is

\textsuperscript{333} BOA, Y.E.E., 103/19, 3 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1300 (1 Jan. 1883).
\textsuperscript{336} BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 38/69, 29 Jumadi al-Awwal 1304 (23 Feb. 1887); BOA, Y.PRK.MM, 1/20, 28 Safar 1305 (14 Nov. 1887); BOA, Y.PRK.MM, 1/21, 2 Sha‘ban 1305 (14 Apr. 1888).
\textsuperscript{337} BOA, Y.MTV, 44/28, 27 Dhu al-Qa‘da 1307 (15 July 1890);
\textsuperscript{338} BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK., 23/57, 27 Muharram 1309 (1 Sept. 1891).
completely opposed to such a gesture, since, in his view, “the Caliph is the head of Muhammad’s community; no person, religious or secular, can be above him.”  

Meanwhile, Shaykh Zafir’s zawiya in the Tripolitanian town of Misrata was repaired by the provincial government at the Sultan’s own order in 1899. By 1904, Zafir’s son Husayn Zafir Bey had become a member of the Istanbul City Council.

Why, then, was Sultan Abdülhamid so devoted to Shaykh Zafir? The answer seems to lie in the fact that, of all the Sufi tariqas active in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Abdülhamid, it was the Madanis that showed the greatest commitments to the territorial integrity of the empire and to the promotion of Abdülhamid as caliph. The caliphate and the integrity of the empire were central themes in Abdülhamid’s rule, and the alignment of the Madaniyya’s activities with those themes earned them an unparalleled place in the heart of the Sultan.

The Sultan and the Sanusiyya

Although the Madaniyya exerted their best efforts in Tripolitania in order to keep the province free of French control, it eventually became clear that the danger to Ottoman rule there lay not so much in France as in Italy. As mentioned above, the French were quite concerned about the potential of the Madaniyya to harm their newly acquired position in Tunisia. France sought to reassure Britain as early as July 1881 that it did not

341 BOA, Y.MTV. 259/74, 9 Safar 1322 (25 Apr. 1904).
seek to occupy Tripolitania. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, the French foreign minister, writes in a memorandum to the French ambassador in London that “France does not… have any designs on Tripolitania; and all it asks for is that this province does not start an explosion of Muslim fanaticism, which could set fire to Tunisia, and eventually reach Algeria…”

Despite these French assurances, the Ottomans sent reinforcements of 10,000 troops to Tripolitania. The Ottoman Empire, anxious to avoid a wider conflict with France, assured the latter that these troops had been dispatched there solely for the maintenance of domestic order. Nevertheless, France persisted in fearing what it saw as nefarious Islamic designs against its North African possessions. Saint-Hilaire, in a memorandum to the French ambassadors in the major European capitals, speaks of “a vast plan” on the part of “the Ottoman government,” aimed at “throwing us back out of Africa, by unleashing against us the religious passions of the Muslim population.” In his view, this Ottoman policy places “obstacles” to “our civilising expansion” (notre expansion civilisatrice). Saint-Hilaire believes that the rise in Islamic consciousness to which “the populations of Islam” are “falling prey” is dangerous to “the whole civilised world.” On the same day, however, Sultan Abdülhamid received the French chargé d’affaires in Istanbul and reassured him that “all efforts at agitation” against France in

343 Montholon to Saint-Hilaire, 21 July 1881. Reprinted in ibid., 77.
Tripolitania would be stopped by the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{346} As we saw above based on evidence from Ottoman documents, however, Shaykh Zafir’s brother, Shaykh Hamza, was still conducting a propaganda campaign against France more than a year after the Sultan’s assurance that such agitation would stop. Clearly, the sultan did not trust France at this point to stay out of Tripolitania, and resorted to the Madanis to try to maintain Ottoman territorial integrity.

The Madanis, however, had a limited range of tools at their disposal. They had no army, and did not command the allegiance of the desert tribes. All they could do is use the voice of persuasion and convey the Sultan’s messages. Julia Clancy-Smith argues that the mere rumour of an impending intervention in Tunisia by Sultan Abdülhamid was a powerful mobilising force. Nevertheless, an anti-colonial movement could not survive long on rumours alone.\textsuperscript{347} As a result, Abdülhamid now turned to the Sanusiyya tariqa for assistance. Relations between the Sanusis and the Ottoman state had existed as far back as 1860. Abdülhamid now sought to renew these ties, using the Madanis as go-betweens. He may in fact have believed that the Sanusis were Shadhilis like the Madaniyya and was, to some degree, under the authority of Shaykh Zafir al-Madani.\textsuperscript{348}

In March 1886, the Ottoman governor of Cyrenaica, Musa Kazım Paşa, reported that Shaykh Muhammad al-Mahdi was expressing his loyalty to the Sultan and was sending a representative named ‘Abd al-Rahim to Istanbul.\textsuperscript{349} In 1887, Abdülhamid dispatched an officer of Syrian origin named Sadiq al-Mu’ayyad to return the visit. Al-


\textsuperscript{348} Le Gall, “The Ottoman Government and the Sanusiyya,” 93-94.

\textsuperscript{349} BOA, Y.E.E. 78/131, 24 Rabi’ al-Thani 1303 (30 March 1886).
Mu’ayyad noted in a report upon his return that Muhammad al-Mahdi was well respected by the Bedouin in the French possessions of Algeria and Tunisia, as well as by the inhabitants of other parts of Africa, such as Sudan. He maintained an active international trade network, and refused to have any dealings with France or Italy. In 1888, the Ottomans supplied Shaykh al-Mahdi with arms and ammunition, and distributed 10,000 rifles among the Bedouin. The following year, the Sultan sent Shaykh al-Mahdi a letter, inviting him to Istanbul; the shaykh decided not to travel to the capital personally, perhaps fearing that the Abülhamid meant to hold him there permanently.

By 1890, a French invasion of Tripolitania had still not materialised. On the other hand, Italy did not hide its eagerness to divest the Ottomans of this province. Thus, in October of that year, Abdülhamid decided to reinforce Tripolitania further with 16,000 soldiers, and to raise a local “militia” of 10,000 men, who could “support the regular troops in case of need,” according to the French ambassador. In fact, Abdülhamid had come to trust France regarding Tripolitania to the point where he hinted that the presence of a few French ships off the coast of Tripoli could be used to warn off Italy. At the same time, however, the Sultan was worried about French plans regarding “the hinterland of Tripolitania.”

One interpretation of the above discrepancy would be that, even a decade after the French conquest of Tunisia, Abdülhamid did not deem Ottoman control over Tripolitania

354 Laugier-Villars to Ribot, 10 Jan. 1891. Reprinted in ibid., 322.
to be secure, and thus (justifiably) saw danger lurking everywhere. Another scenario, however, is that Abdülhamid was merely playing Italy and France off each other in the hope of keeping them both away from Tripolitania. This is confirmed by the Sultan’s actions in 1894. In a meeting with the French ambassador in January, Abdülhamid discussed the possibility of going to war with Italy.\textsuperscript{355} The following September, the Ottoman embassy in Rome opened negotiations whose aim was to form a defensive alliance with Italy if France invaded Tripolitania.\textsuperscript{356}

Around the same time, the Sultan tried once again to woo the Sanusis and bring them over to his cause. In 1892, the Ottomans continued raising volunteer forces in Tripolitania, and started making plans to “gather the Muslims of Central Africa under the roof of the caliphate” (\textit{hilafe çatısı}). In particular, the Ottomans targeted the Sanusis as allies in achieving this goal.\textsuperscript{357} In May 1895, Shaykh al-Mahdi moved the centre of the \textit{tariqa} from Jaghbub in Cyrenaica, to Kufra, located farther to the south.\textsuperscript{358} In October, the Sultan dispatched Mu’ayyad to meet the shaykh once again, this time with Ottoman flags as a gift. In return for this token of imperial favour, Mu’ayyad asked the shaykh to allow the Ottomans to deploy soldiers in Kufra, citing the danger of British and French expansion. The shaykh agreed, giving the Ottomans a base in the south of Cyrenaica.\textsuperscript{359} Although Michel Le Gall argues that the base was actually used largely to collect taxes from the surrounding Bedouin tribes and that its defensive purpose was “marginal,” in

\textsuperscript{356} Hanotaux to La Boulinière, 14 Sept. 1894. Reprinted in ibid., 352.
\textsuperscript{357} BOA, Y.EE. 122/3, 29 Rajab 1309 (28 Feb. 1892).
\textsuperscript{358} BOA, Y.A.HUS. 329/108, 9 Dhu al-Qa’da 1312 (3 June 1895); BOA, Y.EE. 78/16, 10 Dhu al-Qa’da 1312 (4 June 1895).
\textsuperscript{359} Le Gall, “The Ottoman Government and the Sanusiyya,” 95-96.
fact having troops stationed at the headquarters of the most important armed Sufi order in North Africa can hardly be deemed to have been “marginal.” Cyrenaica would provide a reserve from which it would be possible to repel any French or Italian aggression in Tripolitania.

Towards the turn of the century, the Ottoman policy of playing France off against Italy was no longer working. By 1899, France seemed to grow tired of keeping Italy away from Tripolitania, and invited it to seize the province if it could do so “without risk of provoking general complications.”

France reassured the Ottoman Empire about its neutrality regarding Tripolitania, but the assurance sounded rather hollow.

During the same year, France first became worried about the growing relationship between Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Sanusis. According to the French consul general in Cairo, “if this power shaykh [that is, Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi] became in any way the lieutenant of the Sultan, it would be a considerable danger for the Powers which are in contact with the Muslim tribes of Central Africa.” With the Scramble for Africa intensifying, “France and England have divided regions which until now were outside European influences.” It is the threat of further Anglo-French conquest that has pushed Abdülhamid and the Sanusi shaykh into an alliance, according to the French diplomat.

As we see, Le Gall’s contention regarding the marginality of strategic considerations and

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363 Ibid., 44.
the centrality of tax collection behind the Ottoman deployment to Kufra is contrary to the evidence.

It was not not only the Ottomans who suspected France of wanting to eventually occupy Tripolitania; the Italians did so as well. Consequently, France signed a formal accord with Italy in 1901, promising Italy not to invade Tripolitania, as long as Italy did not object to a French takeover of Morocco. 364 By 1902, the international press had got wind of the Franco-Italian accord, and Sultan Abdülhamid tried in vain to convince the French that it was in their interest to allow Tripolitania to remain in Ottoman hands. 365

It is thus no wonder that the Sultan observes in his memoirs in 1902 that “the best defender of my rights in Tripolitania is Shaykh al-Mahdi of the Sanusis. He will not allow the Italians to enter without resistance, because it seems that he can raise 30,000 men.” 366 The Italians had, according to the Sultan, offered the Ottomans 54 million liras in exchange for the right to establish a protectorate over the province. Abdülhamid admits to having given some thought to their offer: selling Tripolitania to Italy would be “better than seeing the country grabbed from us later by violence.” Yet the Sultan ultimately decided to rely on the Sanusis. Apart from the large army that the Sanusis were capable of fielding, Abdülhamid also adds that “we have placed at their disposal arms and cannon in sufficient quantity, with the result that these would be serious adversaries” to the

366 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la debacle de la Turquie, 137.
Italians. Thus, all in all, a war against the Sanusis would be, for the Italians, “even bloodier than that against the Mahdi [1881-1889] in Sudan.”

Thanks to the Ottoman-Sanusi alliance, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica remained in Ottoman hands until 1911, that is, two years after the overthrow of Abdülhamid II by the Committee for Union and Progress. By drawing the Sanusis into the Ottoman system through patient diplomacy, Abdülhamid not only boosted the military capabilities of the tariqa but, more importantly, achieved one of his most important goals, which was to maintain as much Ottoman territorial integrity as possible. Using the glue of Islamic solidarity, he attached this distant province to Istanbul in ways that could not be achieved through a mere military presence. As the loss of the Ottoman provinces of Tunisia and Egypt to France and Britain respectively showed, the Ottoman Empire was not in a position to withstand European armies on its own. However, once the Ottomans not simply boosted their military presence in Tripolitania but enhanced it through a close alliance with the Sanusi proto-state, the combination was sufficient to keep Italy out as long as Abdülhamid remained the sultan-caliph.

**Conclusion**

In employing Sufism as a tool of statecraft by tapping into the networks of spiritual charisma in North Africa in order to protect Tripolitania from European invasion, Sultan Abdülhamid II showed himself to be a highly capable and flexible ruler. When Khayr al-

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367 Ibid., 137-138.
Din was languishing jobless in Tunis, Abdülhamid took his mentor Shaykh Zafir’s advice and brought him to Istanbul, eventually making him the Ottoman grand vizier. The empire thus benefited from several different modernisation projects undertaken by this able administrator and reformer during his brief stay at the post. When Ottoman military strength proved no match for France in the Tunis question, Abdülhamid did everything he could to ensure that France did not invade Tripolitania, which bordered the French possessions of Algeria and Tunis. The Sultan did this largely by deploying the organising and mobilising potential of the Madaniyya tariqa, of which he himself was a member. When France lost interest in Tripolitania and gave Italy the green light to seize it, Abdülhamid prevented this from happening as long as he ruled the empire, by forging an alliance with the Sanusiyya tariqa. Apart from the troops and weapons he sent to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the Sultan accomplished all of this with very few resources, with soft power more than hard.

As a religious man and a Sufi at that, Abdülhamid believed in a progressive Islam. As we saw with Khayr al-Din and Shaykh Qabadu, the Madanis saw no contradiction between Islam and modernisation. Neither did Abdülhamid. As he writes in his memoirs, “the noble doctrine of Muhammad” teaches “the equality of all believers, doing good, the defence of the weak, respecting the law; we do not know dogmas or symbols, and we detest superstition.” To Abdülhamid, love for Islam was equivalent to the Christians’ love for their countries. It is Islam thus understood which provided Abdülhamid with the glue he needed to keep his empire together while he forged ahead with modernisation, on his own terms.

368 Ibid., 166-167.
Chapter Three

Sultan Abdülhamid II and Islamism

It has become a cliché among historians that Abdülhamid was a “Muslim” or “Islamic” ruler. His religious views are often taken for granted based on the particular author’s inclinations (either as sincere but obscurantist, or as shallow and hypocritical), and broad conclusions are then drawn about the kind of system Abdülhamid wanted to implant in the Ottoman Empire during his reign (1876-1909). Based on unexamined premises, these conclusions are, not surprisingly, often wrong, misleading, or incomplete. What this chapter aims to do is to examine Abdülhamid’s religiosity in its own terms. By using primary sources (mainly Abdülhamid’s memoirs), it analyses what the Sultan himself understood by terms such as “Islam,” and what the implications of being a Muslim were for him. It also looks at his attitudes towards Christianity and Ottoman Christians (in particular the Armenians). I argue that, unlike many of the Ottoman rulers who came before and after him, Abdülhamid believed that the Ottoman Empire had a duty to be survive not just for its own sake, but for that of the worldwide Muslim community. A strong Ottoman Empire could serve the umma well, eventually leading to the liberation of foreign Muslims languishing under colonial rule. It is this understanding of Islam which led Abdülhamid to combine within himself the roles of Islamist and moderniser.

By examining the lives and careers of three of Sultan Abdülhamid’s advisers, whose diversity is indicative of the microcosm that was Yıldız Palace, this chapter also delves into the sources and inspirations for some of Abdülhamid ideas, especially those related to domestic Islamism, international Pan-Islamism, and modernisation. I have chosen three officials (namely, İzzet Paşa, Küçük Mehmed Said Paşa and Jamal al-Din Afghani) who represent the different types of personalities Abdülhamid surrounded himself with and thus the different kinds of influences he was under. Two of the three were Ottoman, while one was foreign; one was a Palace official, another was the head of the Sublime Porte seven times during Abdülhamid’s reign, and the third was a peripatetic dreamer who tried to study and remake the Muslim world and believed Abdülhamid could help him achieve their aim. These personages are just three of the many people whose advice Abdülhamid sought at one time or another during his long reign. However, in many ways they are among the most important, for they helped the Sultan (more than he was willing to acknowledge) to shape his understanding of the role of the state and of Islam’s place in it; the relationship of the Caliphate and the Sultanate; and his role vis-à-vis the global community of Muslims.

Abdülahmid’s Religious Schema and Anatolia

Sultan Abdülhamid II was a self-consciously Muslim ruler. This can be seen not only in his public actions, crowned by the construction of the Hijaz Railway, and not just in his dealings with his officials, such as the grand vizier Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, but also in his
memoirs and in his own family’s view of him. We have seen in previous chapters how, starting from the beginning of his reign, Abdülhamid laid increasing emphasis on Islam as the main organising and unifying principle of the Ottoman Empire. But what kind of Islam do we mean here? Some of Abdülhamid’s contemporaries and later historians took his devoutness as a sign of superstition. For instance, the Palestinian Christian journalist Farid Kassab (1884-1970), who was an Ottoman patriot and vigorously defended the continuation of Ottoman rule over the Empire’s Arab provinces, nevertheless describes one of Abdülhamid’s advisers, the Rifa‘i shaykh Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi, disparagingly as “some kind of exorcist of evil spirits, conjurer of demons, knowing how to forecast the future for the superstitious Sultan.”

However, one of Abdülhamid’s daughters, Ayşe Sultan (later Osmanoğlu, 1887-1960), derides the idea that Abdülhamid believed in sorcery. In her biography of her father, Ayşe asks rhetorically, “What need to have magic performed did my father have, given that he possessed absolute [political] authority?”

Rather than believing in magic and sorcery, Abdülhamid was, according to Ayşe, a Muslim who possessed a strong sense of faith, who prayed five times a day and regularly read the Qur’an. Additionally, the Sultan was, according to his daughter, a spiritual man, who belonged to at least two Sufi brotherhoods, the Shadhiliyya and the Qadiriyya. She describes his friendship with Shaykh Zafir al-Madani, which led him to become one of Shaykh Zafir’s followers. According to Ayşe, one time when there an

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outbreak of disease in the Ottoman Empire, Shaykh Zafir and members of his tariqa (order) recited Prophetic traditions from Sahih al-Bukhari, as well as the Shadhili litany called Hizb al-Bahr. Abdülhamid, for his part, had a special edition of Sahih al-Bukhari published, and sent it to mosques around the Muslim world, as well as distributing copies to his family, including Ayşe.\(^{372}\) Thus, Abdülhamid did believe in the efficacy of prayer and the power of certain religious books to alleviate distress and suffering, but this belief rested on his Islamic faith, as opposed to a belief in the occult. It should be added that, despite his devoutness, he was not the type of Muslim who focused on religion to the exclusion of this world. Rather, he liked saying “religion and science” (din ve fen) to emphasise his simultaneous belief in both.\(^{373}\)

One of the five sections of Abdülhamid’s memoirs, Pensées et souvenirs, is devoted to matters of religion. In fact, however, religion permeates the entire work, giving us a picture of Abdülhamid as a ruler who drew inspiration from Islam and, like Khayr al-Din, saw it as a source of progress. Far from clinging to an obscurantist Islam as a means of turning the clock back on the Tanzimat era and enforcing his personal rule, as has been alleged by Niyazi Berkes and others, Abdülhamid saw in Islam the surest way of bringing the Ottoman Empire into the modern era without abandoning Ottoman authenticity, which, for him, rested on Islam.\(^{374}\) For him, Islam could be summarised,


\(^{373}\) Osmanoğlu, Babam Abdülhamid, 22.

\(^{374}\) As Haris Exertzoglou puts it, modernist Islam of the kind promoted by Abdülhamid aimed to “[b]ring Islamic societies into the framework of a threatening western modernity by the means of modernity itself.” See Exertzoglou, “Metaphors of Change: ‘Tradition’ and East/West Discourse in the Late Ottoman Empire,” in Anna Frangoudaki and Caglar Keyder (eds.), Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey.
rather ecstatically, as “nobility, mercy and love, leading humanity towards peace, joy and wisdom!” It is this kind of Islam which, according to Abdülhamid, had allowed Muslims to thrive in the Middle Ages, when Europe was “still sunk in shadows [and] the most absolute barbarism.”

The path to renewed greatness thus lay not in a blind imitation of Europe and its “self-styled” civilisation, but rather in a return to the Shari’a, which the Sultan saw as the source of the Muslims’ erstwhile greatness.

Returning to the Shari’a, however, did not necessarily mean a return to the lifestyle of previous generations. Rather, according to Abdülhamid, there was a set of “fundamental principles” at the heart of Islam which were “immutable,” and it is these principles which were embodied in the Shari’a. However, the presence of these principles did not imply that Islam was opposed to progress or that Muslims were condemned to stand in place. Abdülhamid was well aware of the contemporary Western critique of Islam as “an enemy of civilisation” and a barrier to progress. Abdülhamid had long discussions on these issues with the Hungarian Jewish Orientalist Ármin (Arminius) Vámbéry (1832-1913). Vámbéry, who had travelled extensively in the Muslim world, including the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and the Central Asian khanates, was the author of several hundred scholarly and journalistic articles on the Muslim world, in addition to

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Encounters with Europe, 1850-1950 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 56. For Niyazi Berkes’s argument alleging the deliberate promotion of obscurantism and “traditional Muslim puritanism” by Abdülhamid, see Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey, 258-259. For other accusations of this sort, see Elizabeth Frierson, “Gender, Consumption and Patriotism: The Emergence of an Ottoman Public Sphere,” in Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (eds.), Public Islam and the Common Good (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 103 (Frierson calls the Sultan an “Islamic despot”); Colin Turner, Islam: The Basics (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 172.

Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie: Pensées et souvenirs (Before the Debacle of Turkey: Thoughts and Memories) (Paris; Neuchâtel: Attinger Frères, 1914), 159.

Ibid., 160.

Ibid., 160-161.
several books on his travels. In his memoirs, Abdülhamid professed to being “infinitely” interested in Vámbéry. According to the Sultan, Vámbéry believed that it was the “ignorance, intolerance and fanatical prejudice” of Christians which led them to view Islam as an enemy of progress.

As to those Europeans who claimed that the Shari‘a was a collection of harsh laws, Abdülhamid’s response was that the Bible contained laws that were no less harsh, and that “practice attenuates theory and softens many things.” In other words, it was not the penal aspects of the Shari‘a that Abdülhamid was interested in reviving; rather, it was “virtue,” which, according to Abdülhamid, was taught throughout the Qur’an. It is this emphasis on virtue that made Islam a religion that could not be viewed as inferior to Christianity or Judaism. One of the virtues preached by Islam is hospitality, and Abdülhamid gives the example of Polish refugees being allowed to settle in the Ottoman Empire at the risk of provoking Russian anger and even possibly war. Another such virtue is tolerance: according to Abdülhamid, if Islam had been an intolerant religion, all the non-Muslim minorities in the Ottoman Empire would have long ago been converted forcibly, which would mean that the current “lack of unity” within the Empire would not have existed. Such tolerance, according to the Sultan, consisted not only of tolerating minorities within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, but even within leading Ottoman families. He cites the example of two Ottoman Muslim diplomats, one of whom was married to a Swiss woman, and the other to a Russian. In both cases, the wives had

380 Ibid., 162.
remained Christian after marriage. According to Abdülhamid, there were many other such cases, but in the diplomatic corps, and among Ottoman military officers.\(^{381}\)

Thus, in the Sultan’s view, it is precisely the tolerance of Islam (expressed in allowing minorities to exist without converting) which had created a situation in which religious differences threatened to break up the Empire. Sultan Abdülhamid himself perhaps had somewhat less tolerance for minorities than that which he ascribed to his religion. In his words, “The existence of several different religions or denominations in one single state is an evil.... The solidarity of the state must necessarily suffer from internecine struggles poisoned by religious differences.”\(^{382}\) Here, Abdülhamid is speaking from experience: after all, the 1875 peasants’ revolt in Bosnia eventually turned into a large-scale war with Russian precisely because the economic and class conflict was “poisoned by religious differences.”

Even after the secession of several Christian areas of the Ottoman Empire, Abdülhamid viewed the remaining ones with suspicion, and called the presence of Christians in the Empire a “misfortune”.\(^{383}\) In his view, the Empire was making “too many concessions” and giving “too many rights” to members of religious minorities. Thus, according to Abdülhamid, it was not surprising that Ottoman Muslims, “irritated by the arrogance of the Giaours [unbelievers]” sometimes launched violent attacks on religious minorities.\(^{384}\)

Thus, in one breath Abdülhamid can vaunt and praise the tolerance of Muslims, in another complain that it is too generous and too easily given, and in a third justify the

\(^{381}\) Ibid., 163-164.
\(^{382}\) Ibid., 162-163.
\(^{383}\) Ibid., 162.
\(^{384}\) Ibid., 163-164.
actions of those who launched violent attacks on Ottoman non-Muslims. The Sultan thus had a complex relationship with non-Muslims. His own memoirs demonstrate that he did not view them as being equal to the Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire; to him, their demands were a sign of “arrogance” and their very existence in the Empire was a “misfortune.”

The implications of this attitude towards non-Muslim minorities would become apparent in the 1894-1896 period, when the Sultan’s Hamidian Regiments (Hamidiye alaylari) sparked what eventually became a series of massacres, in which tens of thousands of Ottoman Armenians were killed. When Armenians in the Sasun sancak (district) of the Bitlis vilayet (province) refused to pay increased taxes to both the Ottoman government and local Kurdish chiefs in 1894, the Armenian separatist Hinchak party encouraged a general Armenian rebellion against Ottoman rule. According to Norman Naimark, the Armenians engaged in “armed resistance,” which nevertheless was not of a “serious” nature. The Armenian revolt was seen in quite a different light in Istanbul, however. According to an imperial memorandum (muhtıra-i Hümayûn) addressed by Abdülhamid to the grand vizier (most likely written in 1896), reports from Samsun indicated that as many as 3,000 Armenian rebels were operating there. The rebels had burned several Muslim villages, had shoved gunpowder down the throats of several Muslims and then blown them up and, what is no less offensive to Abdülhamid, had paraded some Muslims around with crosses attached to their necks. In Abdülhamid’s view, if the army were not dispatched to attack these “bandits” (eşkiya), the revolt would

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doubtlessly have “spread to the surrounding area like a gradually growing fire,” and would have turned into “a big headache.”\textsuperscript{386}

In Abdülhamid’s view, the rebellion was not controlled by the Armenians themselves; it was a plot on the part of the Great Powers, who were trying to use the Armenians as a means to break the Ottoman Empire up into several small and allegedly independent states. After a while, in his view, these new states would start fighting each other, and a conference would be held among the Powers to divide them up among themselves, just as Poland had been divided up between Russia, Prussia and Austria in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The reason that the Great Powers wanted to partition Anatolia, according to Abdülhamid, was that the Muslim people of the region, despite the bad education they received at school, still possessed an “obedient and respectful” attitude towards the authority of the Sultan and towards the Caliphate because of “the upbringing they received from their parents.”\textsuperscript{387} Thus, in Abdülhamid’s view, the loyalty of Muslim Ottoman subjects towards the Caliphate was so hateful to the European powers that they would do anything to seize Anatolia from Ottoman hands, without actually appearing to do so directly.

Vámbéry, while being generally very sympathetic to Britain, agrees with Abdülhamid on Britain’s hidden role in stirring up the Armenians to rebel. According to him, British agents had been spreading sedition in “the North of Asia Minor” (that is, the Armenian-inhabited parts of Anatolia). As early as 1890, Abdülhamid had, in a private conversation with Vámbéry, threatened to give the Armenians “a box on the ear” in order

\textsuperscript{386} Undated muhtra-i Hümâyûn, reprinted in Mehmed Hocaoglu, \textit{II. Abdülhamid’ın Muhtıraları} (Abdüllahid II’s Memoranda) (Istanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 1998), 52-53. Although undated, the memorandum has the hand-written date 1312 (1896) added to the document (see Hocaoglu, 71). The Ottoman grand vizier in 1896 was Halil Rifat Paşa (1820-1901).

\textsuperscript{387} Ibid., 54.
to force them to “relinquish their revolutionary ambitions.” Vámbéry sees the massacres of Armenians which took place in 1894-96 as the fulfillment of this promise. While discussing the massacres with Vámbéry, Abdülhamid defended his actions as a necessary defence against European encroachment. In the Sultan’s words (as quoted by Vámbéry),

In the face of the everlasting persecutions and hostilities of the Christian world, I have been, so to speak, compelled to take these drastic measures. By taking away Rumenia [sic] and Greece, Europe has cut off the feet of the Turkish State body. The loss of Bulgaria, Servia [sic], and Egypt has deprived us of our hands, and now by means of this Armenian agitation they want to get at our most vital parts, tear out our very entrails—this would be the beginning of total annihilation, and this we must fight against with all the strength we possess.388

This quotation rings true, not least because it accords with Abdülhamid’s notion of a European conspiracy to partition Anatolia. The Armenians were, relatively speaking, not extremely important to Abdülhamid in and of themselves. The idea of Armenian independence as a first step towards the unravelling of Ottoman control in Anatolia, however, was unthinkable to the Sultan. The Ottomans had already lost much of their long-standing Rumelian heartland in 1877-78. They could not now afford to lose eastern Anatolia as well.

Abdülhamid’s low opinion of the Armenians is evident in his memoirs, where he says that they would not have revolted without foreign pressure, because they are “timid” and “attached to the goods of this world.” He also repeats the notion that any Armenian state that came into existence would be short-lived, because the “very character of the Armenian people” would make it impossible for them to sustain long-term independence.

In Abdülhamid’s view, the Armenians’ main mistake was to imitate the “arrogance” of Western missionaries. These “Anglo-American” missionaries had been treating the Muslims of the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire in an “absolutely provocative” manner; their behaviour was “an insult to all of Islam.” The Armenians, according to Abdülhamid, assumed that they, too could behave in a similar fashion towards “our people” (des nôtres, that is, Muslims), and expect the same “impunity” as that enjoyed by the missionaries.\(^{389}\) This comportment on the part of the Armenians, in addition to previous Armenian plots (dating from 1891 and 1892), led to “our people” (notre peuple) “respond[ing] through assault.”\(^{390}\)

The idea of Muslims spontaneously responding to provocative and murderous Armenian attacks by killing them in turn is certainly misleading. As Abdülhamid himself admitted in the memorandum cited above, it was he who had dispatched troops to crush the beginnings of an Armenian insurrection; the operation was thus palace-directed and not spontaneous. The troops sent to deal with the revolt were, for the most part, Kurds, whom Abdülhamid was actively trying to integrate into the fabric of the state. In 1893, Abdülhamid noted in his memoirs that the Ottoman Empire’s main task in Anatolia was to “assimilate the Kurds.” One of the ways he proposed to undertake this assimilation was by resettling Muslim refugees who had arrived from Bosnia and from Bulgaria in Anatolia; this resettlement would constitute an “internal colonisation,” and would strengthen both the “national power” (that is, military might) and the economic potential of the Ottoman Empire. Abdülhamid believed that the biggest mistake committed by the previous Ottoman sultans had been a failure to “Ottomanise” the Slavs of the Empire.


\(^{390}\) Ibid., 27.
Now Abdülhamid was not going to repeat the same error with the Kurds who, in some senses, were even less integrated into Ottoman life than non-Slavic Christians, such as the Greeks and Armenians.391

Apart from the attempt to bring the Kurds into greater contact with other Muslim Ottomans by settling Balkan Muslims among them, Abdülhamid also took the advice of the Syrian military officer Zeki Paşa (later Kılıçoğlu, 1862-1943) to create Kurdish military units on the model of the Russian Cossacks. In creating these regiments, which were named Hamidiye (Hamidian) after the Sultan, Abdülhamid’s strategy was twofold: not only to integrate the Kurds, but also to protect the eastern border with an expansionist Russia. “Our Kurds,” according to Abdülhamid, would be of great service in case of a new war with Russia, provided they were members of “disciplined regiments.” Abdülhamid emphasises the Kurds’ lack of discipline: in his view, they would benefit from the “obedience” learned during military service. As for the Kurdish aghas, or chiefs, they were automatically given officer positions in the regiments, which “flattered” them and made them more amenable to learning discipline, just like their followers. Even so, the regiments, which were formed in 1891, had not become an effective fighting force by 1895. According to Abdülhamid, they still suffered from “childhood diseases,” which had to be overcome before the regiments could become “a weapon of value.”392

391 Ibid., 14-15. Abdülhamid did undertake the “internal colonisation” he had proposed: many of the Muslim refugees from the Balkans were resettled in eastern Anatolia (the area where the Kurds and Armenians were concentrated). See Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol. II: Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 116. Efforts to settle Balkan refugees among the Kurds continued under the Young Turks. See Joost Jongerden, The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds: An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 179.

392 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 16-17. On the date of the formation of the Hamidiye Regiments, see Jongerden, The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds, 244; Ismet Chériff Vanly, “The Kurds in the Soviet Union,” in Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (eds.), The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview (Abingdon: Rougledge, 1992), 155. The regiments were meant to integrate even non-Muslim
Perhaps it was in order to iron out their kinks and give them greater group solidarity that Sultan Abdülhamid threw his *Hamidiye* Regiments at the Armenian rebels in Sasun. The results were quite devastating in that the unseasoned Kurdish fighters who made up the bulk of the regiments did not hesitate to massacre not just rebels but also Armenian civilians. According to the Armenians’ sympathisers, thousands of civilians were slaughtered. An investigative mission by three Western consuls later found that, in fact, 265 Armenians had been killed. Unfortunately, however, the massacres were not confined to Samsun and spread all over eastern and central Anatolia and beyond, to Aleppo. The final Armenian death toll in 1896 stood at 37,000 according to one missionary estimate, and 120,000 according to another. Today, Turkish historians believe around 20,000 Armenians were killed, whereas Armenian historians think the number is closer to 400,000. As Jeremy Salt points out, “there is no possibility of ever reconciling the wildly conflicting figures,” the true number probably lying somewhere between the extremes.393 Be that as it may, the Armenians “gave as good as they got” (to use Salt’s expression), whenever they had the chance. According to modern-day Turkish estimates, 5,000 to 10,000 Muslims were killed by the Armenian rebels. The brutality extended to civilians and soldiers alike: in 1896, a British consul visiting eastern Anatolia found that the Armenians had executed several hundred captured Ottoman soldiers using axes and knives.394

There is little doubt that the butchery, from which the Armenians suffered more heavily, was caused by Abdülhamid’s use of the Kurdish *Hamidiye* Regiments to

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394 Ibid., 105-106.
suppress a limited rebellion (just as the “Bulgarian Horrors” of 1876 had been caused by the use of başıbozuk to suppress an initially small-scale Bulgarian rebellion). In an entry in his memoirs dated 1897, Abdülhamid describes the Kurds, in his usual patronising style, as “a vigorous and bellicose people” composed of “savage and violent shepherds.” The Armenians, on the other hand, he characterises as “effeminate” people who “emit piercing cries for the smallest thing.” Both the Kurds and the Armenians were at a very “low level of civilisation,” according to the Sultan. Certainly, knowing the “violent” tendencies and undisciplined ways of the Kurdish chiefs serving him, Abdülhamid should have known what the result of setting the Kurdish cavalry loose on the Armenians would be. According to Abdülhamid, in the history of relations between the Kurds and the Armenians, “the Kurd has always been the master and the Armenian the servant.” Thus, again Abdülhamid ought to have known that the Armenians would have to pay a very dear price if the Kurds were used to put down their revolt. We can safely make the supposition that Abdülhamid did know these things, but, according to him, his actions were constrained by the fact that “our position [was] extremely delicate in these provinces.”395 In other words, once the Armenians had issued an armed challenge to their Kurdish overlords, Abdülhamid had to sacrifice the Armenians in order to keep and increase the loyalty of the Kurds.396

It is the violent suppression of the Armenian tax revolt that earned Abdülhamid such epithets as “the Great Assassin” (from Abdülhamid’s old nemesis, the former

396 According to one theory, Abdülhamid harboured an intense hatred towards Armenians because of a persistent rumour, started in his childhood, that he himself was the illegitimate son of an Armenian. See, for example, Alexander W. Hidden, The Ottoman Dynasty: A History of the Sultans from the Earliest Authentic Record to the Present Time, with Notes on the Manners and Customs of the People (New York: N.W. Hidden, 1912), 442; ‘Ali al-Wardi, Lamahat ijtima‘iya min tariikh al-‘iraq al-hadith (Social Aspects of the Modern History of Iraq), Vol. Three (London: Kufaan Publishing, 1992), 23. Nevertheless, a geo-strategic rather than psychological explanation for Abdülhamid’s tough response is more convincing.
British prime minister William Gladstone), “the Red Sultan” (from Georges Clemenceau, a French journalist and future prime minister), and “Abdul the Damned” (from the British poet William Watson) in Europe. It was Gladstone’s attacks that particularly upset Abdülhamid. This was, of course, not the first time that the Ottomans were at the receiving end of Gladstone’s wrath: the previous time, as we saw in Chapter One, Gladstone (1809-1898) had helped popularise the notion of the Turks as an “anti-human specimen of humanity,” as we saw in Chapter One. Sultan Abdülhamid had ascended the throne only shortly before Gladstone published his anti-Ottoman pamphlet, and thus the attack had not been directed at the Sultan personally.

This time, however, Gladstone, who had retired from active politics but still enjoyed a considerable amount of popularity, blamed not only Islam, but Abdülhamid personally for the massacres. In 1896, Gladstone denounced Abdülhamid as “that wretched Sultan, whom God has given as a curse to mankind.” Furthermore, according to Gladstone, it was Islam as a religion which had “crushed up all prosperity, all progress, all happiness” in eastern Anatolia and in every other part of the world where it had any influence. Consequently, Gladstone campaigned for a European or at least British armed intervention in what he called Armenia. Queen Victoria (r. 1897-1901) called Gladstone’s pronouncements “half-mad,” but that did not stop his views being highly popular, not only among the British masses, but also in the Church of England.

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hierarchy. Gladstone’s campaign so inflamed public opinion in Britain against the Ottoman Empire, that the British government, although of a different political persuasion from Gladstone, for a while considered going to war against the Ottomans.

The Marquess of Salisbury (1830-1903), a Conservative politician who served as British prime minister several times, including 1895-1902, faced immense public pressure to intervene in the Ottoman Empire in order to save the Armenians at the beginning of his term in office. Internationally, however, he found his way blocked by the disagreement of Germany and Austria-Hungary. In general, in contrast to the British popular reaction to the massacres, which, according to Salisbury, was something of a “frenzy,” he found the Continental European reaction to be muted, to the point that, in his view, from Russia to Spain there was “not a soul who cares whether the Armenians are exterminated or not.”

While this may have been an exaggeration, it still meant that Britain would not find allies in any invasion of the Ottoman Empire. A solitary invasion of the Ottoman Empire by Britain with the aim of taking over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits would be too risky, and might be misinterpreted by Russia as a threat to its own security and interests. Thus, in 1895, Salisbury considered invading the Hijaz, a vitally important Ottoman province from the point of view of the Empire’s Islamic legitimacy but, conveniently for Britain, located far from any areas the other European powers were interested in. Finally, however, Abdülhamid signed a decree promising reforms in eastern Anatolia in October 1895, and this gave Salisbury the pretext he needed in order to

withdraw from a position advocating war with the Ottomans to one supporting the
continuation of Ottoman territorial integrity, without running afoul of British public
opinion.\textsuperscript{400} No government in Europe was enthusiastic about the prospects of a European-
Ottoman war, and the conflict therefore did not take place.

Even though Gladstone’s rhetoric thus failed to achieve tangible results, Sultan
Abdülmhamid was highly bothered by it. In his memoirs, Abdülmhamid accuses Gladstone,
whom he calls “this old babbler,” of trying to launch a crusade against the Ottomans,
following in the footsteps of Pope Pius II (1405-1464), who had organised an anti-
Ottoman crusade in 1463. In Abdülmhamid’s view, Gladstone’s rabble-rousing was only
the latest step in a crusade that had “never entirely ended” since the middle ages. What
hurt Abdülmhamid most of all about Gladstone’s accusations was that the latter was
reducing the Ottomans to murderers based on recent events in eastern Anatolia, instead of
taking a broader look at the Empire’s historical treatment of minorities. Gladstone, like
most other Europeans, seemed not to be interested in Ottoman history in general.
According to Abdülmhamid, anyone who read about the Ottoman past would learn that, at
a time when Spain was “dominated by the Inquisition” and either exiling its Jews or
burning them at the stake, it was the Ottomans who welcomed them and gave them
refuge. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire had long served as a safe haven for those who had
been exiled from their homeland because of their beliefs or religious views.\textsuperscript{401}

Moreover, in Abdülmhamid’s view, Gladstone was being hypocritical in his critique
of the Ottomans; he was failing to reflect on the manner in which the European powers

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., 101-106.
\textsuperscript{401} Abdul-Hamid, \textit{Avant la débâcle de la Turquie}, 100-101. On Pius II, crusade against the Ottomans, see
Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65.
had subjugated their colonies, and was thus not being fair towards the Ottomans. In the Sultan’s words,

One should consider... the bloody horrors which accompanied the conquests of the Spaniards, the cruelties of the French during the conquest of Algeria, those of the English during the revolts in India, the Belgians in the State of the Congo [that is, the “Congo Free State”], not to mention the Russians and their atrocities in Siberia!\(^\text{402}\)

Thus, what Abdülhamid does not accept is the existence of one moral standard to judge the subjugation of conquered lands and peoples by the Great Powers, and another standard to judge similar behaviour by the Ottomans. As Abdülhamid points out, when Muslims in Algeria or India, or other non-Christians in India or the Congo are on the receiving end of atrocities committed by Westerners, the European conscience is not pricked. On the other hand, when it comes to a Muslim power subduing a revolt by its Christian subjects, it is condemned by the likes of Gladstone with no reservation. According to Abdülhamid, the Armenians had acted like “real anarchists,” attacking Muslims with “dagger and dynamite.” By counterattacking, the Ottoman state had meant to reassert its sovereignty in its Armenian-inhabited provinces. Such a goal, according to Abdülhamid, would seem to the Europeans to be “just and equitable” if it were pursued by “any other state, be it even Monaco.” But since, in this case, it was the “forbearing Turk” taking military action after being driven to desperation by the Armenians, the “Christian powers” found it unacceptable.\(^\text{403}\)

One has to agree with Vámbéry that viewing the Sultan as “a fanatic and an enemy to Christians” would be “ludicrous.”\(^\text{404}\)

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\(^{403}\) Idem.

opposition to the Armenian rebels did not stem from their religion.\textsuperscript{405} In his memoirs, Abdülhamid himself rejects the charge of being intolerant towards the Christians, arguing that the Christians themselves were far from tolerant to each other; he cites the violent struggles between different Christian sects around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as an example.\textsuperscript{406} Furthermore, Abdülhamid also finds much that is praiseworthy among the Christians: above all their love of work. The Sultan was himself, by all accounts, a very hard-working ruler.\textsuperscript{407} As he observes, the Bible teaches man not to worry about the future because God will take care of believers, just as He takes care of birds and animals. Yet, the Christians did think about the future, worked hard, and made progress, while the Muslims sank into “laziness and stupidity” and, as a result, had allowed themselves, over the last few centuries, to be “surpassed” by the Christians. In Abdülhamid’s view, Arab Muslims, especially Syrian ones, were still somewhat hardworking, but Turkish-speaking ones (notre peuple turc) had lost the ability to differentiate between a healthy “submission to God” and “stupid fatalism.”\textsuperscript{408}

Thus, Abdülhamid certainly could be as critical of Muslims (despite the fact that they were his favoured constituency) as he was of Christians. And while Abdülhamid may have been quite wary of “the Christians” as a set of Ottoman communities which were sometimes collectively hostile to central authority, he nevertheless had very amiable

\textsuperscript{406} Abdul-Hamid, \textit{Avant la débâcle de la Turquie}, 164-165.
\textsuperscript{407} According to Abdülhamid’s daughter Ayşe and Vambéry, the Sultan would wake up before dawn, and start working on affairs of state from early morning, continuing till late in the evening. See Osmanoğlu, \textit{Babam Abdülhamid}, 20; Vambéry, “Sultan Abdul Hamid,” 495. Even Abdülhamid’s modern-day detractors admit his love of official work. See, for example, Arnold M. Ludwig, \textit{King of the Mountain: The Nature of Political Leadership} (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 176.
\textsuperscript{408} Abdul-Hamid, \textit{Avant la débâcle de la Turquie}, 165-166. Abdülhamid is paraphrasing Matthew 6: 25-34, according to which Jesus Christ taught, “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink.... Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?... Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (King James Bible).
relations with numerous individual Christians. As Vâmbéry points out, both his chief
physician and his finance minister were Christians, which shows the Sultan did not
hesitate to entrust them with his own health and that of the Empire.\textsuperscript{409} To this fact one
may add the fact that the administrators of Abdülhamid’s private domains, both before
and after the massacres in Anatolia, were Armenians. In 1902, Abdülhamid praised the
role of Mikael Portukal Paşa (1842-1897) and his predecessor Hagop Kazazian Paşa
(1833-1891) for their adroit management of his land estates and forests, which gave him
an annual revenue of over 500,000 Ottoman liras. The Sultan spent some of this money
on himself but, for the most part, he saw his private estate as ultimately belonging to “the
Muslims of the whole world.”\textsuperscript{410} And yet it was Armenian managers, rather than Muslim
ones, to whom he entrusted the task of running his domains.

And yet one must point out that Abdülhamid did not view Ottoman Christians as
being of equal worth to Ottoman Muslims. As the Sultan himself notes in his memoirs, “I
believe that anyone who has lived for some length of time in the Orient... would agree
that we Muslims are... better than the Christians of the Orient.”\textsuperscript{411} In 1899, after an attack
against a detachment of Ottoman soldiers by Muslim Albanian rebels, the Ottoman
government advocated “severe measures against our Albanians,” in the words of
Abdülhamid. However, the Albanians did not have to face the kind of wrath that the
Armenians had faced three years previously because of the Sultan’s attitude towards
them. Abdülhamid was instantly ready to forgive the Albanians: in his words, “I figure
that the shooting [by Albanian rebels] was not entirely without motive.” According to
him, the Ottoman soldiers must have robbed the local inhabitants without restraint, which

\textsuperscript{409} Vambéry, “Sultan Abdul Hamid,” 498.
\textsuperscript{410} Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 79-80.
\textsuperscript{411} Ibid., 102.
explained the Albanians’ actions. In the Sultan’s view, there was nothing surprising in this reaction, because “oppression provokes revolt.” The Ottoman Empire had had previous experiences of such Albanian revolts which, according to Abdülhamid, had been caused by the “violence and excessive severity” of Ottoman governors ruling the region. As a result, Albania had cost the Ottomans much “blood and money.” Thus, according to Abdülhamid, whenever there was an Albanian uprising, including the one he was trying to deal with in 1899, the fault always lay with the Ottoman state itself and its “oppression” of the Albanians, who were composed of “tribes used to independence” and would thus not accept such oppression without protest.  

Consequently, Abdülhamid was against any military reprisals against the Albanians, and promised to “never” support such measures. It was not simply Abdülhamid’s respect for the “independence,” “liberty,” and pride of the Albanians that made him decide against military action. Rather, the reason lay mainly in their religious affiliation. According to Abdülhamid, “We must never forget that, even though there are a few Christian families among them, the Albanians are our brothers,” that is, Muslims. They furnished the Ottoman Empire with some of its best soldiers, officers and officials and, moreover, they represented a geopolitical bulwark against Christian Europe. In the Sultan’s words, “in Europe they are our most loyal Muslims on whom we can count in all circumstances.” Finally, what made it crucial to keep the Albanians satisfied with Ottoman rule was that their neighbours (that is, the Greeks, Serbs and Montenegrins) were trying to “alienate the Albanians from us.”

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412 Ibid., 53-54.
413 Idem.
There is, thus, much that is similar between the Albanians and the Armenians: they both lived in relatively isolated regions of the Ottoman Empire, near the borders of the Ottomans’ rivals and enemies, and were both subject to outside encouragement to revolt, at least according to Abdülhamid. They both faced harsh rule, the Armenians suffering under Kurdish lords whom Abdülhamid himself describes as “savage,” and the Albanians facing robbery and brutality from the Ottoman army stationed there. At some points in time, notably in the 1890s, both the Armenians and the Albanians were pushed by such treatment to rebel against central authority. Yet the treatment they received at the hands of Sultan Abdülhamid could not be more different. While he unleashed the newly formed Hamidiye Regiments against the Armenians, causing large numbers of civilian deaths, he showed remarkable leniency towards the Albanians. There was not to be a massacre, whether localised or general, in response to the Albanian tribesmen’s audacity of shooting at Ottoman troops. Rather, Abdülhamid saw the shooting as an understandable fact of life. The main factor that explains this difference was that the Albanians were mostly Muslim, while the Armenians were Christian. The difference in religion had major political implications to Abdülhamid. Even the Albanians’ independent-mindedness could be tolerated, since ultimately they could be counted upon to support the Ottoman state against its hostile neighbours. As for the Armenians, Abdülhamid was not sure where their ultimate loyalties lay. Hence, with them, the response to rebellion was to give them “a box on the ear” costing a multitude of lives.

Abdülhamid, Islam and the State
One criticism of Muslims that Abdülhamid found he could not agree with, despite the massacres in Anatolia, had to do with their alleged fanaticism. According to the Sultan, “the horrible fanaticism of the Mahometans” had become the most popular way to disparage Muslims in Europe. The use of this label had led to Europeans associating Muslims with massacres of non-Muslims. Abdülhamid agrees that Muslims had a visible pride in and love for their religion but, in his view, this love of religion was comparable to the Europeans’ love of their countries. To Abdülhamid, it was only natural for a Muslim to be proud of a religion that preached “the equality of all [Muslim] believers, doing good deeds, the defence of the week [and] respect for laws.”

Islam, for Abdülhamid, was thus a religion that preached civic virtue, and love for it implied a love of civic virtue, which was incompatible with fanaticism. He underlines this point by going on to say, “We detest superstition.” Islam is great and deserving of ardour because “it has caused our greatness!” In this sense, Islam performed a similar function to the patriotisms of different European countries: as a set of ideals which aimed to bring out the best in people for the common good.

Moreover, for Abdülhamid, Islam was the only possible glue that could hold the Ottoman Empire together. Whereas the European powers could promote patriotic ideas because they were based primarily on one ethnicity or another, the Ottoman Empire was “the most international in the world,” made up of not only of Turks, but also of “Arabs,

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414 Ibid., 166-167.
415 Ibid., 167.
416 As Henk van Dijk points out, in relation to nineteenth-century Europe, “Myths and rituals are as important for nations as they are for the bonds of the community within religion.” See van Dijk, “Religion between State and Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in Helmut Kaellble (ed.), The European Way: European Societies in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), 254. The ascendant European nation-state of the post-Industrial Revolution era was attempting to redirect loyalty from religion to itself, a process with Abdülhamid understood and did not wish to see repeated in the Ottoman Empire.
Kurds, Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Negroes, etc.” The unity between all of these peoples was a result of “our faith.”\footnote{417} Here, Abdülhamid is wildly exaggerating: after all, the Ottomans had fought wars against both the Bulgarians and the Greeks largely because of politicised differences in religion which had taken the shape of separatist ethnic nationalism.

One may therefore conclude that the Tanzimat-era idea of all Ottoman subjects being Ottomans regardless of religion would help the Empire remain united. Abdülhamid, however, did not share this view at all. In his view, “One must never rely too much on the idea of the Ottoman Empire, but one should underline above all the fact that we are all Muslims.”\footnote{418} Clearly, the idea of all Ottomans being Muslims was completely inaccurate in a literal sense, and nobody knew this better than Abdülhamid himself. His point, however, is that the Ottoman polity was a Muslim polity; the Ottoman political nation was a Muslim political nation.\footnote{419} It is the Muslims of the Empire that are the “we,” and in that sense it was true that “we are all Muslims.” Islam thus arguably served the function of a civic religion, at least to some extent: it was meant to unify Ottoman Muslims in a way that a secular appeal to the greatness of the Ottoman Empire could not. Will Herberg describes civic religion as a form of religion which has been “thoroughly ‘functionalized,’” that is, converted into a tool for secular purposes. It is made to serve the sociological function of providing a form of identification and a context of

belonging…"\(^{420}\) And because the Ottoman polity under Abdülhamid was a self-consciously Muslim one, unity among Ottoman Muslims would mean continuing Ottoman unity in general. As Abdülhamid put it, “our religion is the very basis of the entire political and social edifice of our state.”\(^{421}\)

This certainly does not mean, however, that the state was the be all and end all for Sultan Abdülhamid, and that his interest in Islam was merely self-serving. For the Sultan, his title of “Sovereign of the Ottomans” (*Souverain des Osmanlis*) was of secondary importance compared to the title of *Amir al-Muʾminin* (Commander of the Believers, the traditional title of the Caliphs). As Abdülhamid put it, “Always and everywhere we should insist on the fact that I am Emir-ul-Muminin.”\(^{422}\) This was so not only because Abdülhamid believed that the title of Commander of the Believers, that is, of Caliph, had a much greater mobilising potential than that of a dynastic ruler, but also because he believed that Islam ultimately had more lasting power than the Ottoman state. Ruling a Muslim empire at a time when almost the entire Muslim world was controlled by colonial powers (Abdülhamid observes that “It is sad to see so many countries inhabited by our coreligionists in the hands of the Christians”), Abdülhamid could imagine a time when the Ottoman Empire, too, would be crushed. In fact, as we saw earlier, the Empire had barely survived in 1878, and that too largely thanks to a last-minute and grudging British intervention. However, in Abdülhamid’s view, the Empire would remain in existence as long as its Muslims remained united. Even if they lost their unity and the Empire lost all of its “temporal power,” its “spiritual power” could not be destroyed. That is because the


\(^{422}\) Ibid., 172.
Ottoman Empire was “the kingdom of the spirit and of religion.” In other words, Ottoman Islam would survive past the time when the “temporal power” of the Empire would exist no longer.

In this sense, Abdülhamid’s love for Islam was indeed similar to European nationalists’ love for their country, as he himself observes. The German poet Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) had noted, a century earlier, that “even if the [Holy Roman] Empire perished, German dignity would remain uncontested. The dignity is a moral greatness.... While the political Empire has tottered, the spiritual realm has become all the firmer and richer.” Just as Schiller could imagine a time when the centuries-old and German-dominated Holy Roman Empire would no longer be in existence, so could Abdülhamid imagine a world without an Ottoman Empire. And just as Schiller was convinced that the moral worth of the German people was greater and more permanent than the stature of their state, so did Abdülhamid think that the spiritual virtues of Ottoman Muslims were ultimately greater and more enduring than the political strength of the Ottoman Empire.

Nevertheless, Abdülhamid’s hope was that the Ottoman Empire would survive “until the Day of Judgement.” He expressed this desire (in the form of a prayer to Cenâb-i Hak (that is, God) in the context of British rule over India and Egypt. In the latter, according to Abdülhamid, the “religion and rights” of the Muslims were being “violated,” while in India the British had robbed the Muslims of all authority. The continued existence of the Ottoman state was thus an important guarantee that Ottoman Muslims would be able to retain their rights in the face of an expanding European imperialism.

423 Ibid., 169-170.
424 Quoted in David Aram Kaiser, Romanticism, Aesthetics, and Nationalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 54.
Moreover, Abdülhamid believed that the Ottomans could render foreign Muslims valuable help; for example, he wished to facilitate an invasion of India by anti-British European powers such as Germany and Russia. “A single word” from Abdülhamid as Caliph would be enough, in his view, to endanger place British rule in India.\(^{426}\) Certainly, the realities of the international situation prevented the Sultan from uttering this “word,” but the sentiment is revealing. At the same time, while the state was valuable to religion, religion could also reinforce the state, in Abdülhamid’s view. In a memorandum sent to Ahmed Midhat Efendi, the editor of the Istanbul newspaper Tercüman-i Hakikat, Abdülhamid asserts that “for a state and nation (millet) to be able to exist,” the most important condition is “religion, and a certain amount of zeal (taassup) to protect that religion.”\(^{427}\) Religion and state were thus quite intricately interconnected in his view, and each ought to be a pillar of strength to the other.

Thus, one has to agree with Kemal Karpat: rather than being the opportunist depicted by his critics, both Turkish and Western, Abdülhamid was “a devoted Muslim and a firm believer in the superiority of Islam and Islamic practices.”\(^{428}\) And yet, while "Karpat attempts to clear Abdülhamid of the charge of hypocrisy, he still claims that Abdülhamid’s actions were based not on “dogmatic, religious principles,” but rather on

\(^{426}\) Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 136.
\(^{427}\) Muhtıra-i Hümayun, n.d. reprinted in Mehmed Hocaoğlu, II. Abdülhamid’in Muhtaraları (Abdülhamid II’s Memoranda) (İstanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 1998), 127.
\(^{428}\) Kemal H. Karpat, The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 155. For a representative example of the school of thought which depicts Abdülhamid as a hypocrite who merely used Islam as a means of covering up his hunger for power, see John L. Esposito, Islam and Politics (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 46. Many other scholars take a less harsh view of Abdülhamid but still see his Islamism as less than sincere. Examples include John Obert Voll, Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 91; Cleveland and Bunton, A History of the Modern Middle East, 120. Cleveland and Bunton go so far as to state, “Abdul Hamid’s stress on Islamic ties was intended to secure the continued loyalty of the Arab inhabitants of the empire.” Such an assertion, at a minimum, completely disregards the role of Islam in Abdülhamid’s relationship with the other Muslim ethnicities of the Ottoman Empire.
“certain Ottoman historical practices and pragmatic state considerations.”\(^{429}\) Here, Karpat is, in a sense essentialising religion, making a religiously informed approach to governance sound like the equivalent of a dogmatic approach, and attempting to absolve Abdülhamid of this accusation. Karpat cites Abdülhamid’s taxation of wine exports, his donation of land and money for the construction of a Bulgarian church, and his friendship with Vámbéry as proof that Abdülhamid’s policies were based on a “traditional, practical ‘secularism’.”\(^{430}\) In other words, we can supposedly accept Abdülhamid as a rational ruler, but only because his personal piety did not enter the realm of politics.

One can respond to this suggestion by an appeal to Abdülhamid’s own understanding of Islam. Thus, instead of looking at a timeless and reified “Islam,” which Abdülhamid’s personal practices seemed to clash with, we should look at what actually constituted Islam for Abdülhamid himself. As we have seen in the preceding discussion, for Abdülhamid Islam was not primarily a set of prohibitions (such as the prohibition against wine, or a supposed prohibition against friendship with non-Muslims). Rather, Islam was primarily a moral code which urged those who believed in it to be good and decent human beings, and to accept and tolerate non-Muslims as long as the latter were not “arrogant.” Furthermore, as F.A.K. Yasamee points out, to Abdülhamid religion is what engendered group solidarity.\(^{431}\) When understood this way, there is no contradiction between Abdülhamid’s Islamic faith and the actions listed by Karpat. “Pragmatic state considerations,” to use Karpat’s phrase, certainly did play a leading role in Abdülhamid’s policy-making. Much of the Sultan’s time and energy was spent holding the Empire

\(^{429}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{430}\) Ibid., 155-156.
together and fighting against European encroachments on Ottoman territory. However, in Abdülhamid’s words, “our fountain of youth is Islam,” in the sense that the vigour and life of the Ottomans could only be assured if they “remained faithful to our august religion.”

Abdülhamid certainly did instrumentalise religion in the interest of the state. As we have seen in previous chapters, he mobilised the Madani tariqa to prevent further French aggression in North Africa. At the same time, though, he himself was a member of this tariqa. It was not a question of Islam subjugating the state, as Kemal Atatürk would have seen it, or the state subjugating Islam, as Karpat would argue, so much as the two forming an organic whole, with the Sultan-Caliph as the lynchpin. Perhaps Selim Deringil captures it best by describing Abdülhamid’s emphasis on Islam as “a new bid for unity against what he saw as an increasingly hostile Christian world.” Indeed, in a memorandum written in August 1901 and cited by Deringil, Abdülhamid agreed with the assessment made several decades previously by Koca Mustafa Reşid Paşa (1800-1858), according to which the Ottoman Empire rested on four pillars, the most important of which was Islam. Only after Islam came the preservation of the Ottoman dynasty. The third pillar was the continuing protection of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, while the fourth was the role of Istanbul as the capital of the Empire. Abdülhamid ordered his ministers to bear these four pillars in mind when making any decisions.

Thus, to Abdülhamid, the preservation of rule by his family over the Ottoman Empire was

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433 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) saw Islam, at least as it had been practised in the Ottoman Empire, as an imported Arab ideology inimical to the interests of the Turkish nation. Thus, as commander-in-chief of the Army of the Grand National Assembly, Kemal pushed through a separation between the offices of the Caliph and Sultan in 1922. In 1924, he had the Caliphate abolished altogether. See M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 132-141.
important, but even more important was the preservation and strengthening of the Islamic character of the state.

Gökhan Çetinsaya, following Hakan Yavuz, argues that during the Tanzimat era (1839-1876), Islam had already become “a social cement.” Under Abdülhamid, it turned into “proto-nationalism.” A transition occurred from “Islamic political consciousness” to ethnic nationalism, largely because of a “territorialization of the national consciousness,” with the result that Islamism or Pan-Islamism became a form of nationalism. Çetinsaya admits, however, that if such a process did occur, it did so against the will of Sultan Abdülhamid, who, as we have seen, was quite opposed to nationalism of any sort within the confines of the Ottoman Empire.435

How then can Islamism of the type promoted by Abdülhamid be seen as a type of proto-nationalism? The connection between the two can be illustrated with a brief look at the views of the leading Muslim intellectual Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), who was attached for a number of years to Abdülhamid’s court. According to Nikki Keddie, Afghani adopted a version of Pan-Islamist ideology in the 1880s, and started condemning tribalism. However, in Keddie’s view, Afghani’s Pan-Islamism was very similar to nationalism in its “aggressive cultural defensiveness,” and his “attempt to show that Islam and its component peoples are intrinsically superior to the Christian West....” Afghani’s goal was a religious revival among Muslims, but the reason he wanted to see

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such a revival was not so much for its own sake as for the sake of increased military and political power it would bring with it.\footnote{Nikki Keddie, “Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism,” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 41, no. 1 (1969): 23-25.}

According to Azmi Özcan, however, Afghani started advocating Pan-Islamist views as early as 1876 or 1877. In an undated letter he sent to Abdülhamid around this time, Afghani argued that the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and other parts of the Muslim world, such as India and Central Asia, should form a united front against Russian expansionism.\footnote{Azmi Özcan, \textit{Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924} (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 59.} Here, too, it seems that the purpose of Afghani’s Pan-Islamism was to build the collective self-defence of Muslim peoples, so that they could resist the Russian onslaught which had already engulfed Central Asia and was to bring Russian troops to the gates of Istanbul shortly thereafter. What Afghani’s vision shares with nationalism is the conclusion that people who share similar traits must unite in order to attain security.\footnote{Naunihal Singh, \textit{Nationalism} (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006), 109.} In most other ways, though, nationalism is not a very useful lens through which to examine Afghani’s efforts to promote Muslim unity in various lands far from his homeland.

Like Afghani, Abdülhamid also believed in the need for the Muslims to collectively resist Western aggression and dominance. In his view, “The moment has not yet come, but it will come, when all faithful Muslims will rise as one man to break they yoke of the \textit{Giaour} [unbeliever]….” In anticipation of such a day, all Muslims, according to Abdülhamid, looked towards “the Caliph, the successor to the Prophet” as their best hope.\footnote{Abdul-Hamid, \textit{Avant la débâcle de la Turquie}, 170.} Was this an expression of incipient nationalism? Abdülhamid himself would
have undoubtedly been shocked at such a notion. Yet Selim Deringil sees the new, politically unifying role accorded to the Caliphate by Abdülhamid and his bureaucrats as part of a “quest for a new Imperial/national identity.” On the other hand, F.A.K. Yasamee sees Abdülhamid’s Islamism as conservative (that is, aimed at preserving rather than changing the existing order), without being reactionary.

While it is true that, as Deringil suggests, Abdülhamid was looking to modify the legitimation tools of the Tanzimat era by increasingly focusing on Islam, the idea of a “national identity,” if applied to the Ottoman Empire, would have appeared rather alien to him. The Sultan’s native language was Ottoman Turkish and he did possess an awareness of himself as a Turk. For instance, once, when conversing about the history of the Turkish language with Vámbéry, Abdülhamid listed several old Turkish words that were still used by the imperial household, but had been forgotten by the average Ottoman; the Sultan seemed pleased to present this proof of the Turkishness of the dynasty. Indeed, Vámbéry found this attitude on the part of Abdülhamid to be surprising, since the Turks of Istanbul had been “rather ashamed” of their ancestry just a few decades previously. Now, however, being Turkish was becoming a matter of pride, even for Abdülhamid (that is not to say, however, that the Sultan was becoming a nationalist).

This change was, undoubtedly, the result of a general spread of nationalist ideas that had taken place in the Ottoman Empire in recent years. The intellectual and statesman Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (1822-1895) wrote that the Turks, being more ready than the other peoples of the Empire to sacrifice themselves for the ruling dynasty, should as a

441 Yasamee, Ottoman Diplomacy, 24-25.
consequence be given a higher position than others within the Ottoman Empire. Küçük Said Paşa (1830-1914), who served as the Ottoman grand vizier eight different times (both under Abdülhamid and the Young Turks), was proud of his Turkish ancestry. Ahmed Vefik Paşa (1823-1891), who served as grand vizier twice under Abdülhamid, researched the Central Asian ancestry of the Turks, even though he himself was of Greek origin. Unofficially, more and more Turkish-speaking Ottomans, especially members of the elite, started referring to the Empire as Türkiye (Turkey) during Abdülhamid’s rule. One example was in the encyclopaedic Kamus-ül A’lam (Universal Dictionary), published in Ottoman Turkish by the Albanian Ottoman scholar Şemseddin Sami (known to Albanians as Sami Frashëri, 1850-1904) in the years 1889-1899. The dictionary contains a three-page article on the Turks (along with a separate and shorter entry on the Ottomans), and calls the Ottoman Empire a “Turkish state” (Türk devleti). In fact, Abdülhamid himself calls the Empire as Türkiye in an imperial memorandum probably written in 1896. During the 1897 war with Greece over Crete, the Ottoman poet Mehmet Emin (later Yurdakul, 1869-1944) published a book entitled Türkçe Şiirler (Turkish Poems), which contained a poem declaring “Ben bir Türküm” (I am a Turk).

443 Kemal H. Karpat, Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 21, 547-549; Caroline Finkel, Osman’s Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923 (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 548; Handan Nezir Akmeşe, The Birth of Modern Turkey: The Ottoman Military and the March to World War I (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 35; George Walter Gawrych, The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 96-97; Hocaöğlu, II. Abdülhamid’ın Muhtarları, 55; Carel Bertram, Imagining the Turkish House: Collective Visions of Home (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 68; Howard Eissenstat, “Metaphors of Race and Discourse of Nation: Racial Theory and State Nationalism in the First Decades of the Turkish Republic,” in Paul Spickard (ed.), Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World (New York: Routledge, 2005), 245. On the other hand, Donald Quataert reminds us in Quataert, The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 191, that the vast majority of Turks, Arabs, Kurds and Armenians were not ethnic nationalists prior to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. While not contesting Quataert’s point, it is important to note that the evidence does point towards a growing self-perception or self-imagination by the elite of Turkish-speaking Ottomans as Turks during the Hamidian era. For Ahmed Vefik’s ancestry, see Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey, 29.
Even Sultan Abdülhamid could not escape this trend in private, as evidenced by his aforementioned exchange with Vámbéry and his private use of the word “Turkey” to describe the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, in public Abdülhamid wanted no emphasis to be placed on Turkishness. Therefore, when Vámbéry asked Abdülhamid’s permission to deliver a lecture on Turkish ethnology at the Galatasaray Lycée, the Sultan refused, telling him that “We must not touch the question of nationality; all Mohammedans [sic] are brethren.”

A public speech noting the ethnic characteristics of the Turks was thus taboo for Abdülhamid; Islamic unity had to trump ethnic distinctiveness if the state was to survive. A new national identity may indeed have been in the earliest stages of formation during Abdülhamid’s reign, but this process was occurring against the will of the Sultan. Neither Deringil’s view nor Yasamee’s is thus fully satisfactory. In his insistence on Islam as the unifying principle of the Ottoman Empire even above the Ottoman dynasty Abdülhamid was breaking with the Tanzimat era and thus creating a new way for Ottoman subjects to imagine themselves. However, it is doubtful that Abdülhamid was consciously pursuing a new national identity through Islam, or that the Ottoman Empire was a nation (or even a proto-nation) to him.

Rather, as we have seen, he dreamed of the day when the entire Muslim world would rise against subjugation by Christians, possibly under his leadership.

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445 Dmitry Zhantiev notes correctly that “the development of a new political consciousness based on territorial and ethnic identity” was delayed rather than advanced by Abdülhamid. See Dmitry R. Zhantiev, “Islamic Factor in the Consolidation of the Ottoman Rule in the Arab Provinces during the Reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1908),” in Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Andrzej Pikulski (eds.), *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam: Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of L’Union européenne des arabisants et islamisants* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 458.
Abdülmhamid’s Advisers

It goes without saying, or it ought to, that Sultan Abdülhamid did not formulate his ideas alone. Reading accounts of Abdülhamid’s centralisation of power and decision-making at Yıldız Palace, one could get the impression that the Sultan planned out all of his policies entirely by himself, only using certain individuals to implement or promote them.446 To be fair, this is an impression that Abdülhamid himself sought to promote during his reign. In his memoirs, Abdülhamid accuses his “enemies” of starting rumours about his being under the influence of one or another of his advisers. According to Abdülhamid, all such rumours were “false.” In actuality, he would “listen to them all and, after having calmly weighed the opinions of all my counsellors, I arrive slowly at my own conclusion, and my decision, which I then execute with tenacity.”447 In another part of his memoirs, Abdülhamid notes, “Depending on the case, I consult this or that one of my secretaries, chamberlains or ministers – but the decision comes from me.” As a result, Abdülhamid believes that “not one of my advisers has decisive influence on my actions.”448

And yet, the Sultan does admit the indispensability of advice: “all sovereigns have a need for advisers and confidants;” what he denies is that he was ever unduly swayed by any particular advisers.449 Being in control of his own decision-making was not only a matter of pride for him, but a question of principle. Abdülhamid believed that, as Caliph,

446 For example, see Carter Vaughn Findley’s long and detailed chapter on “The Reign of Abdülhamid” in his Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), in which the author presents the Sultan as the sole originator of his policies, and paints his advisers as figures whom Abdülhamid “supported” out of expediency (p. 149). On the other hand, we begin to see the personalities of individual Ottoman statesmen when it comes to Findley’s discussion of the Young Turks.
447 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 57.
448 Ibid., 213.
449 Idem.
it was his role to lead the Empire as he saw fit, listening not so much to his advisers as to Muslim public opinion in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, despite wanting “above all to act as Caliph, as Commander of the Believers,” Abdülhamid admits to being constrained in his range of action by the “pretensions” of the Great Powers. Thus, Abdülhamid believed that if his policies sometimes did not come out as intended, it is because of his twofold constraint: needing to please both foreign powers and domestic Muslim opinion.\(^{450}\) A British Foreign Office report written in 1906 comes to much the same conclusion. According to its author, Ronald Macleay, Abdülhamid’s power as Sultan was restricted by “the pressure or direct intervention of the European Powers, national custom, local privileges, and, to a lesser degree, of public opinion.”\(^{451}\)

Despite this, by his own admission, the Sultan’s ministers and advisers did play a role in the formulation of policy, even if it was a limited one compared to the Tanzimat era, when the state was dominated by a group of bureaucrats.\(^{452}\) Abdülhamid’s advisers were a diverse group, including both government ministers and palace officials; Turks and non-Turks; Muslims and non-Muslims; Ottoman subjects and foreigners. They had a diversity of beliefs when it came to religion and the role of the state. They also differed in their inclinations towards this or that of the Great Powers, some favouring friendship with Britain, others Russia, and yet others being suspicious of all non-Muslim governments.

For their part, the Europeans were quite dubious about Abdülhamid’s governance style, which involved centralising “civil, military, political, religious and social matters at

\(^{450}\) Ibid., 57-58.
\(^{452}\) Shaw and Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol. II, 68-69.
‘Yıldız,‖ in the words of Abdülhamid’s First Secretary, Tahsin Paşa, instead of leaving the day-to-day affairs of government to the Sublime Porte, as had been the practice of his immediate predecessors.\footnote{Tahsin Paşa, \textit{Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hâraları} (Memories of Abdülhamid and Yıldız) (Istanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1931), 30.} In an 1880 article, the Constantinople (Istanbul) correspondent of the \textit{Times} describes Abdülhamid’s administration as “miserably inefficient and shamelessly corrupt.” The correspondent does not suggest that Abdülhamid himself was a corrupt ruler, but rather that he was “influenced in his decisions” by people who happened to be serving him at Yıldız Palace, such as the Chief Coffeemaker, “or some other obscure, ignorant person.”\footnote{“Palace rule in Turkey,” \textit{Times}, 23 Sept. 1880.} An 1882 article in the \textit{Times} by the Constantinople correspondent lists examples of who such “obscure” people might be:

Here may be met Turkish Ulema, in flowing robes and white turbans, mysterious Arab sheikhs, khans from Central Asia, Circassians from the Caucasus, learned men from Egypt, Tunis, or Morocco, eunuchs from the Soudan, Kurdish chiefs from the Persian frontier, Albanian Beys… and nondescript adventurers from every Mussulman country from the West coast of Africa to the Straits of Malacca.\footnote{“Panislamism and the Caliphate,” \textit{Times}, 19 Jan. 1882.}

In contrast to the European-style clothes and manners at the Sublime Porte, the palace was a “genuinely Oriental world.” The correspondent expresses consternation at the fact that, while for a half-century before Abdülhamid’s reign the Ottoman Empire had been trying to make itself one of the leading European powers, Abdülhamid, on the other hand, was trying to “make the Ottoman Empire a nucleus of the universal Caliphate and Constantinople the political centre of the Mahomedan world.” The article contains a dose of self-criticism: in the author’s view, Abdülhamid had decided to take this course.
partially because he was faced with an “aggressive Christendom,” notably at the Congress of Berlin, where no Christian power was prepared to defend the interests of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Abdülhamid had decided to fight the Europeans through “secret, underhand intriguing,” which explained the kind of people he gathered around himself at his palace.456

The *Times* notes that public prayers were regularly held with “no hesitation” at Yıldız Palace, and compares the role of the Sultan at its centre to that of the Pope.457 The French, fearful of Abdülhamid’s influence in North Africa, complained that the Sultan had turned his palace into an “Islamic Vatican,” from which he sought to direct the affairs of the Muslim world.458 While this expression is still in contemporary use, at the other end of the spectrum Abdülhamid’s motley group of advisers is described as an “unofficial parliament.”459

The evidence indicates, however, that this group was neither a sort of “parliament” nor, certainly, a “Vatican.” It was not based around the sort of clearly defined hierarchy that can be found in the Roman Catholic Church, with an infallible Pope at the highest level, cardinals below him, archbishops farther down, and so on.460 As we have seen, in Abdülhamid’s case, he was the Caliph, and as such the temporal head of all Muslims, and yet he belonged to the Madaniya branch of the Shadhiliya Sufi order, recognising Shaykh Zafir al-Madani as his spiritual guide. In this case, who is the pope

456 Idem.
457 Idem.
459 For an example of a modern use of “Islamic Vatican” to describe Yıldız Palace, see Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 495. Gökhan Çetinsaya uses the expression “unofficial parliament” to describe Abdülhamid’s Yıldız advisers. See François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II: Le Sultan calife (1876-1909)* (Abdülhamid II: The Sultan-Caliph, 1876-1909) (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2003), 151.
and who is the bishop? Clearly, the facile transposition of Catholic concepts onto
Ottoman politics is not very illuminating.

On the other hand, calling this disparate group a “parliament,” albeit an
“unofficial” one, is not very accurate either. Parliaments are bound together by a common
constitution, whether a written or unwritten one. As we have seen, the Ottoman
Constitution of 1876 was put into abeyance by 1878. Moreover, the membership of a
parliament is clearly defined and follows some sort of system.461 The actual Ottoman
Parliament of 1877 had followed a set system by means of which its members were
elected. On the other hand, Abdülhamid’s group of advisers was handpicked by him on
an ad hoc basis. There was no institution to which Abdülhamid’s advisers at Yıldız
Palace could all be said to be loyal, other than the person of the Sultan. Thus, ultimately,
the only common link between Abdülhamid’s advisers was the Sultan himself.462

François Georgeon points out that “many among [Abdülhamid’s advisers] are not
well known, and remain shadowy figures....”463 It would thus be useful to briefly examine
the lives and careers of some of these men, in order to gain a greater understanding of
their contribution to Abdülhamid’s ideas and ultimately to decision-making in the
Ottoman Empire during Abdülhamid’s reign. We have already examined the life and
thought of two of Abdülhamid’s advisers: Shaykh Zafir al-Madani, and his protégé,
Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi. Shaykh Zafir not only performed religious services for
Abdülhamid (such as praying for relief at times of disease), but was also a crucial liaison

461 For instance, according to the Magna Carta of 1215, the English parliament was to consist of all the
higher members of the Church hierarchy, as well as the large landlords. In other words, there was a fixed
legal principle beyond the king’s whims or personal choice which determined the membership of
parliament. See William Cobbett, The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the
462 Georgeon, Abdülhamid II, 150.
463 Ibid., 151.
between the Sultan and his subjects in North Africa. Khayr al-Din, while a member of the Madaniyya tariqa, was a reformist and liberal politician, and although Abdülhamid used his skills in negotiations with foreign powers, ultimately Khayr al-Din’s reformism clashed with Abdülhamid’s political conservatism, and Khayr al-Din was removed from the position of grand vizier not long after taking it up, never returning to the post.

Neither Shaykh Zafir nor Khayr al-Din appear in the Sultan’s own memoirs, though. In fact, few of his advisers do, and even fewer get more than one passing mention. However, one of Abdülhamid advisers whom the Sultan does name repeatedly in his memoirs is Küçük Said Paşa. Said played a formative role during the early period, although he was present on the Ottoman political scene in one way or another for the duration of Abdülhamid’s reign.

Mehmed Said (known later in life as Küçük or “small” in order to distinguish him from another Said Paşa) was born in 1830 in the eastern Anatolian city of Erzurum to a father who was from Ankara. He began his career as a journalist, working for an Istanbul-based newspaper called Ceride-i Havadis, which was owned by an Englishman. He then obtained a job at the Ministry of Commerce, moving to the Interior Ministry and quickly rising through the ranks of the bureaucracy, after which he moved to the grand vizier’s office. While at the Ministry of Commerce, he met one of Abdülhamid’s brothers-in-law, who introduced him to Abdülhamid (who was at that time a prince) and described him as an intelligent and well-spoken man. After Abdülhamid came to the throne, he decided to make use of Said’s skills and appointed him his First Secretary. Said thus entered the
personal service of the Sultan in 1876, at a time when Abdülhamid was still experimenting with liberalism and formulating his political views.  

Abdülhamid was evidently impressed with Said, because he appointed him to the position of Minister of Justice in 1878, then governor of Bursa, and eventually Prime Minister in 1879. According to Tahsin Paşa, Said’s influence on the Sultan was profound even before these promotions; in his view, it was Said who persuaded the Sultan to centralise all the entire administration of the Empire at Yıldız Palace. Again, as head of the Justice Ministry, Said formulated ideas that went beyond his immediate purview and dealt with the political order of the Empire as a whole. According to Ercümend Kuran, part of the reason for Said’s speedy rise to the position of Prime Minister was a memorandum he wrote to the Sultan as Minister of Justice, proposing two policies that would become cornerstones of Abdülhamid’s long reign: centralisation and educational reforms, aimed at bringing Ottoman Muslims closer to the authority of the Sultan. In 1880, as Prime Minister, he submitted another memorandum to the Sultan, in which he again advocated improvements in education, in particular the education of Muslims, who, according to him, had fallen behind their Christian counterparts because the Christians had better non-governmental schools. Said also advocated reforming the judiciary to make it more independent and less corrupt. He wanted the training of army officers to be improved, and also wanted to see an increase in the number of Muslim diplomats representing the Ottoman Empire abroad (as many Ottoman diplomats at that

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465 Idem; Ercumend Kuran, “Kucuk Said Pasha (1840-1914) as a Turkish Modernist,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 1, no. 2 (1970): 124-125. Abdülhamid alternated between the use of the title “Prime Minister” (Baş vekil) and the title Grand Vizier (Sadrazam) to describe his chief ministers.

466 Tahsin, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 30.
point were Christian). In 1881 or 1882, Said also proposed increasing the presence of the state in each Ottoman province by establishing an appellate court, a public works office, a statistical bureau and a university in each provincial capital.467

It took Said Paşa many years and several seven stints as grand vizier or prime minister (the last one under Abdülhamid as late as 1908) to implement some of his reform projects, notably in education and the judiciary, but also in other spheres such as the economy (more details on Said’s modernisation campaigns will be given in Chapter Four). His initial attempts at reforms (1879-1882) only enjoyed limited success, however, since the Empire was in dire financial straits and many of Said’s projects were too ambitious given the condition of the state.468 Nevertheless, according to Tahsin, Said was in the forefront of the officials who shaped Abdülhamid’s political views.469 By focusing Abdülhamid on the need to obtain the support of his Muslim subjects and encouraging the Sultan to give up on Ottomanism as a unifying principle for the Empire, Said helped determine the course of Abdülhamid’s thirty-year reign. Not only did Said suggest the content of Islamism to Abdülhamid, however; he also suggested its limits. In 1878, Abdülhamid wanted to make Arabic a co-official language of the Ottoman Empire, and it was Said who persuaded him that such a move would be dangerous for “Turkishness.” Nevertheless, the inspiration for the international dimension of Islamism did not come from Said, who was only interested in the welfare of the Muslims within the confines of the Empire; in that sense, Abdülhamid surpassed the ideas presented to him by Said.470

468 Ibid., 127
469 Tahsin, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 29.
According to Tahsin, Said Paşa was also the main originator of Abdülhamid’s network of spies. Being a very suspicious person, like the Sultan himself, Said set up his espionage network at the first opportunity he got, which was during his first stint as Prime Minister. By doing so, according to Tahsin, he further endeared himself to Abdülhamid. The Sultan’s suspiciousness, bordering on paranoia, was legendary. In Tahsin’s view, while Said was not responsible for Abdülhamid’s suspicious disposition, he did strengthen it by his proximity to the Sultan; in other words, he set a bad example, which the young Abdülhamid followed to his detriment.471

As for Abdülhamid himself, he does not admit in his memoirs that Said was the originator of some of his major policies; evidently, he preferred to think that the ideas had come from himself. He does acknowledge his debt to Said over two ideas, however. One was Said’s insistence that Abdülhamid pay attention to his image in the Western press. Abdülhamid followed through on his advice and started-handing out medals or even, in some cases, money to the editors of various European newspapers, in the hope of obtaining positive coverage from them. Eventually, however, the Sultan was disenchanted with this policy, since no matter how many European newspapers he established friendly ties with, there were “thousands” of others that made it a point to “lie” about the Ottoman Empire.472 The other proposal by Said that Abdülhamid mentions was to transfer the Ottoman capital from Istanbul to Bursa. In an entry in his memoirs dated 1896, Abdülhamid calls this a “strange proposal,” because of Istanbul’s central role both as a repository of Ottoman history and as the centre of the Caliphate. According to Abdülhamid, “To Istanbul are connected all our glorious memories; we

471 Tahsin, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 27-29.
472 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 220.
have ancient and holy mosques there [as well as] relics of the Prophet.” On the other hand, Abdülhamid does admit to seeing certain merits in Said’s idea. “What would we do if the Russians again arrive under the walls of Istanbul,” the Sultan asks himself. He worries that the Russians would capture the capital, which would mean “the end of everything!” Abdülhamid was convinced that losing Istanbul, as long as it remained the capital, would also mean losing the Caliphate, and that the Arabs would then try to seize the Caliphate for themselves.473

Despite these considerations, Istanbul remained the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Said’s power was limited to that of suggestion; it was, ultimately, Abdülhamid who ran the Empire, although he did take all of Said’s ideas seriously. As Tahsin Paşa recalls, Abdülhamid would stay in touch with Said even during those periods when the latter was out of office. When important matters came up before the Sultan, he would send state documents to Said Paşa’s house (sometimes using Tahsin himself as the courier), asking Said to read them and express his opinion orally or in writing.474

Notwithstanding Abdülhamid’s reliance on Said’s ideas and expertise, the two had a very public falling out in 1895. In June of that year, the Times reported that Said’s opponents at Yıldız Palace were trying to arouse the Sultan’s suspicions about him.475 As the months went on, Said became convinced that Abdülhamid was planning to send him into exile, or even have him killed. Consequently, on 4 December 1895, Said, along with his four sons, sought refuge at the British embassy in Istanbul. He emerged from the embassy five days later, after receiving guarantees from the Sultan that he would not be harmed.

473 Ibid., 20.
474 Tahsin, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 29.
Two days after he left the embassy, the Times reported that he felt “utterly alienated” from Abdülhamid.476

The Sultan and Said Paşa were able to patch up their differences, but privately Abdülhamid remained hurt for years by the way in which Said had demonstrated a lack of trust in him. In an entry in his memoirs dated 1900, Abdülhamid expresses astonishment that Said would seek refuge from him with Christians, and accuses him of only pretending to fear for his life. He speculates that Said’s escape to the British embassy was a form of protest against “our surveillance system.” If so, Abdülhamid certainly was not moved by Said’s gesture to stop spying on current and former Ottoman officials. To the contrary, Abdülhamid states in his memoirs that “espionage is, once and for all, a necessity for us,” although he goes on to add that “it should just not be taken too far.” In fact, Abdülhamid blames Tahsin for being overzealous with regard to spying, which is ironic, given Tahsin’s description of Said as the originator of the Hamidian espionage system.477 It thus seems that Said fell victim to the network of spies that he himself had established almost two decades previously.

Abdülhamid eventually forgave Said Paşa his desperate move and reinstated him to the position of Grand Vizier in the years 1901-1903. As he admitted one day to Tahsin regarding Said, “I do not know why, but I have affection for this man.”478 He also described Said to his daughter Ayşe Sultan as the most knowledgeable of his ministers.479 In a 1903 entry in his memoirs, Abdülhamid describes Said affectionately “my old fox.” He also notes that he constantly had to change grand viziers to appease one Great Power

478 Tahsin, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 27.
479 Osmanoğlu, Babam Abdülhamid, 39.
or another; should the foreign power be displeased with some aspect of Abdülhamid’s policies, he would blame them on his grand vizier and sacrifice him. It is for this reason that Abdülhamid kept alternating between Küçük Said and Kâmil Paşa (1833-1913) as grand viziers. These changes, in Abdülhamid’s view, did not have more than a superficial significance, since “the real Grand Vizier lives in Yıldız, because it is me.” In other words, the grand viziers who replaced one another, whether it was Said or someone else, were but puppets in a performance, while Abdülhamid was the puppet master.

However, given what we have seen regarding Abdülhamid’s esteem for Said Paşa’s ideas, it is safe to say that the Sultan is exaggerating here. Neither was Abdülhamid as independent as he claimed, nor was Said a bit player in a drama; rather, Said was one of those figures who not only helped give the Hamidian era its shape, but even helped mould a young Abdülhamid into the ruler he would become. After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, Said Paşa turned against his master and sided with the revolutionaries. To the end, however, Abdülhamid refused to believe that Said could willingly betray him. Living under house arrest in Selânik (Thessaloniki), Abdülhamid told his courtiers that Said had only acted this way because he was a “coward.”

Another one of Abdülhamid’s key advisors was a Syrian named İzzet (‘Izzat) Bey, rumoured to have gained a degree of control over the Sultan. As a consequence, in his memoirs, Abdülhamid takes particular pains to underscore his independence from İzzet’s influence. In an entry in his memoirs dated 1900, Abdülhamid claims that “even” İzzet did not influence his decisions, although he professes a respect for İzzet due to his

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480 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 83.
481 Osmanoğlu, Babam Abdülhamid, 39.
“extraordinary intelligence.”\footnote{Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 57.} In an undated entry, Abdülhamid admits that İzzet was hated by “a good many people,” but once again expresses his admiration for İzzet’s intelligence and his loyalty.\footnote{Ibid., 213.}

Thus, as Abdülhamid himself indicates, İzzet Bey (later given the rank of İzzet Paşa) was a rather controversial personality. One thing that Abdülhamid and İzzet’s critics would agree on, however, was his intelligence. Ahmad ‘Izzat al-‘Abid (or Ahmed İzzet el-Abid in Turkish) was born in Syria, the son of Holo Paşa, who was the governor of the Bekaa sancak of the Damascus vilayet, and may have been of Kurdish origin. İzzet became a prosecutor in a Syrian court, and was promoted to a court in Istanbul around 1887; according to the British diplomat Harry Lamb, the promotion was a result of İzzet’s “evident cleverness.” According to the \textit{Times}, İzzet, whom the newspaper calls an “exceedingly cunning” man, then began to spy for the Sultan, which allowed him to obtain a job at Yıldız Palace, first as a compiler of reports, and eventually as second secretary to the Sultan. In this role, İzzet managed to make himself indispensable to Abdülhamid, partially by giving him useful advice (according to Lamb he is the one who may have come up with the idea of the Hijaz Railway), and partially by adroitly getting rid of his political opponents. Lamb calls İzzet the “avatar of the ‘Hamidian system,’” and “the most interesting personality in Turkey, after the Sultan himself.” Although Lamb describes him as having pro-Russian sympathies, it seems that in reality he was loyal only to the Ottoman Empire and to himself.\footnote{Harry H. Lamb, “Officials of the Palace,” enclosure in Barclay, 18 Jan. 1907, reprinted in Gooch and Temperley (eds.), \textit{British Documents on the Origins of the War, Vol. V}, 8; “Ahmed İzzet,” \textit{Times}, 28 May 1896.}
Although İzzet started out being friends with Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi, a fellow Syrian and one of the two Sufi shaykhs esteemed by Sultan Abdülhamid, around the time he was appointed to the position of second secretary, İzzet had fallen out with the shaykh. Abdülhamid’s first secretary Tahsin notes that every time Abu al-Huda would see him, he would complain about İzzet. Thus, it is important to point out that Abdülhamid’s advisers were not a unified group; even two Syrians who were devoted to the cause of the Caliphate could work at cross-purposes. What united them was loyalty to Abdülhamid, rather than any institutional identity of the kind implied by the term “Islamic Vatican.”

İzzet certainly is an example of a man whom Abdülhamid trusted implicitly, and who was able to use this trust to benefit both himself and the Sultan. The Sultan used İzzet as his go-between during cabinet meetings that were held at the palace. Abdülhamid gave government and military jobs to representatives of several Damascene notable families upon İzzet’s recommendation. Furthermore, when the Zionist leader Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) came to Istanbul in 1896 with a request to increase Jewish immigration to Palestine, it was İzzet who carried out the negotiations, trying to obtain the best deal he could for the Ottomans in return for any concessions. Herzl described İzzet as a “shrewd” man and a hard worker, who even kept a bed in his office in case his work prevented him from going home for the night. Apart from his efforts towards the construction of the Hijaz Railway, which pleased the Sultan immensely, İzzet was also in charge of a treasury reform commission. According to Tahsin, the commission was not successful at increasing the revenue of the Ottoman Empire, but that did not stop İzzet from interfering in “big financial affairs.” İzzet’s goal was apparently to profit from his position, and he was able to use his influence to accumulate a “very large fortune” for

485 Tahsin, Abdülhamit ve Yıldız Hatıraları, 135.
himself. Thus, Tahsin Paşa was clearly among those people who were not impressed by the personality of İzzet Paşa. And yet, when push came to shove, Tahsin helped İzzet escape the Ottoman Empire with his money. In August 1908, after the Young Turk Revolution, the new government was preparing to arrest İzzet on charges of corruption, he fled to Britain, using a pass issued to him by Tahsin.486

Apart from Ottomans from different parts of the empire, Abdülhamid also drew several foreigners into his circle, among whom was Jamal al-Din Afghani. Jamal al-Din was born in Persia, and received a traditional Shi‘ite education in Qazvin and the Ottoman city of Najaf. In 1856, Jamal al-Din (who was to style himself Afghani in order to hide his Persian Shi‘ite origins and make it easier to reside in Sunni-majority lands) travelled to India and stayed there until 1858, witnessing the anti-British revolt of 1857 and its suppression by the British. According to Naeem Qureshi, it was at this point that he developed his anti-British and pan-Islamist views. Afghani made one or more subsequent visits to India (including an extended one from 1879 to 1882), and delivered several lectures in Persian, but his ideas seem to have largely been ignored by the Muslim intelligentsia in India. Afghani, for his part, was bitterly disappointed in Indian Muslim intellectuals such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) for conceptualising a future for Indian Muslims which involved cooperation with the British Empire, rather than struggle against it.487

Afghani became an adviser to three successive kings of Afghanistan in the 1860s, advocating an anti-British foreign policy there. He moved to Istanbul in 1869, and joined a learned society called Encümen-i Daniş (Assembly of Knowledge). In February 1870, Afghani gave a speech at the Darülfünun, in which he urged Muslims to follow a path of reform. His views became popular at the Sublime Porte, and he was appointed to the Ottoman council on education, in which capacity he gave another, more daring speech at the university in late 1870. In the speech, he compared prophecy to philosophy, which led the Şeyhülislam of the time to declare him a heretic. As a result, he was expelled from Istanbul, and moved to Cairo, where he received a government salary and taught various subjects, including philosophy and jurisprudence, at al-Azhar University. He protested the growing British influence in Egypt through articles, public lectures and social clubs such as Masonic lodges. Consequently, he was expelled from Egypt at the urging of the British consul in 1879.488

As mentioned above, Afghani wrote to Abdülhamid at the beginning of the latter’s reign and offered his services for the promotion of a pan-Islamic bloc. Thus, the letter likely came during the Egyptian period of Afghani’s career. Not receiving any encouragement from Abdülhamid at that time, Afghani returned to India following his expulsion from Egypt; he spent three years there, including a brief stint in detention in Calcutta in 1882 because of his earlier anti-British activity in Egypt. He was released upon the completion of the British conquest of Egypt, and decided to move to Paris.

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There, he engaged in a polemic with the philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892) in 1883, arguing that Islam and science were not mutually exclusive. He then set up an influential Arabic newspaper called al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa in 1884 together with his Egyptian disciple Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905). The paper was of a predominantly anti-British character, criticising British imperialism and Britain’s treatment of weaker countries.  

Nevertheless, Afghani also held out a hand of friendship to Britain over the issue of Egypt. When al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa was being published, Britain was in the midst of a war against the self-proclaimed Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad (1844-1885), in Sudan. In his newspaper, Afghani argued that the Mahdist movement had the potential to spread to India. If the British wanted to prevent such a development, in his view, they should restore their erstwhile friendship with the Ottomans, who would help them defeat the Mahdi and would thus act as a firebreak between Sudan and India. Since Mahdism was a Muslim movement, Afghani believed it could only effectively be countered by other Muslims, namely the Ottomans. However, the price of Ottoman cooperation with Britain would be the return of Egypt to Ottoman control. Thus, Afghani and Vámbéry were both advocating some sort of compromise between Britain and the Ottoman Empire over the issue of Egypt around the same time; however, while Vámbéry was, to some extent, an insider in both London and Istanbul, Afghani was an outsider, not accepted at this stage by the establishment of either imperial capital.

A British political activist and horse breeder named Wilfrid Blunt (1840-1922) tried to change this situation. Blunt was inspired by the notion that the Caliphate should

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489 Rejwan, Arabs Face the Modern World, 7; Moaddel, Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism, 363.
be restored to the Arabs, which he had picked up from his Arabic teacher, a Syrian Christian journalist named Lewis Sabuncu. In 1881, through Sabuncu, he met Muhammad ‘Abduh, who told him about Afghani and his reformist ideas, and supported the transfer of the Caliphate to the Arabs. While Blunt himself did not occupy any important government posts, he had close connections through friends and family to the Gladstone government, to which he advocated the cause of Egyptian independence. In the manner of Vámbéry, Blunt also appealed directly to the public, publishing a book entitled *The Future of Islam* in 1882, in which he predicts the imminent fall of the Ottoman Empire, and the transfer of the Caliphate into the hands of the Arabs. He also argues that Britain would become the “adviser and protector” of the global Muslim community, and that British-ruled Indian Muslims would come to occupy a leading place within it.491 In 1885, after the publication of Afghani’s calls for an Anglo-Ottoman compromise over Egypt, Blunt invited Afghani to his house in Britain, where the latter stayed for several months. Blunt’s conversations with ‘Abduh and Afghani himself had convinced him that Afghani was a supporter of Britain. Blunt therefore tried hard to have him sent to the Ottoman Empire to negotiate a solution of the Egyptian question on behalf of Britain, together with the leader of the British delegation, Henry Drummond Wolff (1830-1908). Ultimately, however, the British government decided to leave Afghani off the delegation.492

492 Kedourie, *Afghani and ‘Abduh*, 55-56. As it turned out, Wolff succeeded on his mission without Afghani’s help, and signed an agreement according to which Britain would withdraw from Egypt in 1890. However, the implementation of the deal was blocked by France in 1887, since France feared that an Anglo-Ottoman rapprochement would weaken its own position in North Africa. See F.H. Hinsley,
At this stage, Afghani abandoned his attempts to pursue a more pro-British course and decided to side with Britain’s rival for mastery in Asia, namely Russia. Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887), the editor of the right-wing, Pan-Slavic newspaper Moskovskie vedomosti (whose role in encouraging the Balkan rebellions and Russo-Ottoman War of the 1870s was mentioned in Chapter One), invited Afghani to Moscow in 1886. Katkov’s aim was to use Afghani to promote anti-British agitation in Central Asia and India. Maharaja Dalip Singh (1838-1893), the last independent Sikh ruler, who had been deposed by the British and spent much of his life in exile in Britain, also moved to Moscow at the urging of Katkov in 1887. Together, Dalip Singh and Afghani issued several manifestoes, calling themselves the Indian Liberation Society. These proclamations were printed in Paris and distributed with the help of Irish nationalists. That same year, Katkov died, and the “Indian Liberation Society” was thus left without a patron. Dalip Singh left Russia for France, while Afghani moved in 1888 from Moscow to the capital, St. Petersburg, where he tried to persuade government officials that India would revolt against British rule if Russia openly supported the Indians. Afghani’s lobbying did not produce the results he desired. On a visit to St. Petersburg the following year, the Persian shah, Nasir al-Din (r. 1848-1896) met with Afghani and invited him to visit his kingdom, which Afghani proceeded to do.⁴⁹³

His sojourn in Iran turned out to be a disappointing one for Afghani, however, since the British objected to his presence at once to the Shah. Additionally, the Persian government was afraid that Afghani had come to Iran not to help the state in any way, but to function as a Russian agent. As a result, Nasir al-Din failed to give Afghani a

⁴⁹³ Kedourie, Afghani and ‘Abdul, 56-57.
government post, and Afghani’s championing of Russia turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Afghani started spending his time meeting Persians from all walks of life, including the ulama, criticising the Persian government and praising Russia. In 1890, he sought refuge in a Shi‘ite shrine, from which he continued attacking the Shah and his government. Finally, he was captured and expelled from Persia to the Baghdad vilayet of the Ottoman Empire in 1891, leaving behind a considerable group of newly acquired followers, and partially serving as the inspiration behind the tobacco revolt of the same year.494

From Ottoman Iraq, Afghani made his way to London, which had turned into a gathering place of sorts for Middle Eastern dissidents. It seems he was willing to temporarily overlook his long struggle with the British, because London was the ideal setting from which to continue his new struggle against Nasir al-Din Shah. Afghani wrote articles against him and gave lectures on his experiences in Persia. He also contacted Sultan Abdülhamid in 1892, offering him his services once again. Although Afghani’s friendship with Blunt made Abdülhamid deeply suspicious that Afghani was in reality a British agent, the Sultan nevertheless decided he could use Afghani’s influence to persuade Iraqi Shi‘ites (perhaps because of his previous political experience as a dissident in Persia) to become more loyal to him and the state, and consequently invited him to return to Istanbul.495

In 1894, however, Abdülhamid came up with a much more ambitious project for Afghani: to heal the rift between Sunnis and Shi‘ites everywhere (particularly in Persia),

and not just in Iraq. In a note sent to Afghani, the Sultan stressed the need for the Muslims to achieve “unity and togetherness” in order to stand firm in the face of the designs of “the Christians,” such as the “Russians, Armenians, Bulgarians and others” against them. After all, “according to God’s clear command, the Muslims are brothers.”

First and foremost, Abdülhamid was interested in healing the Sunni-Shi‘ite schism. The reason was practical to some degree: according to Abdülhamid, “the Iranians, while being Muslims… are defending and protecting Armenian troublemakers who are working against the Muslims.” What was needed was to “abolish the divisions between the Muslims’ schools of law” \( \text{(m"{u}sl"{u}manlar\'ın mezhep ayrılıkları kaldırıl[mak])}. \)

This development shows that Kemal Karpat’s assertion that “Abdülhamid had no interest in Afghani as a worldwide pan-Islamic crusader” is incorrect. The Sultan wanted to utilise Afghani’s international contacts and Pan-Islamic zeal, and Afghani responded with enthusiasm. He helped organise a Persian association in Istanbul, and asked its members to write letters to Shi‘ite scholars in Persia, India and the Arab lands, calling for Islamic unity. Around 600 such letters were sent, drawing 200 positive replies. As Abdülhamid notes in his memoirs, he was quite impressed by Afghani’s accomplishments on this score, and became hopeful that, with “goodwill on both sides, the schism between us and the Shi‘ites could be abolished.” In his view, Persia would be the first to benefit from such a development, because then it could stop being “the toy of Russia and England.”

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\(^{496}\) Muhtıra-i Hümayûn, n.d., reprinted in Mehmed Hocaoğlu, \( II. \) Abdülhamid \'i\'n Muhtıraları (Abdülhamid II’s Memoranda) (Istanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 1998), 208-210. The Sultan is paraphrasing the Qur’an, according to which “the believers are brothers” \( (\text{innama al-mu'mina\'ın ikhw\'a}) \) (49:10). English translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (trans.), \( \text{The Qur'an} \) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

\(^{497}\) Özcan, \( \text{Pan-Islamism} \), 57-58; Karpat, \( \text{The Politicization of Islam} \), 201; Abdul-Hamid, \( \text{Avant la débâcle de la Turquie} \), 171.
The Persian government, for its part, saw the matter quite differently. To them, the new Pan-Islamic scheme was a plot by Afghani and the Ottomans to overthrow the Shah. Not only was Afghani known as an inveterate enemy of the Persian regime, but most of his contacts in Persia were opposed to the Shah as well. Consequently, in order to avoid provoking a diplomatic crisis with Persia, Abdülhamid put a stop to Afghani’s activities and set spies upon him to make sure he complied. Afghani felt himself imprisoned and, in desperation, he turned to the British for help, like Küçük Said Paşa was to do the same year. A group of his Egyptian followers also petitioned the Sultan to allow Afghani to return to Egypt. Neither move brought any results, and Afghani remained a virtual prisoner in Istanbul until his death in 1897. When Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896, the Persian authorities blamed Afghani, but Abdülhamid refused to extradite him to Persia. Nevertheless, politically, he sacrificed Afghani for the sake of maintaining amicable relations with Tehran. Abdülhamid’s treatment of Afghani shows both the Sultan’s genuine enthusiasm for Pan-Islamism, and the limits of that enthusiasm. Abdülhamid would espouse and support Pan-Islamism, but not at the cost of endangering his foreign relations at a time when the Ottomans had no allies to speak of.

Conclusion

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As we have seen, Sultan Abdülhamid II most certainly saw himself as a defender of Islam and Muslims, but that in no way implies dogmatism or hatred for the Other. He tried long and hard to find an accommodation with his principal Christian adversary and the Ottoman Empire’s erstwhile ally, Britain, even knowingly surrounding himself with advisers who were, in one way or another, connected to Britain. While he did not believe in the absolute equality of the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire, and even allowed large-scale massacres of Armenians to take place (whether through omission or commission), his concern was sedition rather than theological differences. He did not despise the Armenians simply because they were Christians, and made use of the skills and talents of several Armenian officials. He also, despite himself, allowed a greater sense of Turkishness to emerge during his reign, and sought to assimilate the Kurds. It was not enough to him that they were Muslims; they also had to be integrated into the institutions of the Ottoman state.

Abdülhamid’s Islamic universalism was thus limited in practice by the reality of ruling an empire and the need to keep the interests of that particular empire in mind. As we shall see in the two subsequent chapters, Abdülhamid’s balancing of the interests of the Muslim umma and the Ottoman Empire, combined with the suggestions he received from his advisers, led him to implement a series of reforms and modernisation drives aimed at helping Muslims at home and abroad, and culminating in the construction of the Hijaz Railway in the early 20th century.
Chapter Four

Sultan Abdülhamid II and His Indian Ocean Diplomacy

As we saw in the last chapter, Sultan Abdülhamid II believed that Islam as a basis for unity could provide the Ottoman Empire with the strength it needed to survive and flourish. We have seen how Abdülhamid sought to draw the Arabs and Berbers of Libya and the Kurds of Anatolia closer to Istanbul, and tried to avoid antagonising the Albanians. At the same time, his interests extended far beyond the borders of the Ottoman state. In his role of Caliph, which he took more seriously than any of his predecessors is reported to have done, Abdülhamid saw himself as the legitimate temporal leader of the world’s Muslims. He believed both that a strong Muslim umma would be beneficial to the Ottoman Empire (by strengthening its position with regard to the Great Powers), and that a strong Ottoman Empire would serve the umma well by helping free it from colonial oppression. Consequently, he thought it necessary to “build greater solidarity among all Muslims… in the heart of Africa, in China, in India, in all countries!”

Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism was not only a result of his vision of Islam and its role as the foundational principle of the Ottoman Empire, but also of practical considerations, primarily competition with Britain. As we saw in Chapter One, Abdülhamid came to power as a result of a deep crisis precipitated by Russian support for

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499 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie: Pensées et souvenirs (Before the Debacle of Turkey: Thoughts and Memories) (Paris; Neuchâtel: 1914), 171.
uprisings by Christian Slavs in the Balkans. That support eventually led to the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, which marked the early years of the Sultan’s reign. During this period, the Russians had come close to conquering Istanbul and putting the future of the Ottoman Empire as a whole in question. At the last moment, the Ottomans were reprieved by the appearance of a British fleet off Istanbul; this was a signal to the Russians that they would not be allowed by London to advance any further. However, for reasons discussed in Chapter One, Britain was no longer the dependable Ottoman ally it used to be. Shifts in British public opinion and the balance of parties in parliament meant that Britain now wanted to extract a heavy price for further support of the Ottomans. Thus, Britain helped Istanbul roll back the Russian conquests in the Balkans to some extent, but at the price of the handover of Cyprus by the Ottomans to the British. Subsequently, in 1882, Britain occupied the autonomous Ottoman province of Egypt, and refused to budge from it for the remainder of the existence of the Ottoman Empire. At this stage, Britain’s transformation from ally to rival was complete. There was to be no open Ottoman-British warfare until after the overthrow of Abdülhamid, but much of Abdülhamid’s foreign policy in the Muslim world consisted of countering British influence.

The arena of the rivalry between the two empires was the Indian Ocean World. As Gwyn Campbell points out, the Indian Ocean World as a theoretical framework is relatively new. It is, in some ways, an outgrowth of Fernand Braudel’s sea-based view of history. Instead of focusing on the history of land-based empires, which was up to then

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500 I am using Sugata Bose’s term “arena” to describe the Indian Ocean World, in the sense of a “sphere of action and interaction.” Bose tries to avoid the connotation “ring of conflict,” although in my view that connotation is also appropriate when it comes to the Anglo-Ottoman rivalry that played out in the Indian Ocean World during Abdülhamid’s reign. See Bose, A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 285.
the conventional approach, Braudel studied the Mediterranean as one unit, which allowed him to focus on flows of goods, people and ideas instead of political boundaries.\footnote{Gwyn Campbell, “Slavery in the Indian Ocean World,” in Gad Heuman and Trevor Burnard (ed.), \textit{The Routledge History of Slavery} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 52-53.}

Eventually, the Braudelian framework came to be applied to the study of the Indian Ocean littoral by historians such as Michael Pearson, K.N. Chaudhuri and Sugata Bose. As Bose points out, regions such as “the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, which underpin the rubric of area studies in the Western academy, are relatively recent constructions,” and their unqualified use reifies colonial-era realities and in some ways hinders analysis.\footnote{Bose, \textit{A Hundred Horizons}, 6-7.} While this dissertation does not entirely shy away from the use of such geographical labels, Bose’s criticism points to the fact that an awareness of unifying flows is often much more illuminating to the student of history than arbitrary borders can be.

Bose also cautions us against arbitrary temporal boundaries. Many of the pioneering historians of the Indian Ocean World only ascribe a degree of unity to the ocean (that is, the human communities surrounding the ocean) in the region before it was partitioned by territorially aggrandising European empires. Thus, their analysis often ends with the eighteenth century.\footnote{Ibid., 15.} As Bose points out, while the European colonial project did introduce major change into the Indian Ocean World, it did not by any means end its role as “an interregional arena of economic and cultural interaction.” Bose points out, for instance, the continuing role of Indian capitalists in areas outside India.\footnote{Ibid., 20-21.}

Similarly, Islam remained a potent unifying current right around the Indian Ocean coastline and hinterland, in East Africa, Arabia, Persia, India, and South-East Asia. The
annual hajj brought Muslims from all these areas and others to the Hijaz every year. Muslim scholars, mystics, books and ideas, as well as merchants and their goods, continued to circulate unabated throughout the Indian Ocean region despite the colonial intrusion. What changed, undeniably, was the power dynamic, with the European powers exercising effective hegemony in much of the Indian Ocean World by the late nineteenth century. That is not to say, however, that this hegemony completely redefined the world of the colonial subject. In particular, Muslims living under alien rule constructed what Bose calls “an alternative mode of sovereignty,” involving loyalty to the Caliph. The Ottoman Empire thus became a focus of interest for educated Indian Ocean Muslims who were trying to imagine a world without European domination and could find no remaining example of a fully independent Muslim polity other than the Ottoman Empire. Abdülhamid would later be able to both tap into and expand this latent current of support.

By taking control of Egypt, Britain had unilaterally seized control over the Suez Canal, which gave it effective control over Ottoman movements from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and vice versa. The loss of most of the Ottoman Empire’s Balkan and North African territories also meant that the Empire had now become a predominantly Asian power, raising the strategic importance of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf for the Ottomans. The Ottoman Empire had no prospects for an expansion of the area under its

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505 Ibid., 202.

506 The 1885 Constantinople Convention governing the use of the Suez Canal while Egypt was under British occupation stipulated that, while the Canal was to remain free to all shipping, both in peace and in war, the Egyptian authorities (effectively controlled by Britain) could take whatever measures were necessary “for the defense of Egypt.” See Jean Allain, _International Law in the Middle East: Closer to Power than to Justice_ (Aldershot; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 52-53. In 1901, a British War Office official noted that no country hostile to Britain was likely to risk shipping troops through the Suez Canal so long as Britain continued to occupy Egypt. See Steve Morewood, “Prelude to the Suez Crisis: The Rise and Fall of British Dominance over the Suez Canal, 1869-1956,” in Simon C. Smith (ed.), _Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and Its Aftermath_ (Aldershot; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 16.
influence in Europe; the rise of competing Balkan nationalisms had ensured that the Istanbul was reduced to playing a holding game in the Balkan Peninsula. In Africa and Asia, however, Abdülhamid saw ample potential for the creation of an Ottoman sphere of influence, based primarily on the Muslim-inhabited regions of these continents. This new sphere largely followed the contours of the Indian Ocean and involved areas in eastern Africa, Persia, India, and south-east Asia. Moreover, parts of the Empire that lay in the Indian Ocean region, in particular the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq, became a focus of renewed interest for Istanbul. While domestically the Ottomans sought to increase the presence of the state in the Indian Ocean arena through infrastructure projects (such as railways, telegraph lines and schools, as we shall see in Chapter Five), outside the Ottoman domains Pan-Islamism (involving the preaching of loyalty to the Caliph) became the primary tool of Abdülhamid’s influence.

The Ottoman push into the Indian Ocean sphere was, as an inevitable reaction, followed by a British pushback. The British Empire was, by this stage, an Indian Ocean power \textit{par excellence}. As George Curzon (the British Viceroy of India, 1899-1905) admitted, “Without India the British Empire could not exist.”\textsuperscript{507} What ensured continued British domination of India, however, was the continued British domination of the Indian Ocean. Without direct communication between Britain and its Indian possessions by sea, the far-off island would not be in a position to control the Subcontinent. Since its creation, the Suez Canal had become the essential interface between Europe and southern Asia, eclipsing the far longer route around the Cape of Good Hope. The distance from London to Bombay was 42 percent shorter via the Suez Canal, and that to Calcutta was 33 percent shorter. Since Britain had more extensive possessions in southern Asia than

\textsuperscript{507} Quoted in Michael Pearson, \textit{The Indian Ocean} (London: Routledge, 2003) 196.
any other Power, it is not surprising that Britain at once became the prime beneficiary of
the opening of the Canal: from its inauguration until the 1880s, British ships account for
almost 80 percent of Suez Canal traffic.\footnote{Ibid., 211.} So dependent did Britain become upon the
Suez Canal that, by the 1890s, it became unthinkable to defend British India without
British control of the Canal, and all British pretence of intending to withdraw from Egypt
was abandoned.\footnote{Morewood, “Prelude to the Suez Crisis,” 17.}

Thus, any strengthening of the Ottoman position in its Arab provinces came to be
seen by Britain as a threat to its control of Egypt, which was one of the key elements of
Britain’s domination of the Indian Ocean region. The Ottomans’ attempts to create a
network of Muslim supporters across the Indian Ocean World was met with equal
hostility by Britain, because the latter would not tolerate any challenge to its predominant
position in the region. In response to greater Ottoman assertiveness, the British hit back
by building alliances in the soft underbelly of the Ottoman Empire – the Arabian
Peninsula – and trying to delegitimise the very premise on which Abdülhamid believed
the Empire rested, namely the Ottomans’ possession of the Caliphate, the institution on
which the legitimacy of Ottoman rule rested, according to Sultan Abdülhamid himself.\footnote{Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 172.}

The British response, as much as the Ottoman challenge, thus occurred in the Indian
Ocean arena.

The next chapter will examine the ways in which this Anglo-Ottoman rivalry
played out in the affairs of one vitally important Ottoman province, namely the Hijaz. In
the Hijaz, which is the locus of the hajj, the domestic and foreign aspects of Ottoman
Indian Ocean world policy converged. This chapter, however, sets the stage for that
discussion by examining Ottoman diplomacy in the greater Indian Ocean world, involving enhanced contacts with both Muslims and non-Muslims in this crucial arena.

Figure 1: A map of the Indian Ocean World, showing the cities highlighted in this chapter. The cities in European-ruled areas where Ottoman consulates existed during the reign of Abdülhamid II are marked with a “C” after their names.511

The Anglo-Ottoman Press Rivalry

Ottoman diplomacy in the Indian Ocean arena was carried out by a number of means, among them traditional ones such as the opening of consulates in European-controlled

511 Map courtesy of Google (under fair-use licence). For details, see http://maps.google.com/support/bin/static.py?page=ts.cs&ts=1342531
parts of the Indian Ocean littoral (marking the Ottoman Empire both as a European power projecting its presence abroad through European diplomatic institutions, and as a Muslim empire in search of an appreciative foreign Muslim audience). The Ottomans and foreign Muslim rulers also occasionally exchanged envoys or delegations. The modernisation of the means of communication enhanced the possibilities for trans-oceanic contact, and introduced the press as a new element of the mix. Thus, the Ottomans sponsored the publication of pro-Ottoman newspapers in the hope of reaching a large Muslim audience outside Ottoman borders and encouraging it to develop ties of loyalty to the Caliph.

One such newspaper was the short-lived Peyk-i İslam (Follower of Islam), which started publication in May 1880. This was a newspaper published in Turkish and Urdu, with the goal of bringing the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire and India closer together, and to encourage Indian Muslims to form an attachment to the Caliphate. The publisher of the newspaper, a man named Nusrat Ali Khan, arrived in Istanbul in late 1879. In a “very confidential” report to the Foreign Office, the British ambassador to Istanbul, Sir Henry Layard (1817-1894), states that Khan’s newspaper would be “hostile to the British rule [in India], and advocate a kind of Mussulman league against it.” Apparently, Khan’s goal was being promoted by Ali Paşa, an Indian who taught English at the Ottoman Naval Academy.

Later British enquiries showed Khan to have arrived in Istanbul from Bombay, where he had been the publisher of a newspaper entitled Mukbir-i Surur. The British

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512 BOA, Y.A.HUS., 164/92, 10 Juma al-Thani 1297 (20 May 1880).
dragoman, Hugo Marinich, reports in a confidential memorandum that Khan’s goal was “to preach Islamic unity,” and to “augment the sympathies between the Muslims of India and those of the Ottoman Empire.” Marinich describes Khan as a “fanatic” because of the latter’s avoidance of dealings with the British government. While Khan may have been working “against the interests of England,” he was experienced in pro-Ottoman activity: he had been raising funds in India for the Muslim refugees who had flooded into Ottoman-held territories during the Russo-Ottoman War. He had been helped in these efforts by the Ottoman consul-general in Bombay. Despite his devotion to the Ottoman cause, Khan initially found the Ottoman ministers he approached with proposals to establish his newspaper to be cautious and even indifferent.  

514 An undated memorandum sent by Layard to the Foreign Office in April 1880 shows who some of the people Nusrat Ali Khan met were: they included Gazi Osman Paşa (1832-1900, a hero of the Russo-Ottoman War, who was said to be in correspondence with a number of Indian Muslims); the Grand Vizier, Küçük Said Paşa (1830-1914); a former grand vizier, Saffet Paşa (1814-1883), and the foreign minister, Yannis Sava Paşa (d. 1900).  

515 Khan also promised the Ottomans that he could connect them with 70 Indian princes who would recognise Abdülhamid as their legitimate caliph and send financial contributions to support the Ottoman Empire.  

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Despite his initial discouragement, Nusrat Khan’s efforts were not in vain. Ultimately, it seems it was Said Paşa, the grand vizier (whose career we examined in


Chapter Three), who came to believe in Khan’s scheme, and who, in turn, persuaded Abdülhamid of its advisability. According to Marinich, Said told the Sultan that the British had prevented Indian Muslims who wanted to fight for the Ottomans in the 1877-78 war against Russia from doing so. According to Said, the British were also preventing Indian Muslims from sending the donations that they had already raised for the Ottoman Empire, their aim being to prevent a coming together of Indian and Ottoman Muslims. Abdülhamid was convinced of the need to counter this behaviour on the part of Britain, and approved Khan’s application for financial support for his newspaper a few days later.  

Khan started publishing his paper, and eventually married an Ottoman woman. Just as he promised the Ottoman government, the main themes of his newspaper were the Caliphate and the importance for Muslims of being loyal to it. According to Marinich, the first issue did not contain anything dangerous to Britain, but he feared that such content would be added to the paper “gradually.” What most bothered Marinich is that as many as 200 copies a week of the Peyk-i İslam were to be sent to India, with some copies possibly attached to letters written by Nusrat Khan to “influential people in India,” with the aim of turning them against British rule.

The British embassy did not let the matter rest. Layard protested against the publication of the paper even before receiving instructions from London to do so. He was particularly bothered by the fact that the paper equated obedience to the Caliph to obedience to God, which he perceived as a direct threat to British rule in India. He also

518 Kemal H. Karpat, The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 212; Azmi Özcan, Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877-1924), 118.
encouraged the British authorities in India to ban the import of the newspaper. Eventually, colonial officials in India found that the paper was being read by a limited circle of readers in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, and did not contain any material that could be seen as anti-British. London, meanwhile, kept up its pressure on the Ottomans to close down the newspaper, and eventually got what it wished for. On 11 July 1880, less than two months after its initial issue was published, the *Peyk-i İslam* was suppressed by the Ottoman authorities. Its unofficial subsidy was stopped, and it was no longer allowed to be printed at the Sultan’s printing press, to which it had previously been granted access. The British thus won a temporary victory, but the brief existence of the *Peyk-i İslam* demonstrated the power of ideas to threaten the colonial order across vast distances with the help of new communication technology.

What is good for the goose is good for the gander, and the Ottomans soon found themselves on the receiving end of this new type of propaganda. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (Jamal al-Din Afghani’s friend from Chapter Three) (1840-1922) financed an effort by his client John Lewis Sabuncu (also spelled Sabunji, 1838-1931) to question Sultan Abdülhamid’s right to the title of caliph and, by extension, to cast aspersion on the legitimacy of the Ottoman state. Sabuncu, a Syriac Christian who was born in Diyarbakır *vilayet*, obtained a doctorate in Rome in 1863 and entered the priesthood. In 1870, he launched his first newspaper, *al-Nahla* (the Bee), in Beirut. After leaving journalism for a while, he re-launched *al-Nahla* in Britain in 1877, with financial support from Sultan Bargash of Zanzibar (r. 1870-1888). At this stage, his newspaper promoted British investments in Zanzibar and East Africa in general. However, with the outbreak of the

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520 Özcan, *Pan-Islamism*, 118-119.
Russo-Ottoman War that year, *al-Nahla* became more political, expressing support for the Ottomans (and the British), and attacking the Russians. Nevertheless, in 1878, following the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, which Sabuncu saw as an unjust war on the part of Britain, he adopted a policy of opposition to the British government, while still expressing admiration for the British people on the pages of *al-Nahla*. By 1879, Sabuncu had started losing confidence in Abdülhamid, seeing him as an opponent of reform.522

Around 1880, Sabuncu seems to have developed the idea that Abdülhamid was not a legitimate caliph, and that it was, in fact, the Arabs who had the sole right to the caliphate. At the same time, he was hired as an Arabic tutor by Blunt, who had become interested in Arabian horses. Blunt was an aristocrat of considerable wealth, and he wanted to learn Arabic in order to embark upon a period of living in the Middle East. Though he later came to despise European imperialism, at this point Blunt believed that Britain could play a paternalistic role in the Arab world.523 Sabuncu, meanwhile, shared his newfound belief in the necessity for an Arab caliphate with his employer, Blunt.524

In early 1881, Sabuncu started publishing another newspaper entitled *Al-Khilafa*, this time with an explicitly anti-Ottoman message, whose sources of financing are unknown, although the Egyptian ex-Khédive Isma‘il (r. 1863-1879, deposed by Abdülhamid), Sultan Bargash of Zanzibar (who was trying at this time to emphasise his independence from the Ottomans) and Blunt have all been suggested as possible

According to Sabuncu himself, the new newspaper contained “very strong articles against the Turks, their administration, and their claim to the title of El-Khelaphat.” The Ottomans were sufficiently concerned by Sabuncu’s statements that they tried to neutralise the newspaper. Abdülhamid banned it from Ottoman territory and asked the Ottoman ambassador in London, Musurus Paşa (1807-1891), to try to have its publication stopped. Musurus reported that he could not do so directly, as newspapers could not be banned in Britain. He tried using bribery, but was not convinced that Sabuncu would modify his stance even if he were paid a bribe. Finally, the embassy embarked on a project to counter Sabuncu’s propaganda with propaganda of its own, by sponsoring a London-based newspaper in Arabic and Persian known as al-Ghayra (Effort), published by an Indian called ‘Abd al-Rasul Efendi.

Sabuncu was very sceptical about the new publication, writing to his brother that the Ottomans had bought the services of ‘Abd al-Rasul for £10. Whatever the case may be, al-Ghayra was distributed in India, and its publisher was instructed to avoid saying anything in it that would provoke the British into shutting it down. Although the British authorities in India were annoyed at the paper’s promotion of the idea of the Caliphate and of Abdülhamid’s status as Caliph, they nevertheless did not find anything directly seditious in it, and thus allowed its distribution.

What is interesting about the launch and utilisation of al-Ghayra by the Ottomans as a riposte to al-Khilafa is that, while al-Khilafa was aimed at Arab readers and sought

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528 Özcan, Pan-Islamism, 120-121.
to persuade them to abandon their loyalty to the Ottomans and aim for independence, *al-Ghayra* targeted a different group, namely Indian Muslims. Thus, the Ottomans appear not to have been seriously worried about the effect that a newspaper like *al-Khilafa* may have on Arab readers (perhaps because they had succeeded in preventing its importation into Ottoman territory). On the other hand, they seemed to be worried that Sabuncu’s ideas on Abdülhamid’s lack of legitimacy as Caliph may prove to be damaging to Ottoman interests abroad, especially among Indian Muslims, the largest Muslim community in the world. Thus, Musurus decided to fight against Sabuncu through means similar to his (launching a newspaper in Arabic), but in a ring chosen by the Ottomans, rather than by Sabuncu and his anonymous backers. The Indian Ocean dimension of Ottoman policy proved dominant in their decisions on how best to respond to the threat posed by Sabuncu’s anti-Ottoman journalistic activity.

The press was certainly not the only way in which the Ottomans sought to influence public opinion in India in their favour during Abdülhamid’s reign. Another, more old-fashioned way, was through private correspondence with Indian notables. As we have seen, Gazi Osman Paşa (who was, at this time, the Marshal of the Palace) was believed to engage in such correspondence with Indian Muslims. In a confidential report to London, Layard admitted that he had no actual proof that Osman Paşa did indeed carry on such a correspondence, although Layard believed that it was more than likely that he did, given the marshal’s devoutness (which Layard calls “his well-known fanaticism”) and “his undisguised opposition to the policy of England.”

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In an undated memorandum forwarded by Layard to the Foreign Office in April 1880, the anonymous author stated that Osman Paşa was in communication Akbar Bey, an Indian living in Istanbul. Akbar was the son of “Mirza Assam Bey,” the deputy commissioner of the Jhelum District in Punjab. “Assam Bey” apparently suggested to Osman Paşa that the Ottoman government could establish direct contact with Indian principalities, with the aim of turning Istanbul into an informal political centre wielding “spiritual” influence over the numerous semi-independent Muslim states of India. The extent to which such a development would have been worrisome to the British can be appreciated from the fact that the princely states of India (which numbered over 500) were not allowed by the British even to maintain political relations with each other, let alone with a foreign power such as the Ottoman Empire. An entry by the Ottomans into the political arena of the Indian princely states could have potentially had profoundly destabilising effects to the colonial order established by Britain.

Perhaps equally worrying for the British were reports that Abdülhamid was receiving a large amount of friendly mail from India, and an increase in the number and frequency of Indian travellers coming to Istanbul. Layard’s informant believed these travellers to be linked in one way or another to alleged “Secret Mussulman Committees in India,” which were getting encouragement from Abdülhamid. In May 1880, a few days after Nusrat Khan’s newspaper Peyk-i İslam was launched, Layard laid out his fears in detail in a confidential report to the Foreign Office. In his view, Abdülhamid’s newfound contacts with Indian Muslims would give him the power to cause “trouble and

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530 FO CP 4341/6(i), n.d.
531 S.N. Sadasivan, Political and Administrative Integration of Princely States (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005), 19.
embarrassment” to Britain should he feel threatened by Britain’s policies. The form that such “trouble” would take is incitement against British rule over India, which may bring about “another rebellion in that country.”

The memory of the Indian revolt of 1857, when many Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, had rebelled against British rule, was thus still fresh in the minds of British officials, and the possibility of a repeat of that struggle, when Britain almost lost its grip on India, was a serious threat indeed. Layard does not suggest that Abdülhamid would be able to bring about a revolt on the scale of that of 1857 all by himself. Rather, he places the Sultan at the node of an imagined network which included Ottoman agents who would preach an anti-British message to Indian pilgrims during the hajj, and Indian princes, who were susceptible to pro-Ottoman propaganda sent to them by their fellow Indians from Istanbul. To complete the picture, Layard alleges that this alleged scheme would receive “every encouragement and support from Russia,” which would try its best to alienate the Ottomans from Britain.

It is doubtful that such an elaborate anti-British network of Ottomans, Indians and Russians ever actually existed. To be fair to Layard, some of his fears were indeed borne out when the Russian journalist and pan-Slavic ideologue Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887) encouraged the pan-Islamist thinker Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897) to come to Russia and engage in anti-British propaganda aimed at Indians (as we saw in Chapter Three). Nevertheless, Katkov seems to have been acting on his private initiative. As for Sultan Abdülhamid, he certainly wanted to see British rule in India overthrown, but his lack of

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533 FO CP 4341/10, Layard to Earl Granville, 25 May 1880.
535 FO CP 4341/10, Layard to Earl Granville, 25 May 1880.
direct success on that score underlines the fact that his network of Indian well-wishers was nowhere nearly as organised or structured as Layard would have his superiors believe. Much later, in 1902, Abdülhamid recorded in his memoirs that “I, the Caliph, the Commander of the Faithful, could with one single word cause great danger to English domination in India.” That is the danger that Layard had been warning about in 1880, and yet the fact is that Abdülhamid never did issue a call for an anti-British jihad in India, and when his brother and successor Mehmed V (r. 1909-1918) did declare jihad in 1914, the Indian Muslims failed to rally to the Ottoman cause. At most, Abdülhamid’s effort to spread pan-Islamic ideas around the Indian Ocean perimeter and in India in particular, did serve as a catalyst for several anti-imperialist British movements, whose efforts were to bear fruit decades later.

Thus, we can conclude that both Layard and Abdülhamid significantly exaggerated the power of the Ottomans to spark a rebellion among the Muslims of India (besides which the cautious Abdülhamid would not risk war with Britain over India when he avoided war with it over the Ottoman province of Egypt). What is undoubtedly true, however, is that Abdülhamid’s overtures towards the Indians (and his welcoming of overtures from Indians) did win the Ottoman Empire a great deal of soft power. This soft power may not have been readily convertible into hard benefits such as the ability to defeat Britain in an open conflict, but the large stock of goodwill now commanded by the Ottomans in India meant that Britain could not afford to write the Ottoman Empire off as a relic of the past.

The Ottoman-British newspaper rivalry flared up again in March 1888, when an Indian newspaper called the Punjab Times published an article denying Abdülhamid’s

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right to the title of Caliph. The Ottoman ambassador to London, Rüstem Paşa, was instructed by Istanbul to complain to the British government about the article (just as the British had done earlier regarding the anti-British tone of the *Peyk-i İslam*). Rüstem’s task once again shows the extent to which the Ottomans were unwilling to give up the struggle for legitimacy among Indian Muslims without a fight. However, the answer received by Rüstem was quite different from that which the Ottomans had been obliged to give the British earlier with regard to the *Peyk-i İslam*. In this case, the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, explained that he was “unable” (gayr-i muktedir) to do anything about the article or about the newspaper, which he claimed was in any case unknown in Britain. But it was not Britain whose public opinion the Ottomans were concerned about, but India, with the world’s largest Muslim population. The Ottoman government could not allow such a direct challenge to the legitimacy of Abdülhamid to stand without response, and submitted a rebuttal to a conservative London newspaper, the *Morning Post*, emphasising the Sultan’s right to the title of Caliph. The *Morning Post* published the article, and once again the Ottomans had fought the British to a draw in the court of Indian public opinion.537

### The Caliph’s Indian Ocean Diplomacy and Indian Muslims

Another way the Ottomans sought to increase the goodwill of Muslims in the Indian Ocean region towards the Ottoman Empire – both in India and outside – was through the activities of Ottoman consuls stationed around the Indian Ocean littoral. Although the institution of the consulate arose in the Middle Ages with permanent representatives of the Italian city-states stationed in the Middle East, the modern international system of consulates (offices meant to issue passports and provide help to the subjects of a sending country residing in the receiving country, and also facilitate the travel of subjects of the receiving country to the sending country) arose in the nineteenth century. Thus, Britain went from having consuls in the Ottoman Empire (from 1675) to having a consular service with representatives around the world starting in 1825. The German states did not have consular services prior to unification, and the North German Confederation was thus proud to launch a consular service in 1867. The possession of an international consular service (rather than just having consuls in the Middle East) was thus one of the hallmarks of modernity.  

Prior to Abdülahmid’s enthronement, Ottoman consulates had already existed in four important cities in Britain’s far-flung Indian Ocean possessions, namely Bombay, Calcutta, Cape Town and Singapore. To these, Abdülahmid added several others, in India, South-East Asia, and South Africa. However, the sheer number of Ottoman consulates operating in European-ruled territory from one end of the Indian Ocean World

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539 The Ottoman consulates in Bombay and Calcutta were opened in 1849 (during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid I); see Özcan, *Pan-Islamism*, 111-112. Meanwhile, the Ottoman consulate in Cape Town began operations in 1861 or possibly even earlier, in 1853 (also during Abdülmecid’s reign); see Serhat Orakçı, “A Historical Analysis of the Emerging Links between the Ottoman Empire and South Africa between 1861-1923” (unpublished MA thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2007), 82. The Ottomans also opened an honorary consulate in Singapore in 1864 (during the reign of Sultan Abdülaiziz I); see Anthony Reid, “The Ottomans in Southeast Asia,” *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 36 (2005), 11.
to the other perhaps mattered less than the new function these consulates acquired during the reign of Abdülhamid II. Thus, the consulates became not just instruments to promote an Ottoman political agenda abroad (a feature they shared with the consulates of other powers), but also loci from which pan-Islamism could emanate and could be conveyed to the Muslim subjects of European colonial empires. At the same time, particularly in India, whose Muslim elite already had a highly developed sense of belonging to the umma, the Ottoman consuls themselves were sometimes inspired to take more pan-Islamic political positions after being exposed to local politics. Thus, the consulates came to be vital interfaces between the Ottomans and foreign Muslims, allowing some of Abdülhamid’s ideas on the international unity of Muslims to be put into practice.

At the time when Abdülhamid came to power, the Ottoman Empire was represented in Bombay by the consul general Hüseyin Hasib Efendi. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, Hasib raised large donations for the Ottomans from Indian Muslims sympathetic to the Ottoman cause. There was apparently not enough work for him in India, because he concentrated much of his effort on Persia, encouraging the Arabs of the northern Persian Gulf littoral to support the Ottoman Empire. He was promised by local leaders in the region that should Persia go to war against the Ottomans, the Arabs of Persia would rebel and supply the Ottomans with an army of 150,000. It is thus perhaps not surprising that the British feared him as a potential threat to their rule in India. He was kept under surveillance by the British authorities in India, even though their investigations regarding him found no evidence that he was promoting an anti-British rebellion in India. Apart from raising funds for the Ottomans, Hasib’s
achievements in India included forging close ties with a number of Indian Muslims and contributing reports on events in the Ottoman Empire to the vernacular press.  

Hüseyin Hasib was replaced in 1883 with Abdülhâmid (later Tarhan, 1851-1937), who would eventually become famous as one of the leading Ottoman poets. Hâmid sailed to India through the Suez Canal with his family and cook. He claims in his memoirs that he decided to accept the post after being enthralled by a doll in the shape of an Indian dancing girl. Thus, it was the search for exotic beauty rather than Islamic brotherhood that initially motivated Hâmid. Although he later came to love India, he was at first severely disappointed in it upon arrival, expressing the opinion that the monkeys in India were more beautiful than the people. Moreover, he viewed the Hindus and Parsis of Bombay as idolaters, while the Muslims, according to him, were steeped in superstition. Hâmid also complained about the necessity to entertain large numbers of guests in a style befitting one of the Caliph’s representatives, which he found very expensive to do. Nevertheless, eventually he was impressed by the fact the Indian Muslims he met had a genuine attachment to the Caliphate, and suggested to Küçük Said Paşa that this sentiment should be used to the advantage of the Ottoman Empire. Said’s reply was that the Ottoman government was not powerful enough to control the Ottoman vilayet of Aydın (in western Anatolia), let alone worry about increasing its influence in India.  

At first glance, Said Paşa’s response may seem contradictory, given his championing of Nusrat Khan’s idea to set up the Peyk-i İslam newspaper in Istanbul precisely in order to influence Muslim public opinion in India in favour of the

540 Özcan, Pan-Islamism, 112-113.
Ottomans. However, Said probably learned his lesson about meddling in Indian affairs from the fate of the newspaper project he backed: as we saw earlier, the paper had to be shut down after two months of operations because of British opposition to its existence. It is likely that Said did not want to be drawn into another such escapade by Hâmid’s enthusiasm and decided to give him a cold shower before he could create another embarrassment for the Ottoman Empire.

During Hâmid’s tenure as Ottoman consul in Bombay, Lord Dufferin (1826-1902), a former governor-general of Canada and (more importantly to Hâmid), a former British ambassador to Istanbul, arrived in India as the new viceroy. Dufferin stopped in Bombay for several days on his way to the capital of British India, Calcutta, and gave a speech to the Bombay Muslim Society, to which Hâmid was not invited. Nevertheless, he later found out that the speech had contained very friendly remarks towards the Ottoman Empire. Dufferin pointed out during his speech that Britain’s cordial relations with the Ottomans were particularly important because Britain had a large number of Muslim subjects itself.⁵⁴² This was a direct admission on the part of Dufferin of the growing importance of the Ottoman Empire to Indian Muslims. Britain thus seemed resigned to the fact that there was now a third party in its relationship with its Indian Muslim subjects, and that at least formal friendship with the Ottomans was becoming a precondition for the acquiescence of the vast Indian Muslim community to the continuation of British rule over them.

And yet, the British still wanted to keep the Ottomans at arm’s length, to the extent possible, and this might explain why the Ottoman consul had to find out about the speech through others instead of being invited to listen to it in person (to be fair to

⁵⁴² Ibid., 37.
Dufferin, though, the speech also had an improvised character to it, as related by the *Times* two years after the event).\(^{543}\) As the *Times* observed, the growth of the press had created a public opinion in British India, and this public opinion was often opposed to British rule. Additionally, “the religious influence or the Mussulman influence” had grown powerful in India.\(^{544}\)

Dufferin’s very first actions as viceroy demonstrated the skilled diplomat’s understanding of the situation. During his Bombay stopover, the governor of Bombay gave a reception to the diplomatic corps in the city in honour of the new viceroy, while pointedly leaving out two members of the corps off the list, namely the consuls of the Ottoman Empire and Persia – the only Muslim diplomats in Bombay. The ostensible reason for this slight was that the two Muslim consuls’ wives did not appear in public without their veil on, so their presence would violate diplomatic protocol. Hâmid would not accept this explanation, and demanded to be invited. The governor gave in and issued him an invitation. Lord and Lady Dufferin turned this awkward situation into an opportunity to underline their friendly attitude towards the Ottomans. Lady Dufferin wore a medal given to her by Sultan Abdülhamid and made a point of talking to Hâmid about it. Meanwhile, for his part, Lord Dufferin praised the Sultan at length.\(^{545}\) Thus, although originally the reception was meant to introduce Lord Dufferin to the European consuls and exclude the Muslim consuls stationed in Bombay, the Dufferins were quick to avoid a faus pas by adapting to Hâmid’s presence and trying hard to make him feel welcome at the party. As for Hâmid, his perseverance helped mark the Ottoman Empire as one of the powers that mattered, leaving only Persia excluded from the gathering.


\(^{544}\) Idem.

Hâmid ended up staying in India for only about a year, after which he left because of his wife’s failing health. He spent his remaining time in India travelling to different parts of the Subcontinent and building informal ties with the rulers of some of the Indian princely states. Abdülhamid must have been pleased with the way he represented the Ottoman Empire during his brief sojourn in Bombay, because he then gave Hâmid a post at the Ottoman embassy in London in 1886. Although Hâmid can perhaps be described as an Orientalist—a Westernised poet who had come to India in search of exotic beauty and was at first repelled by its reality which did not match his imagination, eventually he was won over to the idea of Islamic brotherhood as a result of his experiences in the country. As he was to admit, India opened up a “new horizon” for him. Hâmid’s evolution testifies to the fact that the Ottomans and Indians were not necessarily in a master-disciple relationship, with the Caliph’s representatives teaching the subjugated Indians proper Islamic behaviour. Rather, the Caliph’s consul could learn a thing or two from the Indians and be moved to try to influence the Ottoman grand vizier with his newfound enthusiasm.

After Hâmid, another Ottoman consul named İsmail Zühdü (about whom much less is known) was sent to Bombay. Upon his return to Istanbul in 1889, he submitted a report to the Sublime Porte, in which he describes a reception held in his honour by a group of Indian Muslims. As many as 250 guests assembled at the party. After the meal, an ‘alim (religious scholar) from Bombay, Mawlawi Sayyid Isma‘il, gave a speech, in which he said that the “Muslim inhabitants of India” (Hindistan ahali-yi Müslime) felt an “attachment” (merbutiyet) for the Caliphate. According to Sayyid Isma‘il, Indian

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547 Özcan, Pan-Islamism, 115.
Muslims considered the “majestic dynasty” (*hanedan-i celil*) of the Ottomans to be the “preserver” and “protector” of the Shari‘a. The ‘alim then prayed for Sultan Abdülhamid’s life to continue and his sultanate to endure, and for him to achieve “success” (*ikbal*) and “victory” (*muzafferiyet*). The prayer took half an hour to complete, and the assembled guests said “amen.” Isma‘il was clearly impressed with the proceedings. To some extent, his very presence, just as that of his predecessors, had catalysed Indian pan-Islamism. At the same time, the well-to-do Muslims of India were perhaps more enthusiastic pan-Islamists than members of the Ottoman elite. Thus, by raising the profile of his consuls in Bombay, Abdülhamid had tapped into a rich vein of Islamic loyalty directed at him as Caliph.

The Ottoman Empire expanded its network of consulates in India by opening an honorary consulate in Madras in 1890 and another one in Karachi in 1891. In 1893, the Ottomans tried to open a consulate in the princely state of Hyderabad, but were denied permission by the British. By this stage, Abdülhamid and the Sublime Porte undoubtedly knew that the princely states were not allowed to enter into direct relations with foreign powers, but they were testing the limits of British tolerance in India nevertheless (just as the Great Powers did in the Ottoman Empire when it came to sponsoring this or that minority). Evidently, the failure to open the consulate in Hyderabad left Abdülhamid with the impression that the princely states had no decision-making powers of their own. In a memorandum probably written in 1896, Abdülhamid accused the British of “parading the rulers [of the princely states], whose heads are

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549 Özcan, *Pan-Islamism*, 113.
decorated with jewels like those of women… in order to spread the idea that they are free.”

In 1896, Abdülhamid appointed the first Ottoman consul (as opposed to a local honorary consul) to Karachi, Hüseyin Kamil Efendi. After arriving in India, Kamil went on a tour of India, apparently meeting groups of thousands of Muslims (though, unlike İsmail Zühdü, he did not describe these meetings in detail to his superiors in Istanbul). According to Kamil, his aim in conducting these meetings was to ascertain whether it was true that the British were preventing Muslims in some parts of India from mentioning Sultan Abdülhamid’s name during the Friday prayer sermon (an honour usually accorded to the Caliph). He was also trying to find out the reasons behind the civil unrest that had been occurring in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The British found Kamil’s travels suspicious and placed him under surveillance. In 1897, after the Ottomans’ defeat of Greece in the Greco-Ottoman War, Kamil organised a large-scale celebration of the Ottoman victory in Karachi. Meanwhile, Ottoman advances on the battlefield and the Ottomans’ ability to inflict defeat on a European country (albeit not one of the Great Powers) had encouraged Pashtun tribesmen in the NWFP to launch a revolt against British control. After witnessing Kamil’s celebration in Karachi, the British decided that they had had enough, and asked that Kamil be withdrawn from India; he was thus forced to return to the Ottoman Empire in 1898.

As mentioned above, the loyalty displayed by many Indians towards Ottoman consuls and other officials caused Abdülhamid to exaggerate his ability to cause an anti-

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British uprising in India, at least in private. In an entry in his memoirs dated 1902, he notes that Germany and the erstwhile enemy of the Ottomans, namely Russia, should have formed an alliance with the Ottomans when Britain was distracted by the Second Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa, in order to “overturn with my help England’s house of cards in India.” Such a tripartite invasion of India, supported from within, would , according to Abdülhamid, have served Britain right for “the violence of which the poor Hindus have been victims.” Nevertheless, Abdülhamid still believed that “the day of vengeance” would come, and that the Hindus would “break the yoke of England” – after all, there were millions of Hindus, and only a few thousand Englishmen in India.552 While Abdülhamid was not able to directly provoke an uprising in India, let alone invade it in order to liberate it from British rule, his actions did help prepare the ground for Indian independence movements to some extent.

In 1886, a group of Indian Muslims had established a group called Anjuman-i Islam (Islamic Society) in London, with branches in India. Although this group eventually became largely inactive, it was revived in 1903 as the Pan-Islamic Society of London, or the Imperial Pan-Islamic Society. This organisation, founded by Abdullah Al-Mamun Suhrawardy (1870-1935), a lawyer from Calcutta, advocated closer ties between Indian Muslims and the Ottoman Empire.553

However, by far not all members of the Indian Muslim elite responded to Suhrawardy’s call. In fact, some were opposed in principle to the notion that Abdülhamid was the Caliph, or that he deserved the political support of all Muslims around the world. Those in the anti-Ottoman camp, such as Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk (1837-1907), a civil

552 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 136-137.
553 M. Naeem Qureshi, Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 50; BOA, Y.MTV. 280/52, 12 Rajab 1324 (1 Sept. 1906).
servant and activist from the North-Western Provinces, Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928), a jurist and writer from Orissa gathered along with some 3,000 other delegates in Dacca (now Dhaka, Bangladesh) in 1906 at the invitation of the Bengali aristocrat Nawab Sir Salimullah (1871-1915) to establish the All-India Muslim League. The delegates considered pan-Islamism to be a blind alley. Ameer Ali, for example, believed that Muslims in India and worldwide should cooperate with Britain rather than the Ottoman Empire for the sake of progress. The founding conference of the Muslim League adopted a resolution whose first article stated that its purpose was to “promote, among the Musalmans of India, feelings of loyalty to the British Government.”

Thus, at the outset the Muslim League was a firmly loyalist organisation, choosing the option of supporting a continuation of British rule over India instead of throwing in the Muslims’ lot with the Ottomans and facing an uncertain future. Yet, ironically, over the subsequent years the existence of the Muslim League as the political vehicle of Indian Muslims gave rise to the idea of the existence of an Indian Muslim political nation. Consequently, the League gradually transformed itself into a pro-independence party, and even later into a separatist party, demanding independence not just for India but for the Muslims of India. Its pro-independence campaigns under the eventual leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), combined with those of the Indian National Congress led by Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) and his allies, eventually resulted both in independence from Britain and in the creation of Pakistan in 1947. In

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some ways, by encouraging his consuls to take a proactive stance in support of pan-Islamism in India, Abdülhamid threw a stone into the waters of Indian politics, and its ripples continued to be felt for decades afterwards. Members of the Muslim intelligentsia who initially banded together to oppose his message of Islamic unity in favour of British-led “progress,” unwittingly laid the groundwork for the kind of pro-independence political struggle that Abdülhamid may have wished to see.

Ottoman Diplomacy in South-East Asia

Similar developments took place in Indian Ocean cities outside India. In 1883, the Ottomans went beyond the confines of the British Empire and opened a consulate in Batavia, capital of the Dutch East Indies (today’s Jakarta, Indonesia). In 1873, a group of 40 Arab (mainly Hadrami) merchants living in the cities of Batavia and Semarang on Java had sent a letter of complaint to the Ottomans, claiming that they were being mistreated by the Dutch colonial authorities. At the time, Sultan Abdülaziz did not seem to have taken any concrete steps to help them. Abdülhamid apparently tried to remedy the situation by establishing an Ottoman consular outpost on an island where the prosperous Arab merchant community was pro-Ottoman while the Dutch held notably negative views of the Ottoman Empire. Once the consulate was opened, many of the Hadrami merchants living in the Dutch East Indies applied through it for Ottoman citizenship; they were not recognised as Dutch subjects and were officially classified as “Foreign Orientals.” This status meant that they were taxed more heavily than other merchants,
and could seek no recourse against these discriminatory tax rates. On the other hand, becoming naturalised Ottoman subjects would put them in the category of Europeans in the eyes of Dutch law, since the Ottoman Empire was treated internationally in some respects as a European power.\textsuperscript{556}

Curiously, the Ottoman consuls posted to Batavia soon proved themselves to be more enthusiastic promoters of pan-Islamism than Abdülhamid himself, and had to be cautioned by Istanbul to calm their ardour somewhat. The first Ottoman consul, Ali Galip Bey, was a case in point. He personally delivered several Friday sermons at mosques in Java, mentioning the Caliph’s name. He also asked the Javan \textit{ulama} to do the same (which was undoubtedly in keeping with Abdülhamid’s aims). However, Galip exceeded its authority by coming up with a way for Dutch East Indies residents to become naturalised Ottomans. When some people who attended one of the mosques where he delivered a Friday sermon asked him to make them Ottoman subjects on the spot, he replied that he was not allowed to do so because one’s allegiance to a government was regulated by international law. Nevertheless, Galip suggested that those interested in Ottoman becoming Ottoman subjects could go on hajj and stay in the Ottoman Empire for a period of five years. After that, they could apply for naturalisation. This scheme was not well received in Istanbul and Galip was asked to be more careful in the future.\textsuperscript{557}

A subsequent Ottoman consul general in Batavia, Sadik, ran afoul of the Dutch by continually asking them – somewhat provocatively, to be sure – to “oppress the Muslims of Java less.” Abdülhamid did not fault Sadik for what he was trying to do (in particular,  

to help the Arab merchants of Java to gain rights equal to those of Europeans), but he did think that Sadık was being a little “maladroit” in the way he went about doing it. While Abdülhamid backed what he saw as the “just and equitable” demands of the merchants and promised to pursue their demands “energetically,” he saw no need to antagonise the Netherlands while doing so. Yet another Ottoman consul, Mehmed Kamil Bey (not to be confused with Hüseyin Kamil, the Ottoman consul in Karachi), who served between 1897 and 1899, also managed to anger the Dutch by his encouragement to the Arabs of the Dutch East Indies to deal with the colonial government through him, and by his support for several local rulers in the East Indies, particularly Sultan Ibrahim of Aceh (r. 1874-1903), who had recently been defeated by the Dutch in a protracted war. As a result, the Dutch forced Mehmed Kamil to leave Batavia.

Thus, Abdülhamid’s policy of promoting pan-Islamism in the Dutch East Indies without antagonising the Dutch succeeded only to a limited extent. While the loyalty of the Muslims of Java (particularly the Hadrami community) to the Caliphate did increase, the issue of granting Ottoman citizenship to the Hadramis (let alone the Dutch subjects of the East Indies) proved to be impossible to resolve to the satisfaction of both the communities interested in Ottoman citizenship and the Dutch. In fact, as a letter from the Dutch East Indies published in the modernist Cairo magazine *al-Manar* in 1898 indicates, the Netherlands gave the Ottomans an ultimatum: either stop giving the Muslims of the East Indies the hope of Ottoman citizenship, or shut down your consulate. Such an ultimatum, if it was indeed issued, seems to have been unwarranted, because, as we have

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seen and as the author of the letter to *al-Manar* acknowledged, the initiative for the acquisition of Ottoman citizenship by East Indies Muslims came from the latter, rather than from the Ottomans. In any case, the Ottoman consulate in Batavia remained open till at least 1904, as a contemporary report praising the attachment of the Muslims of the city to the Caliphate demonstrates.\(^{561}\)

Individual Hadramis did receive Ottoman passports on a case-by-case basis. Some had actually been born in the European portion of the Ottoman Empire, and in their case the Ottoman consulate did not hesitate to confirm their Ottoman status.\(^{562}\) Another category consisted of Hadrami students from Java, who underwent a process of Ottomanisation through education. In 1898, the Ottomans announced a scholarship for children from South-East Asia to study in the Ottoman Empire; applications could be made through the Ottoman consulates in Batavia or Singapore. All the boys who were chosen by the consuls ended up being Arabs, probably reflecting the Arabs’ relative standing in the Muslim community of the region, as well as their greater wealth and readiness to traverse the seas.\(^{563}\)

As a community, the Hadrami Arabs of South-East Asia also harboured ambitions of being recognised as being equal to the Europeans, as we saw earlier. Thus, one particular Hadrami merchant named ‘Ali b. Ahmad b. Shihab al-Din sent his son ‘Abd al-Muttalib to a Dutch school in the Dutch East Indies for a while. However, the colonial Dutch press attacked the merchant for “thinking he was European.” As a consequence, ‘Ali b. Ahmad withdrew his son from the Dutch school and sent him to Istanbul instead,

\(^{561}\) BOA, Y.A.HUS, 481/112, 23 Ramadan 1322 (1 Dec. 1904).
to be educated at the prestigious Galatasaray Lyceum (where Ármin Vámbéry wanted to deliver his lecture on the Turkish race, as mentioned in Chapter Three). Two other boys went with ‘Abd al-Muttalib, and each found success after graduating from Galatasaray: ‘Abd al-Muttalib went to an Ottoman military academy, another one went to university in Belgium, and the third became a member of the Dutch East Indies legislative assembly, the Volksraad.\textsuperscript{564}

In 1899, the programme was expanded to include seven boys, and the ones chosen were once again all Arabs, although instead of coming exclusively from Java, this time some of the boys were from Sumatra. Ulrike Freitag asserts that the second batch of boys was sent to the Aşiret mektebi (Tribal School), although they could not have gone there in 1899 since the school was not opened until 1902. In any case, the second batch of students did not fare very well. By 1900, there were 17 students from the Dutch East Indies in Istanbul, but four died within the following year. Of the remaining students, not all managed to complete their education.\textsuperscript{565} Despite these problems, several students did return to the Dutch East Indies, and they did so as Ottoman subjects, finally fulfilling the East Indies Hadramis’ dream of being able to claim European status.\textsuperscript{566} Kemal Karpat’s assertion that the education project was a “fiasco” is thus unwarranted.\textsuperscript{567} It was rather a modest success in terms of what its original goal was: to bring a small number of Muslim children from colonial South-East Asia to Istanbul and to give them an Ottoman education, thereby fostering closer ties between the Ottoman Empire and the

\textsuperscript{564} Ibid., 210-211.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid., 211. For the date the Aşiret mektebi was opened, see Eugene L. Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi: Abdüllahmid II’s School for Tribes (1892-1907),” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies} 28, no. 1 (1996): 83.
\textsuperscript{566} Deringil, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State,” 351.
\textsuperscript{567} See Karpat, \textit{The Politicization of Islam}, 236.
As a bonus, the students who returned from the Ottoman Empire were able to make a dent, albeit a small one, in the rigid Dutch racial classification system which attempted to make them permanent outsiders under the label “Foreign Orientals.”

As mentioned above, apart from Batavia, there was another South-East Asian city in which there was an Ottoman consulate, namely Singapore. Unlike Batavia, Singapore was a British colony, yet the two cities shared certain characteristics, among which was the presence of a large Hadrami merchant community. As noted above, the Ottoman consulate in Singapore was first opened in 1864. Sayyid Abdallah al Junied, a Singapore-based Hadrami, became the honorary consul. The Netherlands did not like the existence of the consulate, because Muslim pilgrims from the Dutch East Indies quickly developed the practice of stopping by Singapore on their way to Mecca and paying their respects to Junied as the Caliph’s representative. Hence, the Netherlands asked Britain to pressure the Ottomans into not appointing another Muslim consul after Junied died in 1865. The British agreed, but they must not have put too much pressure on the Ottomans, because the latter did appoint another Muslim to the post (in fact, Junied’s brother Junied al Junied) but without officially naming him a consul. Another Hadrami named Sayyid Muhammad Alsagoff replaced Junied al Junied in the early 1880s. Alsagoff visited Java in 1881, leading the Dutch to fear that he was encouraging a revolt there.

In 1899, the Ottomans sent a frigate named Er투그르 on a goodwill mission to Japan. On its way to Japan, the ship stopped at the Indian Ocean ports of Jidda, Aden, Bombay, Colombo and Singapore. Crowds of Muslims, number up to 30,000 people.

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569 Reid, “The Ottomans in Southeast Asia,” 11-12.
gathered to welcome the ship at each of these cities. She underwent repairs in Singapore, and the Ottomans decided not to have her stop in the Dutch East Indies in order to avoid angering the Dutch, who, as we have seen, were suspicious of Ottoman motives. The Ottoman press also saw the journey as one whose main purpose had to do with spreading pan-Islamism, rather than building a closer relationship to Japan. In any case, after a successful visit to Japan, the Ertuğrul ran aground off the Japanese coast on her way back in 1890, killing about nine-tenths of the large crew. As François Georgeon notes, however, the ship must have been a powerful reminder to the British of the Ottoman Empire’s mobilising potential, if not its technical prowess.570

Prior to the Ertuğrul’s journey and despite all the fears regarding the revolutionary potential of Ottoman consuls and the subversive plans of the Sultan, the Dutch allowed the Ottomans to open a consulate in Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, as we saw above. Hence, when the Ottomans wanted to appoint a new consul in Singapore in 1901, the British allowed them not only to officially declare him a consul (something they had not been able to do for decades), but also, for the first time, to appoint an Ottoman subject to the post.571 Thus, the Ottoman consulate was upgraded from an unofficial honorary consulate to a full-blown consulate, similar in status to the Ottoman consulates in Batavia or Bombay. The Straits Times, the leading Singaporean newspaper, noted in somewhat confusing language that “an interesting ceremony took place at the Imperial Ottoman Consulate… in honour of the opening of the first Turkish

571 Reid, “The Ottomans in Southeast Asia,” 12.
What the paper apparently meant was that this was the first time that the Ottoman consul in Singapore was “Turkish,” that is, an Ottoman subject.

The ceremony was attended by “some sixty of the influential Arab merchants of Singapore,” including members of the Alsagoff family, whose relative had been the previous consul. The consul thanked his guests for the “warmth of their feelings towards the Mohammedan religion.” It is significant that, in his understanding, the merchants were there because of their loyalty to Islam, rather than the Ottoman state. The consul, whose name was Hacı Ahmed Ataullah Efendi (1865-1903), proved to be as torn between his dual mandate to help the local Muslims and maintain cordial relations with the colonial power as his colleagues in Batavia were.

Ataullah represented the second generation of an Ottoman family that had made it its life’s work to extend the Ottoman Empire’s influence in the Indian Ocean arena. He was born in Cape Town to the Ottoman qadi Ebubekir Efendi (1835-1880) and his English wife, who happened to be a niece of the explorer James Cook (1728-1779). Ebubekir had spread the practice of mentioning the Caliph’s name in Friday sermons and the Ottoman custom of wearing the fez. When Ataullah was 11 years old, Ebubekir took him to the Ottoman Empire, including Mecca, where he was enrolled in a school for two years. After that, Ataullah continued his education at al-Azhar University. Returning to South Africa in 1881, Ataullah took up a number of leading positions in the Muslim community there, including working as the principal of the Ottoman Hamidiye School.

572 “A Turkish Ceremony,” Straits Times, 18 Nov. 1901.
573 Idem.
574 Ebubekir had been sent to South Africa in 1862 by Abdülaziz II with the approval of the British to provide religious instruction to Muslims in the Cape Colony.
(named after Abdülhamid II), heading a theological school, and editing a periodical called the *Muslim Journal*, which took a stance in favour of pan-Islamism. He learned Urdu in order to be able to communicate with the Muslims of Indian origin in South Africa (the Muslims of Malay origin spoke Afrikaans, which he also knew). He even ran for parliament in the Cape Colony in 1894, albeit unsuccessfully. After his electoral experience, he decided to return to the Ottoman Empire and continue his career there.⁵⁷⁵

In 1901, as mentioned above, Abdülhamid appointed Ahmed Ataullah the Ottoman consul to Singapore. He was, in many ways, an ideal candidate for the position, being, at his young age, a learned scholar and a pan-Islamist activist. Moreover, his British ancestry and his familiarity with Arabs as well as Muslims of Asian origin must surely have been valuable assets in a setting such as Singapore, a British-ruled city in South-East Asia with a large Arab merchant constituency. However, he soon got involved in a political crisis that would eventually spell an end to the Ottoman diplomatic presence in Singapore. In 1903, Sultan Taha of Jambi (a kingdom located on Sumatra), who had been fighting against the Dutch for several decades, asked Ataullah to help him in his struggle. The consul conveyed the message, and the Ottomans initially tried to help through diplomacy, officially asking the Netherlands to stop harassing Jambi. This angered the Dutch to the extent that they killed Taha. The Ottomans then used other means; an Ottoman army officer of Hungarian origin was dispatched to continue the struggle, and he managed to raise a revolt a few months after the killing of Sultan Taha. That revolt took the Dutch two years to suppress. Britain was finally persuaded of the dangers that an Ottoman consular presence in Singapore represented to the colonial

⁵⁷⁵ Orakçı, “A Historical Analysis of the Emerging Links,” 58-60. On Ebubekir, see ibid., 54-55.
regimes of South-East Asia. After Ataullah died in an automobile accident in 1903, Britain did not allow the Ottomans to station new consuls there.  

As far as both the British and the Dutch were concerned, Ottoman cooperation with the Arab merchants of South-East Asia may have been annoying, but providing assistance to native rulers fighting anti-colonial wars against the European rulers was a red line that could not be crossed. The Ottomans had to tread carefully, but even so they built up a large reserve of goodwill among South-East Asian Muslims. Unlike India, there did not seem to be a significant anti-Caliphate faction among the Muslims of South-East Asia, and again, unlike in India, a rebellion against British rule did take place in Singapore following the outbreak of World War I. The way the British understood it, the rebellion of 1915 was a result of the mutinous Muslim soldiers’ solidarity with the Ottoman Empire.  

The Caliph and Anticolonial Resistance in Africa  

Yet another front for Ottoman diplomatic activity in the Indian Ocean world, albeit on a much smaller scale, both before and during the reign of Abdülhamid, was South Africa. An Ottoman consulate existed in Cape Town since 1861, but during its whole existence it remained an honorary consulate in that the consuls it employed were not Ottoman subjects. Consequently, the consulate did not engage in pan-Islamic propaganda, but rather aided South African and other African Muslim individuals who faced difficulties.

577 Reid, “The Ottomans in Southeast Asia,” 15.
of various sorts. In 1888 the Ottomans decided to open another consulate in
Johannesburg, after hearing of discoveries of gold in Transvaal, where Johannesburg was
located. The consulate was shut down during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, and did
not reopen for the remainder of Abdülhamid’s reign.578

This does not mean, though, that Abdülhamid’s influence in South Africa was
limited to the somewhat marginal role played by these consulates. As mentioned above,
Ebubekir Efendi (part of whose career in the Cape Colony took place during
Abdülhamid’s reign) became an important figure among South African Muslims, as did
his son Ahmed Ataullah. In July 1906, a group of Indian Muslim merchants in
Johannesburg founded the Hamidia Islamic Society, whose name is a clear expression of
loyalty to Sultan Abdülhamid in his role as caliph.579

The Society suddenly turned into a formidable player in South African politics
within a few months, when the legislature of Transvaal Province started debating a law
that would require men of Asian origin to register with the authorities and carry an
identity card containing their fingerprints. The Asians (mostly Indians) found such a
project to be a case of racial discrimination, and immediately started opposing it. The
anger with the proposed legislation was galvanised by the Hamidia Islamic Society,
which was able to mobilise not just Muslim Indians but Hindu and Christian ones as well
through mass gatherings. In September 1906, at a meeting of around 3,000 Indians,
including rich merchants and street hawkers, Haji Habib gave a speech condemning the
proposed legislation, but also condemning the European powers’ nefarious plans against
the Ottoman Empire. Among the speakers was also a lawyer and newspaper publisher

578 Orakçı, “A Historical Analysis of the Emerging Links,” 81-84.
579 Ibid., 74; Bose, A Hundred Horizons, 158.
named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), who would subsequently lead India to independence from Britain. At this stage, however, his goals were much more modest; he asked the people gathered at the meeting to refuse to register, even at the risk of going to jail. Hearing Gandhi’s appeal, Haji Habib improvised on the spot and had the crowd swear a formal oath promising to go to jail rather than registering with the authorities. Thus began Gandhi’s long career of civil disobedience, a tactic that would eventually help bring down the British Empire.\textsuperscript{580}

The Hamidia Islamic Society and Haji Habib thus served as a catalyst in a movement that would prove to be much larger than anyone could anticipate that evening. Indeed, there was no suggestion at the meeting of struggling against the British Empire; in fact, the gathering closed with three cheers for King Edward VII (r. 1901-1910), and a rendition of the national anthem, “God Save the King.”\textsuperscript{581} The organisers may have been the Hamidia Islamic Society, but their ultimate political loyalty lay not with Istanbul but with London. Their protest against the racist and discriminatory policy of the Transvaal government was being carried on within the framework of the British Empire, not in opposition to it.

Consequently, in October 1906, Gandhi and one of the leaders of the Hamidia Islamic Society, A.O. Ally, went to London to lobby the British government to block the anti-Indian legislation in Transvaal, which had the status of a British colony. However, the Indian merchants and their middle-class and working-class allies in South Africa did not receive the kind of support from London that they may have been wishing for. Ally

\textsuperscript{580} Bose, \textit{A Hundred Horizons}, 158; Kathryn Tidrick, \textit{Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 77-78; Arthur Herman, \textit{Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age} (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), 139-140.
\textsuperscript{581} Herman, \textit{Gandhi and Churchill}, 140.
fell sick in Britain and Gandhi had to do most of the work. While he was well received in Britain and the Colonial Office bureaucrats he met seemed to support him, privately Transvaal received instructions that it should wait a few months and proceed with the legislation anyway. Hence, the Asiatic Registration Act of 1907 was passed in March that year by the Transvaal legislature.582

When confronted with the issue by the opposition in the British parliament, the Undersecretary of State for the Colonies and future prime minister Winston Churchill (1874-1965) replied that while he found the racism inherent in the Transvaal law a cause for “regret,” he also considered the use of an identification card with fingerprints to be “a highly scientific system of identification.” Moreover, he made it clear that condemning the bill outright would be “inconsistent with the self-governing Constitution of the Transvaal Colony.”583 Thus, the right of the white settlers in Transvaal to autonomy would trump the right of the Indians in Transvaal to equality and fair treatment. This approach was confirmed in a House of Lords debate by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Elgin (1849-1917), who stated that the issue was simply one of race: a small “white” community like Transvaal had to be allowed to discriminate against Indians, because otherwise “economic forces would inevitably turn the scale in favour of the East.” Elgin was at pains to show that he himself was not a racist; he argued that “it is [the Indians’] patient industry, their frugal and temperate habits, that make them such formidable competitors to the white man.”584 When the issue was framed as being one of

582 Tidrick, Gandhi, 78-79.
Indians against “the white man,” Britain could not side with the Indians, no matter how industrious and “temperate” the Indians may have been.

The Indian merchants did not give up easily, however. For several months, weekly meetings were held at the Hamidia Islamic Society’s headquarters, in order to plan appropriate action in the campaign against the registration law.\textsuperscript{585} Gandhi remained one of the main speakers at these meetings, despite being a Hindu. Meanwhile, the Hamidia Islamic Society cooperated with a group of Ottoman subjects living in South Africa in drafting a petition to the Ottoman consul in Johannesburg, asking for him to intervene with the local authorities and to inform Sultan Abdülhamid about the discriminatory and “humiliating” law. The petition was signed by 20 people describing themselves as “residents of Johannesburg and faithful Mahomedan subjects of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan of Turkey.”\textsuperscript{586} However, according to Gandhi’s newspaper, \textit{Indian Opinion}, the letter was written “with the help of” Maulvi Ahmed Mukhtiyar, an Indian and one of the leaders of the Hamidia Islamic Society.\textsuperscript{587}

One may wonder why the Ottoman subjects of Johannesburg needed the help of an Indian in order to compose a letter to their own consul. The reason may be linguistic: the consul in Johannesburg at this point was not himself an Ottoman subject, and so the letter had to be written in English, which Mukhtiyar may have been more fluent in than the Johannesburg Ottomans. In any case, it is remarkable that the small but growing

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Ottoman community in Transvaal was more comfortable approaching its consulate through Mukhtiyar than directly.\footnote{According to Ottoman figures, between 1902 and 1904, 281 Ottomans had emigrated to the Transvaal. Prior to this period, there were already several hundred Ottomans in Transvaal. See Kemal H. Karpat, \textit{Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays} (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 126.} It demonstrates both that the Ottomans of Johannesburg considered their Indian neighbours to be allies, and also that the leadership of the local Indians wanted to add substance to the designation “Hamidiya” by trying to involve Ottoman officials and ultimately the Sultan himself in protests against the registration law. If anything, however, the situation in Transvaal illustrates the limits of Abdülhamid’s ability to influence events. Whereas Ottoman consuls in South-East Asia were constantly thinking of ways to accord Ottoman protection both to indigenous Muslims and Arab merchants in the region, there was no similar enthusiasm at the Ottoman consulate in Johannesburg. It may also have been the case that the Sultan was simply not interested in the political rights of the Muslim minority in Transvaal, preferring to concentrate on the rights of Muslims in Muslim-majority lands ruled by foreigners.

Whatever the case may be, the Ottoman consulate in Johannesburg could certainly be active when it wanted to be (it was involved in raising money for the Hijaz Railway at this very period, as we shall see in Chapter Five), but when it came to registration, the Muslims, who found Abdülhamid to be an inspiring figure, found themselves relying for leadership on a figure like Gandhi, who may not have shared their religious beliefs, but who was a fellow Indian dedicated to the cause of Indian rights. For his part, Gandhi acknowledged the importance of the Hamidia Islamic Society and of Islamic beliefs in galvanising opposition to the registration law.
In an article published in *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi notes with approval a speech given by Mukhtiyar, who said that the Muslims could hope for help only from God, and that “with Him on one’s side one will never suffer defeat.” Gandhi comments that the Hamidia Islamic Society had displayed “extraordinary courage” during the anti-registration campaign, and that “the struggle we are engaged in is a righteous war,” and a “question of our faith.” Despite being a Hindu, Gandhi thus seemed to have taken the religious teachings of Muslim activists such as Moulvi Mukhtiyar to heart. We see in his commentary on Mukhtiyar’s speech a complete identification with the goals and mode of thinking of the Muslim preacher. Jonathan Hyslop thus makes an understatement when he states that “it could almost be said… that Islamic conceptions of sanctified struggle were a source of Gandhianism.” They certainly were a source, as acknowledged by Gandhi himself.

And while Abdülhamid may have ignored Gandhi and his Muslim friends, they did not ignore him. Thus, in August 1908, when the campaigners decided to burn their registration documents in order to ramp up the pressure against the Transvaal government, they did so at the Hamidia Mosque, once again drawing a symbolic connection to the Sultan. In September 1908, the Hamidia Islamic Society organised a large meeting to celebrate the 32nd anniversary of Abdülhamid’s accession to the throne, as well as the inauguration of the Hijaz Railway. Gandhi attended the meeting, as did the Ottoman consul, marking a rare occasion of public cooperation between the consulate and the Hamidia Islamic Society. The overjoyed Indians, in an effort to involve other

communities in the celebration, distributed sweets among both black and white children and arranged a fireworks show.\textsuperscript{592} The campaign of the Hamidia Islamic Society and Gandhi resulted in a small victory; Britain prevailed on Transvaal to drop its requirement for Ottoman Muslims to register.\textsuperscript{593} Thus, instead of Ottomans trying to defend oppressed peoples, as in South-East Asia, it was the oppressed Indians in South Africa who had succeeded in defending the tiny Ottoman community in Transvaal. The Indians themselves (much more numerous and threatening to white supremacy in the province) still had to register, until the law was finally repealed in 1911, after years of struggle and, incidentally, after Abdülhamid had been deposed.\textsuperscript{594}

With hindsight, it is clear that the Sultan was short-sighted in ignoring the struggle of the Indians of Transvaal against racial discrimination. While he was expecting a revolt to eventually break out in India (possibly with Ottoman help) and overthrow British rule, a non-violent revolt was brewing among the Indians of South Africa, and no direct Ottoman help was forthcoming. The tactics of peaceful resistance that Mohandas Gandhi developed in South Africa, strengthened with the sense of religious determination he had absorbed from the Muslim leaders of the Hamidia Islamic Society, were eventually applied by him to his homeland, India, with spectacular success. Gandhi led India to its independence in 1947 through a long series of non-violent protests which had

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\item \textsuperscript{594} Stanley Wolpert, \textit{Gandhi’s Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78. It must be noted that the repeal of the Asiatic Registration Act in 1911 did not mean equality for Indians; it was only in 1961 that the South African government accepted the fact that the Indian minority had a right to South African citizenship, and only after the end of apartheid did the Indians win rights equal to those of white South Africans. See Kogila A. Moodley, “South African Indians: The Wavering Minority,” in Leonard Thompson and Jeffrey Butler (eds.), \textit{Change in Contemporary South Africa} (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 254.
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commenced with the Hamidia Islamic Society meeting of September 1906. Once again, though, Abdülhamid’s policy of pan-Islamism in the Indian Ocean arena found an echo in this momentous movement. To some degree, it inspired the Indian Muslims in South Africa in their struggle (as indicated by their repeated use of the word “Hamidia” and their attempts to cooperate with the Ottoman consulate and ordinary Ottoman Muslims in Transvaal), and gave them a sense of mission which they may have otherwise lacked.

South Africa was certainly not the only part of the African portion of the Indian Ocean World that the Ottomans had an interest and impact in during Abdülhamid’s reign. For instance, in 1888, when Sultan Khalifa b. Sa‘id (r. 1888-1890) ascended the throne of Zanzibar, Abdülhamid sent him a name-i hümayun (imperial letter) through an Ottoman official called Şükrü Efendi to congratulate him. However, he did not write to Khalifa as an equal, as one sultan to another. Rather, in all Ottoman documents on the subject, Khalifa is referred as Zengihar hâkim-i cedidi Said Halife hazretleri (the new ruler of Zanzibar, His Excellency Sa‘id Khalifa). For his part, upon receiving Abdülhamid’s letter, Sultan Khalifa acted outwardly as his vassal. He welcomed Şükrü to his court and, in a gathering attended by his ministers, took the letter from Abdülhamid and placed it on his head in a gesture of thanks and in acknowledgement of Abdülhamid’s superiority over him.

However, in reality this gesture was largely ceremonial. The Ottomans were clearly trying to cultivate goodwill in Zanzibar, a strategically important island, but they could do little more. By this stage, the Scramble for Africa was in full swing, and Zanzibar and its holdings on the East African coast were one of the prime targets for European expansionism. The Scramble for Africa had begun in 1881 with the French

takeover of Tunisia and continued the following year with the British occupation of
Egypt. The Ottoman Empire had been in no position to resist that onslaught militarily; it
certainly was in no position in 1888 to compete with the Europeans in the partitioning of
Zanzibari domains or, for that matter, to protect Zanzibar from European encroachment.
Sultan Khalifa’s predecessor, Sultan Bargash (who was mentioned earlier in the context
of his support for the anti-Ottoman publications of Lewis Sabuncu) had given the British
a 50-year lease on Zanzibari-owned land on the East African shore (in today’s Kenya),
measuring about 50,000 square miles and containing a population of two million.
Similarly, Germany had acquired Zanzibari territory on the mainland of modern-day
Tanzania.⁵⁹⁶ After Khalifa came to power, even the Italians entered the fray, demanding
that he hand over yet another strip of Zanzibari land on the African mainland to them.
Moreover, Germany (which was, by this stage, an Ottoman ally) denied Zanzibari
sovereignty over the land it had recently acquired, and brought in a warship to force
Sultan Khalifa’s local representative to lower the Zanzibari flag.⁵⁹⁷

It is thus no wonder that Khalifa welcomed any attention from Abdülhamid; his
empire was at the end of a process of being unravelled and any expression of solidarity
was welcome. For Abdülhamid, friendship with a weakened and disaffected Muslim ruler
with memories of past glory was a good strategy to pursue in case a general anti-colonial
uprising could be organised one day. That seemed to be Abdülhamid’s favoured strategy
both in India and in South-East Asia as well. However, unlike the Dutch, whom
Abdülhamid and his consuls defied by aiding Muslim rulers and merchants in South-East
Asia, there was little material difference that Abdülhamid could make in the case of East

Africa. His friendship with Germany and his weak position with regard to Britain (which was within striking distance of the Muslim holy cities in the Hijaz) made it impossible for him to act decisively. Nevertheless, the cordial (and unequal) ties between Zanzibar and the Ottoman Empire persisted. In 1907, Sultan ‘Ali (r. 1902-1911) of Zanzibar visited Sultan Abdülhamid (whom he recognised as the Caliph) in Istanbul, while in 1908 an Ottoman delegation headed by the Grand Vizier visited ‘Ali in Zanzibar.⁵⁹⁸

So far in this chapter, we have examined the way Sultan Abdülhamid dealt with Muslims living under European colonial rule in the Indian Ocean World. However, his diplomacy was not limited to contacts with Muslims; pan-Islamism was a crucially important strategy for him, but it was not the only tool at his disposal. This is demonstrated by the fact that he also sought to establish or deepen cordial relations with non-Muslim countries who had successfully resisted European encroachment. One of these was Ethiopia, which was, like South Africa and Zanzibar, also located in the eastern African portion of the Indian Ocean World. Located next to Sudan (which was witnessing a drawn-out conflict between the British and the Mahdi, or, as the Ottomans called him, the Mütemehdi, that is, the Mahdi Pretender), Ethiopia was at a strategic crossroads.

The Ottomans, as we saw in Chapter Two, had established a mutually beneficial working relationship with the Sanusi Sufi order, providing the Sanusis with arms, which not only helped keep the Italians out of Libya, but may have prevented the Mahdi’s followers from expanding westwards into the Chad region. In fact, in early 1889, the Sanusis themselves started expanding onto Mahdist territory in Sudan, pushing the

⁵⁹⁸ Amal N. Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism: Expanding the Crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s-1930s)* (Abdingon: Routledge, 2010), 53.
Mahdists eastwards.\(^{599}\) In something of a domino effect, the Mahdists pushed east into Ethiopia the same year. Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872-1889) resisted the invasion, and was killed on the battlefield. The Italians then took advantage of the situation to grab the Ethiopian Red Sea coast (today located in Eritrea).\(^{600}\) Thus, Ethiopia ended up trapped between two enemies, with the Italians to the east and the Mahdists to the west. Neither the Mahdists nor the Italians were active enemies of the Ottomans, but they were rivals, since both ultimately had designs on Ottoman territories in Africa. This became even truer than before when the British, together with Egyptian troops, made a concerted effort to defeat the Mahdists and reoccupy Sudan.\(^{601}\) Now, Ethiopia was about to be surrounded by two powers which not only were a threat to Ethiopia, but were also a major threat to Ottoman territorial integrity. Thus, it was logical for Abdülhamid to try to establish cordial ties with the country.

The Sultan proceeded using his time-honoured method of sending medals and other gifts. In December 1897, he received a letter from Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889-1913), thanking Abdülhamid for the jewel-encrusted sword that the Sultan had sent him, and the medal he had sent to his wife, Empress Taytu Betul (1851-1918). In reply, Menelik sent “wild animals” of 35 different species to Istanbul as a token of his friendship. To Menelik, this was not a mere exchange of pleasantries, for he had a higher goal in mind. He asked Abdülhamid that a church in Jerusalem be handed over to the


\(^{601}\) BOA, Y.EE. 118/10, 3 Jumada al-Thani 1315 (30 Oct. 1897).
Ethiopian Orthodox Church. At the same time, an Ethiopian general named “Mesheshya” (probably Meshesha) also wrote a letter asking for the church.

This correspondence demonstrates the Ethiopians’ understanding of Abdülhamid’s aim in establishing links with their country. Ethiopia and the Ottomans faced common military threats; hence, it only made sense for an Ethiopian general to join the conversation between the two rulers. Abdülhamid must have taken the request from Ethiopia to heart, because he announced in 1898 that the entire Ethiopian community in Jerusalem would receive “autonomy” (serbestlik). In response, Ethiopia claimed to have granted its Muslims autonomous status as well. To seal the agreement, the Ethiopians also sent a lion (a living example of their national symbol) to Istanbul.

This mutual granting of “autonomy” was probably not a difficult undertaking for either side. For the Ottomans, it merely meant granting the few Ethiopians in Jerusalem recognition as a separate community; they could govern their own religious affairs just as the Greeks and Armenians did theirs. Meanwhile, granting “autonomy” to the Muslims of Ethiopia was not really a new undertaking on the part of Menelik, since all he wanted from the Muslim areas he conquered was that they fly the Ethiopian flag and pay him tribute. In other words, if they acknowledged his supremacy and their incorporation into Ethiopia, day-to-day governance was left to their own chiefs. Thus, both Abdülhamid

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602 BOA, Y.EE. 62/38, 5 Sha‘ban 1315 (30 Dec. 1897). The tiny Ethiopian community of Jerusalem, numbering perhaps a couple dozen people, did not enjoy any official political status with the Ottomans at this point, unlike the Greeks and the Armenians. The Jerusalem Ethiopians appealed for British and Russian help at different times in the 19th century, without much success. According to Hanna Kildani, the Ethiopian emperors came to their aid towards the end of the century; certainly, negotiating with the Ottoman Sultan for a church building to be used by the community in Jerusalem was part of this aid. See Rev. Hanna Kildani, Modern Christianity in the Holy Land (Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2010), 623.
604 BOA, Y.EE. 62/36, 29 Dhu al-Hijja 1315 (21 May 1898).
605 See the Russian traveller Alexander Bulatovich’s impressions of the autonomous Muslim state of Jimma (first published in 1900) in Aleksandr Ksaver‘evich Bulatovich, S voiskami Menelika II (With the Troops
and Menelik took their existing policies and packaged them in such a way that they
would appear to be a favour to the other side. By doing so, Abdülhamid was able to
secure the goodwill of the Ethiopians, located in a region of Africa where he had few
allies and many enemies. Although not a Muslim state, Ethiopia was no Zanzibar. It can
and did resist European colonialism militarily. Thus, friendly ties with Ethiopia, although
not part of Abdülhamid’s pan-Islamist strategy, certainly did contribute to Ottoman
efforts to turn the Indian Ocean littoral into a vast belt of Ottoman-friendly territories.

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Abdülhamid II realised that it no longer had military
allies among the Great Powers. At the same time, the threats to its territorial integrity and
its very existence were increasing. The Ottomans lost many of their Balkan territories to
the Russians’ Slavic allies in the 1870s, followed by Cyprus to Britain in the 1870s, and
Tunisia and Egypt to the French and British in the 1880s. Italy was interested in capturing
the territory that lay between Egypt and Tunisia. Thus, the territory in the western parts
of the Ottoman Empire, whether in Europe or Africa, was either lost or under threat of
being lost. While there was no immediate prospect of winning back the lost territories,
Abdülhamid was determined to ensure that further losses did not occur.

of Menelik II) (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 189-190. See also Tseg A Endalew Etefa, Inter-Ethnic Relations on
a Frontier: Mätakkäl (Ethiopia), 1898-1991 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2006), 57. In a book on
Ethiopia published in 1902-1903, the Egyptian historian and al-Azhar professor Ahmad al-Qina’i praised
Menelik for his treatment of Muslims, calling him the “beloved najashi.” See Haggai Erlich, The Cross and
the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 90-93.
Additionally, as we have seen, he believed that the Muslims were one *umma* with him as their legitimate leader, the *Amir al-Mu’minin*, and looked forward to the day when the colonised Muslim peoples would rise up in a revolt against their European masters. The need to defend the Ottoman Empire from further territorial encroachment, combined with the wish to provide colonised Muslims with moral support in expectation of liberation at some point in the future, led Abdülhamid into a policy of Pan-Islamism. His consuls in India, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore and (to a lesser extent) South Africa spread the message of Islamic unity and encouraged Muslims conducting struggles against their colonial overlords, whether the British or the Dutch, to not lose hope. In some cases, they even offered the local Muslims material aid in their struggles. This policy created vast amounts of goodwill for the Ottomans, as demonstrated, for example, by the Hamidia Islamic Society in Transvaal throwing a large celebration to mark Ottoman successes, or the huge crowds of Muslims who came to see the Ottoman frigate *Ertuğrul* when it visited their shores. Ottoman Pan-Islamist diplomacy ultimately contributed to the fulfillment of both of Abdülhamid’s goals. It enhanced the security of the Ottoman Empire by making it costlier for the European powers to attack it (since their own Muslim subjects would be less likely to accept such an attack). At the same time, it also gave added hope and courage to colonised people in the Indian Ocean World, making them feel that they were not alone in the struggle against colonialism, and, through the rise of figures like Mohandas Gandhi, actually contributing to eventual decolonisation.
Chapter Five

The Hijaz Railway in the Context of Hamidian Modernisation

As we saw in Chapter Four, Sultan Abdülhamid’s diplomatic approaches towards Muslims in the Indian Ocean World were predicated upon his status as Caliph of the Muslim umma. Most of the Ottoman diplomatic activities in the Indian Ocean region took place in British and Dutch colonies. Part of the reason for such a state of affairs is that both the British and the Dutch zealously guarded their sole sovereignty over their colonies, and had no intention of allowing direct relations between semi-autonomous states, or let alone rebel states within their domains on the one hand and the Ottoman Empire on the other. Apart from this factor, though, the very presence of the British and Dutch empires in the Indian Ocean created an infrastructure that allowed for such things as consulates to spread. Consulates were a feature of Great Power diplomacy, and by adopting this feature the Ottomans were in effect claiming a seat at the table of European powers and marking themselves as the Europeans’ equals.

The intended audience for this claim consisted not only of the European powers, but, perhaps even more so, of their Muslim subjects. In the eyes of these Asian Muslims ruled by foreign powers, an Ottoman consulate represented not so much the Ottoman state as the Caliph. It was for this reason that, as we noted in Chapter Four, the Ottoman consul in Singapore, Ahmed Ataullah, stated that the presence of a large number of Arab merchants at the (re-) opening ceremony of the consulate indicated their attachment to Islam. He harboured no illusions regarding their attachment to the Ottoman Empire as a state. Similarly, the Ottoman ex-consul of the Ottoman Empire in Bombay, İsmail Zühdü,
noted the Indian Muslims’ love for the Caliphate and their long prayers for the Caliph – not for the Ottoman Empire or the Ottoman people. The Indian Muslims of South Africa named their political organisation and one of their mosques *Hamidiya*, rather than *Osmaniya*. Thus, it was the Caliphate and the Caliph rather than the Ottoman Empire that resonated with the Muslim public in areas outside the Ottoman Empire.

As Abdülhamid notes in his memoirs, a quarter of a billion Muslims pray to God every day, “directing their gaze at the Caliph, the successor of the Prophet.” 606 Of course, the “gaze” Abdülhamid evokes here is a political more than a spiritual one. Religiously speaking, the Muslims’ hopes for salvation rested with God. But politically, in Abdülhamid’s view, he was seen by the Muslims of the world as their best hope for future liberation. This worldwide respect for the Caliphate on the part of Muslims prevented the Ottoman Empire from being a mere “instrument” in the hands of the Great Powers. 607

The Caliphate is what united the Ottomans themselves in many parts of the Ottoman Empire. Ottomanism – the notion that all Ottoman subjects regardless of religion were equal to each other and were equally “Ottoman” – was a very recent political idea, and failed to resonate with large segments of the population. As Alexander Vezenkov argues, the idea of Ottomanism contained in it the seeds of two types of nationalism: one civic, and the other ethnic. Thus, in the Tanzimat era and afterwards, Muslim, Christian and Jewish subjects of the Sultan were all officially Ottomans. At the same time, in informal discourse, the word “Ottoman” was a marker of ethnicity, primarily referring to a Turkish-speaking Muslim (a people that, more and more, came to

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607 Idem.
be known within the Ottoman Empire as the “Turks”). For example, the Ottoman journalist Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912), while travelling in Europe in 1889, said to one of the people he met there, “I am Ottoman. And not only an Ottoman – I am the purest of Ottomans, I am a Muslim and a Turk.”

In this definition of Ottomanism, which may not have been the official one but was shared by many members of the Turkish-speaking Ottoman elite, including, arguably, Abdülhamid himself, one had to be a Turkish-speaking Muslim to be a “pure” Ottoman, although others, such as Greeks and Armenians, could be Ottomans as well, albeit not full-fledged ones. As we saw in Chapter Three, Abdülhamid saw the need to “Ottomanise” the Kurds (who were already Muslim, but not Turkish-speaking), and used a decidedly “us vs. them” language when referring to the Armenians. As far as the non-Muslim minorities themselves were concerned, on the other hand, the idea of Ottomanism came too late in the game to prevent the rise of nationalist sentiment both among Slavic Christians in Rumelia and among Armenians in Anatolia. Some of this nationalism had indigenous roots, but much was instigated by outside powers, such as Russia and Britain. There certainly were individuals among the Greek and Armenian elite who considered themselves Ottomans and who served the Ottoman state in various capacities (including as ministers, ambassadors and court officials). But much of the non-Muslim intelligentsia was not persuaded by the language of Ottomanism and started imagining its future in ethnic terms.

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Sultan Abdülhamid thus understandably saw Ottomanism as a failed ideology. As noted in Chapter Three, the Sultan argues in an undated entry in his memoirs that “We must never rely too much on the idea of the Ottoman Empire, but [we should] underline the fact that we are all Muslims: always and everywhere we must insist on the fact that I am the Amir al-Mu’minin (leader of the believers); my title of Sovereign of the Ottomans must come only in second place.”\(^{610}\) According to Abdülhamid, it is peoples such as the Arabs and Albanians who needed to be approached by the government in this fashion, because they had been contaminated by nationalism, spread by Britain through its “perfidious policy.”\(^{611}\) Thus, Ottomanism would not be an effective tool in raising the loyalty of the inhabitants of Arabia towards the Sultan. The “idea of the Ottoman Empire” simply failed to evoke significant emotional responses among the most Arabs. Even the idea of Abdülhamid being a “sultan” who must be obeyed might be a hindrance. Rather, Abdülhamid wanted to be presented as the Caliph and the Commander of the Faithful, to whom all Muslims owed their allegiance and obedience.

Abdülhamid thus pinpointed the problem facing the Ottoman Empire among its Arab subjects: an incipient crisis of legitimacy, which had come about as a result of the growth of nationalism, as well as growing pressure from Britain, which wanted to erect as many barriers between the Sultan and his Arab subjects as possible. Abdülhamid’s solution was to bolster his legitimacy through the use of the language of the Caliphate, both literally (in terms of government pronouncements, the press, and so on) and metaphorically (by building new facts on the ground which reinforced the notion of the Caliphate).


\(^{611}\) Ibid., 173.
However, the more widely Abdülhamid was accepted as Caliph, in his empire and abroad, the more Britain’s predominant position as the hegemon of the Indian Ocean was threatened (as we saw in Chapter Four). Britain’s response, then, was to question the entire basis for Abdülhamid’s claim to the Caliphate by various means, including government propaganda, the press, and help for various rebels in the hope that they might publicly reject Abdülhamid’s title of Caliph. There was no better place for Britain to pursue this policy than the Arabian Peninsula. Abdülhamid’s legitimacy as Caliph lay in the official story (propagated by generations of Ottoman government officials but lacking the support of documentary evidence) that the last Cairo-based ‘Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutawakkil ‘ala Allah III (r. 1508-1516) had surrendered his caliphal authority to the Ottoman Sultan (r. 1512-1520). However, as Kemal Karpat notes, the possession of the Caliphate without control over the holiest sites of Islam, Mecca and Medina, was not “meaningful”. On the other hand, a ruler who held effective sovereignty over the Hijaz and its holy cities, providing services to the pilgrims who gather there throughout the Muslim world, could thereby legitimise his claim to the Caliphate. The first Ottoman ruler who met these informal criteria was Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566).  

This criterion for determining who is a true caliph still applied at the time of Abdülhamid. As the Damascene Muslim scholar Sayyid Muhammad ‘Arif b. Ahmad al-Husayni states in his book on the future Hijaz Railway (written in approximately 1900 and submitted by the author to Yıldız Palace), “The Two Shrines [that is, Mecca and Medina] are the two centers of Islamic practice and the two poles of the Muslim axis.... Their ruler is the greatest caliph of Allah’s Prophet.... Watching over the Two Shrines

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and everything connected with or near both of them is a most necessary matter." For Muhammad ‘Arif, the matter is simple: whoever rules over the land containing Mecca and Medina and their sacred mosques is almost automatically to be deemed a caliph. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of the Caliphate had become completely intertwined with the concept of the protector of Mecca and Medina.

This being the case, any weakening of Ottoman authority in the Hijaz (which was already quite weak, as we shall see below) could potentially be a blow to the Ottoman sultan’s very legitimacy as Caliph. By extension, a loss of the Arab provinces in general could also diminish a sultan’s standing among Muslims and claim to the Caliphate. Basing themselves on this theory, as well as their desire to bring the entire Indian Ocean World under their hegemony and (where possible) direct control, the British sought to neutralise the threat which Abdülhamid posed them by undermining his hold over the Hijaz. As we shall see in this chapter, Abdülhamid’s response to the British challenge was to reinforce the Ottoman presence in the Red Sea littoral of the Hijaz, and to make plans for a strengthening of Ottoman sovereignty over the Arab shores of the Persian Gulf.

He sought to achieve the latter aim with the help of Germany, a newly rising power eager to assert its presence on the world stage and happy to challenge Britain where a more established power may have demurred. Although the resulting Berlin-Baghdad Railway never reached the Gulf, an alliance with Germany was formed that eventually led to the Ottoman Empire joining the Central Powers during the First World War.

War, years after Abdülhamid had been dethroned. As for the former aim, that is, to strengthen Ottoman control over the Hijaz and its holy sites as well as the Arabian shore of the Red Sea, Abdülhamid launched the Hijaz Railway, connecting Damascus (which had already been linked to Istanbul by rail) to Medina.

While the Berlin-Baghdad Railway was an infrastructure project pure and simple (albeit with important geopolitical aims behind it), the Hijaz Railway had the additional feature of providing transportation to pilgrims on their way to the Hajj. This feature is what made it important in the eyes of Muslims worldwide. It also made it unique among the railways of the Ottoman Empire in that no other railway had this sort of religious dimension to it. As a result, the Ottomans financed the construction of the Hijaz Railway solely with recourse to non-Western (and almost entirely Muslim) sources. The railway was a site of contestation not only between the Ottomans and the British, but also between the Ottoman state and its army on the one hand, and many of the indigenous inhabitants of the Hijaz on the other. Thus, the Hijaz Railway project provides an example not only of Sultan Abdülhamid’s modernisation and valorisation of Islam, but also some of the limits of his power and his policies.

**Sultan Abdülhamid and Modernisation**

As noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, many historians who discuss the Hijaz Railway are in agreement that this railway was the prime example of Sultan Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamic policies. Nevertheless, the railway in their accounts often
stands in splendid isolation from the rest of Abdülhamid’s modernisation drive. Pan-Islamism and the centrality of the Caliphate to Pan-Islamism may help us understand why Abdülhamid needed to reinforce the presence of the Ottoman state in the Hijaz, especially given British and Italian control of the western shore of the Red Sea. What reference to Pan-Islamism alone does not tell us, however, is why Abdülhamid decided to build a railway as his means of tackling the problem, as opposed to dispatching more troops to the Hijaz, bolstering the Ottoman navy, sending in refugees to settle the Hijaz with a more Ottoman-friendly population, or other options that were available to him.

The debate tends to focus on why the railway was built and which of its uses (religious, military or economic) was predominant or meant to be predominant. What is not usually problematised is the decision to build a railway in the first place. The answer to the question “why a railway” must be sought in Abdülhamid’s attitude towards the notion of progress and his policy of modernisation in different spheres of Ottoman life. What emerges from the evidence is that modernisation (often involving the adoption of new technology) was the Sultan’s answer to many of the problems facing the Ottoman Empire, and not just the problem of the vulnerability of the Hijaz. As Abdülhamid notes in his memoirs, “I... want to make known to my coreligionists the good aspects of all innovations as soon as my people is capable of digesting them.”614 F.A.K. Yasamee describes Abdülhamid’s policies of Muslim unification within the confines of the Ottoman Empire as being “manifestly conservative.”615 As this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, however, they were anything but conservative, unless Abdülhamid’s use of pre-existing structures is equivalent to being conservative. The point is that

Abdülmecid (while being a political conservative in the sense of wanting to preserve the authority of the sultan against demands for constitutionalism) transformed the institutions he came into contact with and utilised them for new purposes.

For example, in Chapter Two, we saw how Abdülhamid’s alliance with the Shadhiliyya Madaniyya tariqa and the Sanusiyya tariqa changed both the Sufi orders. The Sanusiyya, from being a semi-independent proto-state, turned into, in a sense, an agent of the Ottoman state. The Madaniyya initiated Abdülhamid into their way of worship, but Abdülhamid incorporated them into his conception of the state; the entire tariqa, from Shaykh Zafir down, was placed at the disposal of the Sultan for the purposes of clandestine agitation against European imperialism. In Chapter Three, we examined Abdülhamid’s incorporation of the Kurdish tribes of eastern Anatolia directly into the Ottoman state structure through the formation of the Hamidiya cavalry, modeled on the Cossack regiments of the Russian army. As with the Cossacks, the idea was to take existing military structures that existed on the margins of the empire and were hard to control, and to repurpose them in order to have them serve the interests of the state. The Kurds went from being “wild shepherds,” as described by Abdülhamid, to regular cavalry units serving the Sultan-Caliph and, what is more, were happy to do so. The aims of these changes can perhaps be described as conservative in the sense that their goal was to preserve Ottoman territorial integrity to the extent possible. The effect, though, was the opposite of conservative; it was transformative, and modernising.

Abdülmecid’s policies had a similarly transformative effect on many of the institutions that made up the Ottoman state. His reforms also reached a greater number of people than those of many of his predecessors. One of the key areas of reform and
modernisation under Abdülhamid was in education. The Ottoman state only became interested in providing education to its subjects in the Tanzimat era. Under Sultan Abdülmeclid I (r. 1839-1861), a temporary committee was formed to study the issue of public education. Gradually, the temporary committee turned into a permanent one, which took charge of the writing of textbooks for the planned state schools. Eventually, the permanent committee gave way to the Ministry of Education, thus making public education a true branch of the state.  

In parallel to the religious schools which existed before the Tanzimat era, the education law of 1869, modeled on French practices, called for the creation of a state-run educational system involving schools of five stages: primary schools (ibtidai), middle schools (rüşdiye), secondary schools (idadi), lyceums (sultani), and a university (darü’l-fünun). By the time Abdülhamid had come to power, this programme had remained largely unrealised. The Galatasaray Lyceum had been opened in Istanbul, along with many middle schools, though mostly clustered around the capital. However, not a single public primary school was in operation. On the other hand, foreign schools, often run by Christian missionaries, were being opened in different parts of the Empire at a rapid rate. For instance, in the late 1880s, the vilayet of Beirut had five French schools and four British schools, as well as several American, German and Italian schools, some run by missionaries and others by the respective foreign governments. About 90 percent of the children attending these schools were Ottoman subjects. Even though the number

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616 BOA, Y.EE. 39/7, 24 Sha‘ban 1309 (24 Mar. 1892).
618 Benjamin C. Fortna, Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52-53.
of foreign schools had not been as high in the 1870s, the Ottomans were nevertheless worried about their deleterious effects.\textsuperscript{619}

According to Michael Winter, Abdülhamid’s reign was a period of “despotism and political reaction.”\textsuperscript{620} Yet, running completely counter to the image of Abdülhamid as a tyrant or reactionary (as Winter goes on to admit himself), the Sultan decided right from the beginning of his reign to dramatically expand the educational system and open up new educational opportunities in areas where Muslims had previously had no schooling options beyond the mosque schools (\textit{medrese}). Unlike his predecessors, he was not satisfied with surrounding himself with an educated elite in Istanbul and opening more schools for the children of this elite in order to perpetuate the existing system. Rather, he sought to bring modern education to the provinces, which his predecessors had done on paper, and, unlike them, he largely succeeded in this goal. Thus, the number of secondary schools (\textit{idadi} schools) went from six in 1876, when Abdülhamid came to power, to 55 in 1893, and 98 by 1908. Out of the six secondary schools which existed in 1876, a third were in Istanbul. By 1908, only a tenth of the secondary schools were in Istanbul, marking a significant increase in access to education.\textsuperscript{621} This process meant not only an expansion of the state’s reach into the provinces, but also the expansion of opportunities available to individuals in those provinces and their being brought into the ambit of an

\textsuperscript{619} İsmail Güven, \textit{Osmanlı Eğitiminin Batılılaşma Evreleri} (Stages in the Westernisation of Ottoman Education) (Ankara: Naturel Yayınları, 2004), 137. For a particular example of Ottoman concern about the effect of missionary schools, see an interior ministry memorandum on American schools in Armenian-inhabited regions, dated 19 Nisan 1319 Rumi (2 May 1903 Gregorian); reprinted in İhsan Süreyya Srma, \textit{Belgelerle II. Abdülhamid Dönemi} (The Era of Abdülhamid II in Documents) (Beyan Yayınları, 1998), 62-64.


\textsuperscript{621} Georgeon, \textit{Abdülhamid II}, 251-252.
Ottoman (as opposed to foreign, missionary-driven) modernity. As Winter admits, Abdülhamid oversaw a tripling of literacy rates in the Ottoman Empire.  

Apart from schools that provided their pupils with a general education, Abdülhamid also opened a considerable number and range of specialised schools, including schools for advanced studies, across the empire. Using financing obtained through a new tax he introduced in 1883, the Sultan started opening up teacher-training colleges in every province the same year. A university was re-established in Istanbul in 1900 (the one opened briefly during the Tanzimat era had closed soon thereafter). In 1903, a medical school was opened in Damascus, and in the following year military schools were opened in Damascus and Baghdad, as well two cities in Rumelia and one in Anatolia. In 1907, three law schools were opened, one in Rumelia, one in Anatolia, and one in Baghdad.  

Abdülhamid also wanted to introduce balance into the education system, paying attention to its earlier stages as well as its later ones, and attempting to diversify it in order for it to better match the needs of the labour market. As he notes in an undated entry in his memoirs, the quality of Ottoman lyceums was very high, but the state should concentrate instead on opening more middle schools. Lyceums could produce good bureaucrats and soldiers, but Abdülhamid did not want the Ottoman educational system to simply be a machine for the augmentation of the army and the bureaucracy. Rather, he wanted it to also produce “young people able to study engineering, architecture, etc.”

This was not modernisation with the sole aim of strengthening the state, as has been alleged by some historians, but also modernisation for the sake of economic growth and

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622 Winter, “Ma‘arif,” 905.
623 Idem.
624 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 186.
public welfare. To this end, he established a school of finance in 1878, a school of fine arts in 1879, a school of commerce in 1882, an engineering school in 1884, a veterinary school in 1889, but also, keeping the interests of the state in mind, a police academy in 1891, and a school to train customs officers in 1892.

Abdülahmid was explicit about the aim of his educational reforms, which was modernisation. In his memoirs, Abdülahmid praises (British-occupied) Egypt for understanding “the necessity to adapt themselves to modern needs.” He was determined that the Ottoman Empire under his rule should do no less. One of the barriers in his path, according to Abdülahmid, were the ulama, who were “excessively conservative.” In contrast, what the Empire needed were “truly eminent men, who honour our great religion.” Thus, the Ottoman ulama, to the Sultan, were less than eminent, not living up to his high expectations for them. It was their fault, in his view, and not at all the fault of Islam as a religion, that higher learning in the Ottoman Empire had fallen behind the times. His solution was, in many ways, to push the ulama aside and to increase the role of the state in the name of progress. In this sense, his approach was similar to that of his grand vizier Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, who believed that Islam and political modernisation were fully compatible, but that unreasonable ulama sometimes stood in the way of progress (see Chapter Two).

Abdülahmid’s goal was to prepare a modern workforce not only on those sectors of the economy that were undergoing rapid modernisation, such as industry and

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625 For instance, John Obert Voll argues that the aim of Abdülahmid’s modernisation was to “give added power to the instruments of state control,” in order to further strengthen his “autocracy.” See Voll, Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 91. The Sultan’s initiatives in education do not support his thesis.
626 Winter, “Ma‘arif,” 905.
627 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 186.
construction (where the professions he mentions in his memoirs – engineers and architects – would be needed), but also the sector that provided the Empire with its largest source of employment (if not economic output). At the turn of the twentieth century, the vast majority of the Ottoman population lived in the countryside, where agriculture was the predominant occupation. Yet agriculture was a relatively underdeveloped sector from the commercial standpoint (compared to the urban economy), with agricultural taxes (on crops and on land) accounting for only 40 percent of total taxation in the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s.

It is thus no surprise that Abdülhamid believed that Ottoman agriculture was in need of modernisation. In his view, agriculture was the most important sector of the economy, because it literally kept all the other sectors alive. The Ottoman Empire, according to the Sultan, had more than sufficient fertile soil to meet its needs; what it needed now was for its farmers to “assimilate the results obtained by modern agricultural science.” For this purpose, Abdülhamid established an agricultural school in Halkali, a suburb of Istanbul, in 1890. The school laid emphasis on a scientific approach to agriculture and featured laboratories and fields where students could experiment with crops. Yet Abdülhamid was not naive about what this school (and two others that had been opened on private initiative) could achieve. In his memoirs, he describes the Ottoman peasantry as “slow and apathetic,” and predicts that they would not adopt the recommendations of these schools for a long time. And yet, in his view, the peasants

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628 Depending on the region, the rural population ranged from about 60 percent of the total to around 95 percent. See Şevket Pamuk, “Commodity Production for World Markets and Relations of Production in Ottoman Agriculture, 1840-1913,” in Huri İslamoğlu-Inan, *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 192.
would eventually come to see the benefits of their findings, and would thereby undergo "progress."  

Concepts such as "modern" and "progress" were thus Abdülhamid’s watchwords. While public education made great strides during his reign, certain social groups remained largely excluded from it. In particular, these were members of tribes, whether nomadic or settled. Kurdish tribes in Anatolia, Albanian tribes in Rumelia and Arab Bedouin tribes in the Arabian Peninsula had one thing in common, which is that they were separate societies in their own right, which certainly had dealings with their neighbours and representatives of the Ottoman government on a regular basis, but nevertheless lived according to their own laws, customs and mores to an extent that most non-tribal communities in the Empire could not match. In Chapter Three, we looked at the ways in which the Kurds were largely outside Ottoman central control, prompting Sultan Abdülhamid to adopt the Hamidiye Cavalry project in order to tie them more closely into the state. Abdülhamid thought of Muslim Ottomans as “us,” as we can see repeatedly in his memoirs, but he clearly thought of the Kurds (who were Muslim but tribal) as “them,” describing them as “savage and violent shepherds.”  

Similarly, we also examined the way in which Abdülhamid unconditionally pardoned a group of Albanian rebels or, more precisely, refused his army permission to engage them in combat. Albanian tribes were similarly outside Ottoman central control, and Abdülhamid thus wanted to cultivate them as allies, rather than risk turning them into enemies.

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As we will see later in this chapter, many of the Arab tribes of Arabia were similarly outside the reach of any effective Ottoman control and administration. The Arabian Peninsula contained several proto-state formations, some of which manoeuvred between the Ottomans and the British to try to derive maximum autonomy out of the rivalry between the two empires. Many of the nomadic Arab tribes lived not only by herding but also by raiding their sedentary neighbours, which had a negative impact on the overall economy of the Arab provinces of the Empire, by raising the cost of production, increasing the already considerable uncertainty involved in agriculture, and was also a headache for the Ottoman state because of the need to deploy soldiers to protect settled areas from tribal attack. Moreover, the tribes raised their own taxes and possessed their own justice system, not to mention their own armed forces. Consequently, the Ottoman state, which believed that deploying military power, administering justice and raising taxes was its sole prerogative, had a strongly antagonistic attitude towards the tribes. Just as Abdülhamid described the Kurds as savages, Ottoman officials described Arab tribesmen as “wild,” “uncivilized,” and “submerged in ignorance.”632 These tribes, to the Ottomans, thus represented the very opposite of “modernity” and “progress,” concepts that were dear to Abdülhamid. As a result, Abdülhamid started making concerted efforts to draw the Arab states into the ambit of the Empire, using education (rather than military conquest and suppression) as his primary tool.

The first step in this direction was to bring 48 young men from three Arab provinces: the Hijaz, Yemen and Tripolitania, to Istanbul, and enroll them in the military academy there in 1886. Some did not have an adequate academic background and had to

drop out, but the rest attended the school for three years and graduated with the rank of second lieutenant. Upon graduation, they were received personally by Abdülhamid at his Friday selamlık (ceremonial procession on the way to Friday prayer), and were given a letter in which they were instructed to go back to the tribes and the towns they had come from, and to act as role models for the children there. The children of the Arab tribes were thus being given a living alternative model to that of their fathers. Instead of becoming proficient in the arts of warfare in order to serve their tribe and increase its glory, they could now pursue an education that would open to them the vistas of modernity through a career in the Ottoman armed forces.

Abdülhamid must have judged this experiment to be a success, because he then decided to open up a boarding school solely for Arab students from important Bedouin tribes, to be known as the Mekteb-i Aşiret-i Hümayun (Imperial Tribal School). Preparations for the school were begun in June 1892, and the school was opened the following October, demonstrating the efficiency that the Ottoman bureaucracy was quite capable of when roused to action. During these few months, the governors of 12 mainly Arab provinces (including the Hijaz) were informed about the school and asked to select students for it. There were to be 50 students during the first year, aged between 12 and 16. The students would not only have all their expenses paid by the government, but would also receive a stipend. The regulations of the school made it clear that it was part of the Ottoman Empire’s self-appointed civilising mission, its goal being “to enable the tribal people to partake of the knowledge and prosperity that emanates from knowledge and civilization.” The school was also explicitly meant to inculcate love for “the Great Islamic Caliphate” and “the Sublime Ottoman Sultanate,” and to promote loyalty to the

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state. Furthermore, the students would not be allowed simply to be assimilated to the urban Ottoman way of life and leave their families unchanged. Rather, they all had to return to their tribes after completing their education, after which they would be given civil service jobs (for example, as schoolteachers). The idea was to use these students as a vanguard for the transformation and Ottomanisation of their tribes.634

The Ottoman interior minister of the time prepared a report on the recruitment process, describing the Bedouin as people living in a “forbidden hole of darkness,” and consequently grateful for the “caliphal light” which the school represented. Yet reports such as this one (similar to the reports sent in by the provincial governors) masked the fact that the governors actually had a hard time recruiting students. The governor of Baghdad, whose report was perhaps more honest than those of some of his colleagues, suggested to the Ottoman government that they provide more important jobs to the students once they graduate, as an inducement for their fathers to send them to the school in the first place. Meanwhile, the Hijaz which, as we have seen, was the most important Arab province to the Ottomans in terms of maintaining the legitimacy of the Caliphate, did not select a single student. Evidently, there were no takers; the tribes were quite happy with the degree of autonomy they possessed and were not interested in the “light” and “civilisation” that Abdülhamid and his government were determined to spread to them. Eventually, after follow-up letters from Istanbul and a month after the school had opened, the vali of the Hijaz was able to find two students for it. In fact, in all the years of its existence, the school never reached full capacity.635

634 Ibid., 86-87.
635 Ibid., 87-91. Regarding the government’s insistence on including students from the Hijaz, see BOA, Y.A.HUS. 265/76, 12 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1310 (4 Oct. 1892).
The coursework at the school was rigorous. Apart from Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, the students also had to learn Persian and French. They also studied history and geography, as well as mathematics and Islamic studies (the Qur’an and theology).

Discipline in the school was quasi-military. The beginning of classes was sometimes announced with a trumpet, and the students had to learn drill. Furthermore, the students’ letters home were inspected by the principal himself. The students were not allowed free access to the city. Once an Arab army officer from Iraq, while visiting Istanbul, wanted to meet some of the Arab students at the school, but was not allowed to do so by the principal. At the end of each day, the principal would lead the students in a prayer expressing their devotion not just to God and the Prophet, but also the Sultan.\(^{636}\)

As mentioned above, the school was conceived by Abdülhamid to educate Bedouin children. The Bedouin may have been less than enthusiastic about it, possibly seeing in it yet another attempt by the state to intrude into their lives without invitation. However, a different constituency, namely the Kurds, viewed the school in an entirely different light. Those Kurds who had already agreed to be incorporated into the structure of the Ottoman state by serving in the Hamidiye Cavalry regiments did not want their sons to be denied the opportunities for advancement that were being offered by the Sultan to the sons of the Bedouin. Thus, having heard the news of the school’s opening, they petitioned Abdülhamid to admit their sons as well. In response, the leaders of the regiments (some of whom were simultaneously tribal chiefs, as in the case of Zilan tribe) were allowed to nominate students for the school. Eventually, the decision was made that only two children per regiment would be admitted.\(^{637}\)

\(^{636}\) Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi,” 92-94.

\(^{637}\) BOA, Y.EE. 139/59, 26 Rabi‘ al-Akhir 1310 (17 Nov. 1892).
Kurdish boys were admitted beginning with the Tribal School’s second academic year, in 1893. Later, boys from Albanian tribes were admitted as well. As we noted in Chapter Four, at an even later stage Arab students from the Dutch East Indies were admitted as well. In fact, the Hadrami Arabs of South-East Asia seemed to be much more interested in sending their children to this school than the Arabs of Arabia, and certainly those of the Hijaz in particular. The reason for the East Indies Hadramis’ enthusiasm for the school was perhaps the same as the reason for the Hijazis’ lack of it: a desire to preserve or obtain some degree of autonomy from a central authority perceived as overbearing. While sending one’s son to the school would be a mark of independent thought and action for a Hadrami in Java, it might mean the opposite for a Bedouin in the Hijaz.

In any case, the mixture of ethnicities at the Tribal School contributed to the Ottomanisation of the students. Unlike children who had grown up in the Ottoman Empire’s ethnically mixed cities, many of the students at this school, especially those arriving in Istanbul at age 12, may never before have met anyone who spoke a different language or came from a different culture. Being thrown in together did produce some friction; once, the police was brought in to break up a violent fight between a group of Arab students and a group of Kurdish ones. Nevertheless, the school did move the students from particular identities (loyalty to a particular tribe and a local way of life) to a more cosmopolitan Ottoman identity, marked by the school uniform, consisting of a coat, a pair of trousers and a fez, a combination that Charlotte Jirousek calls the Tanzimat-era

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638 Rogan, “Aşiret Mektebi,” 86.
“new uniform for the male elite” of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{640} By the 1890s, this style was no longer new, but it was no less effective as a marker of belonging to the modernised, educated upper and middle classes of the Ottoman Empire.

By putting the tribal chieftains’ sons in these uniforms, the Ottoman state was marking their bodies in ways that signified their move from the periphery of the Ottoman world to the centre. What is more, the state made sure that this change in orientation that the students underwent did not go unremarked. Abdullah Frères, the official court photographers, were given the task of portraying the boys in two diametrically opposite ways.\textsuperscript{641} The students were first put in their “native” costume, that is, the clothing they supposedly would have worn while living at home – although it appears to be more ceremonial costume than everyday attire. Thus, Arab students were visibly marked as Arabs, wearing dishdashas, cloaks and scarves.\textsuperscript{642} The photographers then took a group picture of all the students in their school uniforms, to demonstrate the transformation they had undergone.\textsuperscript{643} At least one (probably non-Arab) student had before-and-after portraits taken of him individually: one in an elaborate ethnic costume, and the other in the restrained school uniform which, as we have noted, was more of a general uniform for


\textsuperscript{641} Abdullah Frères were three Armenian brothers had a photography studio in Istanbul from 1858 to 1899. Sultan Abülaziz I (r. 1861-1876) appointed them court photographers and gave them the title of “Outstanding Artists of the City.” See Wendy M.K. Shaw, \textit{Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire} (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 141. Incidentally, one side of the family converted to Islam in 1899. See Engin Özendes, \textit{Abdullah Frères: Ottoman Court Photographers} (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi, 1998), 193.

\textsuperscript{642} See, for example, “Aşiret Mektebi Şakirdanı” (Tribal School Students), Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Abdul Hamid II Collection, LC-USZ62-81454.

\textsuperscript{643} “Aşiret mektebi şakirdlarının gurubu resmi” (A Group Picture of Tribal School Students), LC, PPD, Abdul Hamid II Collection, LC-USZ62-81986.
males of the Ottoman educated classes and was meant to erase local differences and particularities in favour of an Ottoman-wide modernity.\footnote{For the “before” picture, see “Aşiret Mektebi Şakirdanı” (Tribal School Student), LC, PPD, Abdul Hamid II Collection, LC-USZ62-81466, and “Aşiret Mektebi Şakirdanı” (Tribal School Student), LC, PPD, Abdul Hamid II Collection, LC-USZ62-81467.}{644}

These pictures were among the over 1,800 photographs which Sultan Abdülhamid presented to the Library of Congress in the early 1890s. He also sent a very similar collection to the British Museum. Apart from pictures of schools and students, the photographic collection included images of economic facilities such as factories and mines; military personnel from the army and the navy; infrastructure such as harbours; and infrastructure such as hospitals. As the Library of Congress website notes, the overall picture that emerges from these images is one of “the modernization of numerous aspects of the Ottoman Empire.”\footnote{“Abdul Hamid II Collection: Background and Scope,” Library of Congress, \url{http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/ahii/background.html} (accessed on 3 Sept. 2011).}{645} Ultimately, however, Abdülhamid closed the Tribal School down in 1907. According to the British, the reason was “troubles in Kurdistan,” and perhaps the Sultan was afraid that the school would become a hotbed for rebellion the way Robert College (also based in Istanbul) had been for Bulgarian nationalists several decades earlier.\footnote{Sir N. O’Conor, “Education,” 13 Jan. 1908 (extract from “Annual Report for Turkey for 1907). Reprinted in G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds.), \textit{British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914, Vol. V: The Near East: The Macedonian Problem and the Annexation of Bosnia, 1903-9} (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1928), 30. On the role of Robert College (founded by American missionaries in 1863) in the rise of Bulgarian nationalism, see Çağrı Erhan, “Main Trends in Ottoman-American Relations,” in Mustafa Aydin and Çağrı Erhan (eds.), \textit{Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future} (London: Routledge, 2004), 6; Vesselin Dimitrov, \textit{Bulgaria: The Uneven Transition} (London: Routledge, 2001), 9.}{646}

By 1907, towards the end of Abdülhamid’s reign, there were about 24,000 \textit{ibidai} schools in the Ottoman Empire, 500 \textit{rüşdiye} schools, and 70 \textit{idadi} schools. In the primary schools, students the pupils studied Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, the Qur’an, arithmetic and Ottoman history. About a third of their time in school was devoted to religious studies. In
the middle schools, in addition to the above, the pupils were taught Persian, morals, geography, Islamic history, and agriculture. In the secondary schools, the students also learned the sciences of physics, chemistry and biology, as well as political economy and book-keeping. Although the British believed (or were trying to convince themselves) that “the spirit of Islam [is] a most effective barrier to the spread of an enlightened system of education in Turkey,” they were nevertheless forced to admit that Abdülhamid was “justly celebrated” in the Ottoman Empire for constantly opening new schools. In other words, according to the British, Abdülhamid’s success in opening schools must have come despite “the spirit of Islam,” which was an obstacle to education. The amount of time dedicated to Islamic studies in the schools opened by Abdülhamid, however, indicates that, to the Sultan, Islam and a modernised education system went hand-in-hand, and were in no way mutually exclusive.

Abdülhamid believed that Islam was the central pillar and the raison d’être of the Ottoman state. As we saw in Chapter Three, however, Islam to him was a faith and a state of mind, rather than a set of rituals or inherited traditions. The way that Islam was actually implemented in practice by the Ottoman state under Abdülhamid included the promotion of modern education, including the sciences, social sciences and languages, but also containing an important religious studies component, which included studying the Qur’an and morals. Opening schools of various levels in the Arab provinces was one of the ways that Abdülhamid attempted to integrate those provinces more fully into the matrix of the Ottoman Empire. Where the state’s reach was weak or almost non-existent,

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648 Ibid., 29.
Abdülhamid used the Tribal School to bring in the sons of Arab (and other) chieftain, in order to turn them into Ottomans and thus promote the Ottomanisation of their tribes.

The Ottoman ulama generally went along with this expansion of public education, especially since the Qur’an and other Islamic subjects were taught in the new schools. The only significant point of disagreement between the Islamic establishment and the Sultan was regarding girls’ education. The şeyhülislam Ahmed Esad Efendi suggested in 1887 that girls’ schooling ought to end by age nine, because they would reach puberty then and should not continue being out in a public institution after that. The Sultan and his government paid no heed to this proposal, and nothing came of it.649

Modernisation through Infrastructure and Institutions

Apart from education, another way in which the Ottoman state expanded its presence in the Arab provinces of the Empire was through infrastructure projects. Abdülhamid built a multitude of clock-towers in Arab lands (and elsewhere), both as markers of the Empire’s presence, but also to transform the public perception of time and the periodisation of a day: instead of judging the time by the Muslim call to prayer when out in the public space, the Sultan’s subjects could now see the exact hour and minute of the day displayed prominently in a central location in their city.650 Similarly, Abdülhamid used the

telegraph as a means of binding the Ottoman Empire more firmly together, and in particular to tie the Arab provinces more closely to the centre.\textsuperscript{651} The length of telegraph lines in the Ottoman Empire more than doubled during his reign.\textsuperscript{652} In particular, between 1884 and 1892, the number of telegraph offices in the Hijaz doubled from two to four, and more than doubled in Tripolitania, going from six to 13.\textsuperscript{653}

Meanwhile, Abdülhamid realised that the territorial integrity of the Empire could not be maintained without military reform. As noted in Chapter One, the Ottoman Empire’s defeat at the hands of Russia in the war of 1877-78, and the lack of outright support for Britain, pushed Abdülhamid into approaching Germany for an alliance. Thus, the Sultan sent emissaries to Germany in 1880, asking for military instructors to be sent to the Ottoman Empire. The Germans accepted the request in 1882, sending a delegation of German soldiers who were to serve in the Ottoman armed forces and head efforts to reform them.\textsuperscript{654}

In 1883, Major Colmar von der Goltz (1843-1916) joined the German mission and entered Ottoman service, rising to the rank of colonel in 1885 and general in 1886. It was Goltz (known as Goltz Paşa in Turkish), who became the primary moderniser of the Ottoman armed forces, and remained in that capacity until 1895. Being placed in charge of military schooling in the Empire, Goltz fostered the idea that youthful and energetic nations ought to be warlike, and would one day defeat old and peace-loving nations. He thus argued that Ottoman society should be put on a warlike footing. His views

\textsuperscript{651} See, for example, Mehrdad Kia, \textit{Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire} (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 24-25.

\textsuperscript{652} Ayşegül Okan, “The Ottoman Postal and Telegraph Services in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century” (unpublished MA thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2003), 99.

\textsuperscript{653} Ibid., 101-102.

influenced a whole generation of Ottoman officers, who came to see themselves as the leading elements of Ottoman society. Furthermore, Goltz argued that the future of the Ottoman Empire lay in an alliance between the Turks and the Arabs of the Empire, and that the Ottoman state should expand in the Arab lands and in Africa. He even suggested that the Ottoman capital be moved to Aleppo or Damascus in order to bring the centre of the Ottoman world closer to the Arabs. Goltz also came to see Ottoman soldiers as being highly disciplined and moral, qualities he believed they had acquired through their Muslim upbringing.

While Abdülhamid did not share his view that the leaders of the army were the natural leadership of a society in the modern age, he did see eye-to-eye with Goltz on the qualities of Muslims, and on the axis of future development for the Ottoman Empire, namely Arabia and Africa. Furthermore, Goltz’s view of the Turks and Arabs together forming the backbone of the Ottoman Empire was very similar to Abdülhamid’s own Pan-Islamic views and policies (although Goltz was not a Muslim himself).

Although he had returned to Germany in 1895, Goltz was overjoyed at the news of the Ottoman victory over Greece in 1897. In fact, he advocated an Ottoman attack on Bulgaria (and possibly even Serbia and Montenegro) in order to finish the task of reasserting Ottoman hegemony over the Balkans. Goltz believed that a world war was brewing because Britain and France would not be able to accept Germany’s rise to Great Power status, and that in that future war, Germany ought to form an alliance with the

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655 Ibid., 21-27.
656 Karpat, 192.
Ottoman Empire. Abdülhamid, on the other hand, was a very cautious international player and did not want to do anything that would provoke war with the Great Powers. Nevertheless, he believed that the Ottoman victory over Greece demonstrated the similarity between the Ottomans and the Germans. Both peoples, in his view, were “a little slow,” especially when it came to getting angry. However, if they were provoked for a long time, they both hit back hard. In general, Abdülhamid thought the Germans possessed “courage, honesty, courtesy, and hospitality,” qualities that the Ottomans shared with them.

Being of such a high opinion of the Germans, Abdülhamid decided to entrust to them another one of his major infrastructure projects meant to fulfill multiple goals that were part of his agenda. As mentioned above, the Ottoman state had only an attenuated presence in the Arabian Peninsula. In particular, the Ottoman (western) coast of the Persian Gulf (or, as the Ottomans sometimes called it, the Gulf of Basra), was not under direct Ottoman control, except for its northernmost portion around the city of Basra itself. Rather, by the 1890s, effective control of eastern Arabia and the Gulf coast lay in the hands of several Arab sheikhdoms, including Qatar and Kuwait on the coast, and the Rashidi and Sa‘udi emirates in the interior. As Frederick Anscombe points out, the Ottoman Empire could and did keep the British (who were trying to penetrate the region) at bay to some extent, but it did not possess the right tools to force its will upon the Arabs of the Gulf, who were nominally its subjects.

657 Akmeşe, *The Birth of Modern Turkey*, 27-28. Goltz was quite prescient in his analysis of the global political situation, and an Ottoman-German alliance did materialise during World War I, but not with the approval of the deposed Abdülhamid.
The Ottoman Empire may have been victorious over Greece, one of its former territories, in 1897. However, around the same time, events in Kuwait (a *kaza* or district of the Basra *vilayet*) demonstrated Istanbul’s lack of control over its own territory in the Gulf. In 1896, Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah murdered his half-brother, Shaykh Muhammad (r. 1892-1896), who was at that point the ruler of Kuwait. The exact reason for the murder is not known, although the British at the time speculated the quarrel between the brothers stemmed from an inheritance dispute. Mubarak (r. 1896-1915) now took over as the emir of Kuwait, but without official Ottoman approval.\(^660\)

Shaykh Mubarak petitioned the Ottomans to recognise him as the *kaymakam* (district governor) of Kuwait, a position previously held by Shaykh Muhammad. On the other hand, the sons of Muhammad were calling for justice. The Ottomans, who had no officials in Kuwait and thus lacked independent information regarding the recent events, were in a bind as to how to proceed. Mubarak tried to bribe the Ottoman governor of Basra, Hamdi Paşa, but instead of supporting Mubarak, Hamdi called for an Ottoman military incursion into Kuwait; in his view, 300 soldiers would be enough to overthrow the al-Sabah family and bring the district under direct imperial control. The Ottoman government saw Hamdi’s solution as dangerous and removed him from office, replacing him with Arif Paşa.\(^661\)

Like Hamdi, Arif believed that nothing except an invasion could defeat Mubarak. On the other hand, unlike Hamdi, Arif thought that an invasion would be too drastic a measure, and thus he suggested that Mubarak be pardoned and recognised as the

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\(^{660}\) Ibid., 92-94. Much later, a British official ascribed Mubarak’s murder of his brother not to financial disputes, but rather to Mubarak’s “fanatical love for his country.” See H.R.P. Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 136.

\(^{661}\) Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, 94-97.
kaymakam. The Ottomans still threatened Mubarak with a military incursion which never took place, only succeeding in alienating him from the Empire. Eventually, he was recognised as kaymakam in 1897, but the threat of invasion still hung over him because he was illegally withholding the inheritance of his predecessor’s sons. Sultan Abdülhamid got personally involved in the dispute and asked the naqib al-ashraf (head of the descendants of the Prophet) of Basra, Rajib, to persuade Mubarak to give his nephews their inheritance by reminding him of the need to obey the Caliph, but Rajib instead persuaded the Ottomans not to send their army against Mubarak.662

Meanwhile, starting in 1897, Mubarak al-Sabah attempted to place Kuwait under a British protectorate in order to safeguard himself from a possible Ottoman military incursion. The British at first refused, but various British officials started urging their government to reconsider. For example, the British resident in the Persian port of Bandar Bushehr argued that Kuwait possessed a good port, and that the British could eventually try to build a railway from Port Said (in Egypt) to Kuwait, giving the latter strategic potential. He also said that “civilization” would be advanced if Kuwait became a British protectorate, because Britain could use its position there to fight against the slave trade and piracy. The Resident also argued that without British help Mubarak would have no choice but to make up with the Ottomans, which it was in Britain’s interest to avoid. The British prevaricated until the summer of 1898, when news emerged that the son of the Russian ambassador to Austria-Hungary was trying to get approval to build a railway from Tripoli (on the Mediterranean coast) to Kuwait. That idea threw the British into something of a panic mode, and they decided to quickly grant Mubarak some degree of protection. Therefore, in January 1899, Britain signed a secret agreement with Mubarak,

662 Ibid., 97-109.
whereby he pledged not to maintain relations with any other country without British approval, while Britain promised to use its navy to prevent an Ottoman takeover of Kuwait.  

This was not a formal protectorate, but amounted to the same thing as far as Mubarak’s ability to prevent his overthrow by the Ottomans was concerned. Kuwait thus became the first Ottoman territory to be essentially lost to Britain since the latter’s occupation of Egypt. To underscore the break with the Ottoman Empire, Mubarak imposed a tax on all Ottoman ships using the Kuwait harbour. In response, the Ottomans sent a harbourmaster with an armed escort from Basra to attempt to take over the port. However, Mubarak expelled them, and there was no further Ottoman retaliation.

Certainly, the loss of Kuwait by the Ottomans was not comparable in almost any respect to that of Egypt in 1882. However, it demonstrated the limits of Abdülhamid’s policy of avoiding conflicts with his Muslim subjects and the Great Powers. His attempt to resolve the dispute with Shaykh Mubarak by means of a religious notable (yet another example of involving religious figures in the solution of political problems) may be characterised as a failure in the sense that it did not prevent Mubarak from slipping out of Ottoman control and taking Kuwait with him. Pan-Islamism could largely work by persuasion, and when the subject was not willing to be persuaded, there was very little that Pan-Islamism, by itself, could do to promote policy objectives. Britain’s assumption

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664 Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, 137.
of the position of paramountcy at the head of the Persian Gulf was a significant blow to
the Ottomans in their decades-long rivalry with Britain in the Indian Ocean region.

Abdülhamid’s solution was to further deepen the Ottoman Empire’s cooperation
with Germany, with the aim of not only bringing Kuwait firmly back into the Ottoman orbit, but also, in general, of asserting Ottoman rights to the Persian Gulf and its hinterland. Just like the British, Abdülhamid too had been worried about Russian plans to build a railway to the Gulf. In fact, in his memoirs the Sultan specifically notes being worried that Russia would “advance to the Indian Ocean” by means of building such a railway. 665 This is perhaps the only reference to the Indian Ocean by name in Abdülhamid’s memoirs, but it demonstrates his acute awareness of the centrality of the Indian Ocean to the Ottoman Empire since the late 1870s, and the fact that the Gulf was one of the Ottomans’ few available gateways to that ocean. Although the details of Shaykh Mubarak’s deal with the British were unknown to the Ottomans at the time, it was nevertheless clear to them that Britain was placing Kuwait under its influence in some manner. In any case, Abdülhamid was aware that the British were dreaming of building a railway from Egypt to the Gulf. Such a development, in his view, would be tantamount to Britain taking control of all of Arabia. 666

Meanwhile, Baron Max von Oppenheim (1860-1946), a German diplomat and historian, wrote a book about the economic potential of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. Abdülhamid received extracts from the book, and found that it confirmed what his own governors in Iraq had been saying about the rich prospects of the region. He thus decided to have a railway constructed from Konya (which was, at that point, the terminus of the

665 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 112.
666 Ibid., 129-130.
Anatolian Railway) to Baghdad, using “German engineers and money.” The reason Abdülhamid thought he could trust the Germans is that he believed them to be the only one of the Powers which would cooperate with the Ottomans largely out of economic considerations, rather than trying to gain territorial concessions or political influence over the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the Sultan already had a positive experience of working with the Germans on the Anatolian Railway (the Ottomans had given Deutsche Bank a concession to construct a railway line in Anatolia in 1889, and by 1896 the railway had reached Konya, in the centre of Anatolia). The Anatolian Railway, although subsidised by the Ottoman government for years, was about to start making a profit. Moreover, Abdülhamid, who calls himself a good accountant in his memoirs, notes that the existence of the railway made it possible to settle large numbers of Muslim refugees in the interior of Anatolia, and the annual taxes paid by the refugees on their new lands far exceeded the subsidy paid to the railway. Furthermore, the railway enabled Anatolian farmers to substantially extend lands under cultivation by opening new markets up to them. In Abdülhamid’s view, “only a blind person” could deny that the Anatolian Railway was an example of the rapid progress of the Ottoman Empire.

The Sultan’s hope was that a new railway from Konya to Baghdad would achieve similar results. In his view, the railway, combined with “a rational system of irrigation,”

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667 Ibid., 46-47. The Ottomans had been considering the construction of a railway to Baghdad since at least 1892; see BOA, Y.EE. 140/9, 22 Shawwal 1309 (20 May 1892). However, not much had come of the idea until 1899.
668 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 112. Abdülhamid would be disappointed in his hope that the Germans had no ulterior motives; in fact, even before the Germans were given the Baghdad Railway concession, they started making plans to establish German agricultural settlements along the railway. These plans were foiled by the Ottomans’ blunt refusal to allow German settlers to move to the Empire. Nevertheless, Berlin was sufficiently interested in the railway to proceed with its construction nevertheless. See ibid., 117-118; Jonathan S. McMurray, Distant Ties: Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the Construction of the Baghdad Railway (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 9.
would allow the region of Iraq, which was now “sterile,” to return to an Edenic state of agricultural bounty. In addition to these economic considerations, Abdülhamid also believed that the railway would greatly improve the Ottoman Empire’s military position in Syria, Iraq and the Gulf, by bringing them into closer reach of the Ottoman army. But even beyond these important concerns which had to do with the position of the Arab provinces within the Empire, Abdülhamid also thought of the future Baghdad Railway in terms of international strategy in the Indian Ocean arena. His ambition was no less than to reopen the “ancient way by which Europe’s trade with India and India’s trade with Europe once took place.”\(^{670}\) In other words, he wanted to reestablish the Silk Road, and once again make the Ottoman Empire the essential lynchpin connecting the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean worlds, a position it had essentially lost with the construction of the Suez Canal and Britain’s takeover of Egypt. Such a development – with Haydarpaşa station in the Istanbul suburb of Üsküdar becoming the “starting point for the new route to India” – had the potential to place a large portion of world trade in Ottoman hands, which could dramatically incer ease the Empire’s international importance and challenge Britain’s hegemony in the Indian Ocean region.\(^{671}\)

Since Abdülhamid’s ultimate goal behind the Baghdad Railway was access to the Persian Gulf, it was logical that the railway extend beyond Baghdad, which was a considerable distance upstream from the Gulf. Hence, the search began for a suitable location and, by 1900, the German railway developers had settled on Kuwait. The difficulty, of course, was that Kuwait was under an informal British protectorate, as we have seen. Thus, when the German consul-general toured the Gulf in 1900, the British

\(^{671}\) On the planned new role of Haydarpaşa, see ibid., 61.
were quite worried, fearing that his voyage was just the beginning of an Ottoman-German takeover of Kuwait. Consequently, Britain, which had intended to keep its agreement with Kuwait secret, now felt obliged to divulge it to Germany, and to make it clear that German influence in the sheikhdom would not be tolerated. Having been informed of this situation, the Ottomans sent a navy ship to Kuwait, but were warned by Britain that no Ottoman troops would be allowed to land, which prompted Istanbul to lodge an official protest with the British government. Germany, meanwhile, told Britain that it regarded Kuwait as an indisputably Ottoman territory, and that, in its view, Abdülhamid could depose Mubarak if he so wished. Matters thus escalated until Germany and Britain were able to come to an understanding in 1901, when Britain promised to allow the Germans to build the railway terminus they wanted, while the Germans promised not to challenge Britain’s overlordship over Kuwait as long as they could build the terminus there. Furthermore, the Germans persuaded Abdülhamid not to make a further issue out of Kuwait in his relations with Britain and not to send any Ottoman troops there. Meanwhile, Shaykh Mubarak pledged loyalty to the Sultan in early 1901, but without giving up his British alliance.672

Thus, a face-saving formula had been found whereby each of the parties (the Ottomans, British, Germans as well as Mubarak of Kuwait) could claim victory. Certainly, Britain had no desire to go to war with Germany over Kuwait, and Abdülhamid was satisfied that the Baghdad Railway could reach Kuwait after all, obviating the need for an open conflict with Britain. Ultimately, it was not Britain’s control over Kuwait which proved fatal to the railway, but rather the Germans’ inability to deal with the Anatolian terrain. By 1905, after the Ottomans had taken out a substantial

672 Harcourt, “Memorandum Respecting Kuwait,” 201-206.
loan to finance the railway, the German engineers (whose skill Abdülhamid had imagined would overcome the natural barriers of the region) only managed to build 200 km of track, with nine-tenths of the railway still left to be built.\footnote{Sean McMeekin, \textit{The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power} (London: Penguin, 2010), 49.} The situation was not much better by 1907, while the end of Sultan Abdülhamid’s rule was approaching.

Jonathan McMurray points out that most historians who have studied the railway consider it a “unilateral instrument of German expansion.” From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that it was, in fact, very much a joint Ottoman-German project. The Ottomans lacked the technological know-how to be able to build this railway on their own. Arguably, given the results of the project, the Germans were not very much ahead of the Ottomans when it came to railway building (although Abdülhamid had not known this when he awarded the construction contract to the Germans). The Sultan thus felt the need for a European partner in his scheme to build a railway to circumvent the British-controlled Suez Canal. Germany’s colonial ambitions (including the idea of planting German settlers in Anatolia and Iraq) were quickly cut short by Ottoman opposition.

Nevertheless, if one looks at the railway through the eyes of British officials (which most historians have done), one does get the impression that it was Germany rather than the Ottoman Empire which was in the driver’s seat when it came to the railway. Thus, a lengthy 1907 Foreign Office report on the railway expresses the fear that, should the railway be completed and Britain is unable to share in its ownership, the “shortest route to India” would then be “exclusively” controlled by Germany. The report does note that the 99-year railway concession granted by the Ottomans to the Germans
was revokable, meaning that the Ottomans could assume direct control of the railway whenever they wished. Nevertheless, the British view was that it was Germany which was both behind the railway and fully in control of it.\(^{674}\)

Despite their failure to give Abdülhamid adequate credit for his plans to challenge British hegemony in the Indian Ocean through the railway, the British were still concerned that this hegemony would come under threat, albeit by the Germans. According to a former British consul in Baghdad, the completion of the railway would mean an end to Britain’s domination of the commerce of Baghdad, Basra, and the Gulf coast of Persia. The British consul in Bandar Bushehr noted that Britain had dominated the Persian Gulf for the previous 80 years, but the railway might put this domination to an end and, moreover, potentially threaten Britain’s control of Indian because of the presence of a German base only 1,200 miles from Karachi. The British consul in Basra went even further, arguing that Britain had controlled the Gulf and its commerce for over 250 years, and that it would now be replaced both commercially and politically by Germany. Apart from control of the Gulf, what worried the British was that a journey from London to Bombay by means of the Baghdad Railway would take 12 days, as opposed to the 15 days it took to travel there by sea through the Suez Canal. Thus, even Britain’s trade with its own colony, India, could be undercut, and Britain’s position in India could be weakened.\(^{675}\) That is, of course, precisely what Abdülhamid had been aiming at as early as 1899.


\(^{675}\) Ibid., 387-392.
However, the British need not have worried. Although the railway was supposed to be completed in eight years, the slow pace of construction of the Baghdad Railway continued to hamper progress until the outbreak of the First World War, and the war halted the project entirely.\textsuperscript{676} The railway only reached Baghdad in 1940 (almost two decades after the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist), and has not reached Kuwait to this day.\textsuperscript{677} An analysis of the the reasons for the failure of the railway scheme after Abdülhamid’s reign is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In any case, the Baghdad Railway stands in sharp contrast to one of Abdülhamid’s most successful infrastructure projects, the Hijaz Railway, which he cherished even more than the Baghdad Railway because it was almost entirely executed by the Ottoman Empire itself and demonstrated to the world its potential as a modernising Muslim power.

\textbf{The Ottoman Empire in the Hijaz}

As we saw in the Introduction to this dissertation, the Hijaz Railway is almost always placed in the context of Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism or his strategic concerns in the literature on the subject. What is lacking is an adequate appreciation for the modernising qualities of the railway and, by extension, for Sultan Abdülhamid’s modernisation project as a whole. That is certainly not to deny the importance of Pan-Islamism to Abdülhamid. However, just as the Muslim \textit{umma} was important to Abdülhamid as the larger group he identified with, so was the Ottoman Empire of key importance as the state which could

\textsuperscript{676} For the railway’s planned completion time, see ibid., 379.
\textsuperscript{677} See Zvi Yehuda Hershlag, \textit{Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 260.
work for the benefit of the *umma* and fulfill its needs domestically and on the world stage. Abdülhamid was opposed to Turkish nationalism, and even found Ottoman patriotism to be unhelpful, emphasising what he saw as the Islamic basis of the Ottoman state and the brotherhood of Muslims under the leadership of the Caliph, that is, himself. But that certainly did not mean that he did not pursue the interests of the Ottoman Empire; indeed, his whole reign can be fairly characterised as a series of attempts to defend the Ottoman Empire from external pressure and to increase its influence.

Abdülhamid’s evident concern for the welfare of the state has led many historians to take the opposite stance from the one described above, that is, to claim that the Sultan’s Pan-Islamism was purely theatrical, a smokescreen meant to mask his avaricious grip on power and provide it with a figleaf of legitimacy. Such an assessment also fails to give us anything more than a two-dimensional portrait of Abdülhamid’s rule. If the point of the Hijaz Railway was to provide legitimacy for an autocrat masquerading as a pious Muslim, what was the point of the vastly expanded educational network and the rapid spread of literacy among the Ottoman public? In effect, the spread of modernised education among Ottoman Muslims helped create the Young Turks and their successors, the Kemalists, inasmuch as they were shaped by the Hamidian schools they attended. Similarly, regime legitimation alone is an inadequate explanation for Abdülhamid’s

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679 To cite one example, Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk, ca. 1881-1938), the founder of the Turkish Republic and the man responsible for the abolition of both the Ottoman sultanate and the Caliphate, attended a number schools in Selânik (today’s Thessaloniki, Greece), Manastır (today’s Bitola, Macedonia) and Istanbul, all of which had been founded during Abdülhamid’s reign. See Yılmaz Öztuna, *II. Abdülhamid: Zamamı ve Şahsiyeti* (Abdülhamid II: His Era and His Personality) (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2008), 14.
small-scale but ubiquitous infrastructural projects such as clock towers, or for his large-scale projects such as the Anatolian Railway or the Baghdad Railway.

As with much that Abdülhamid did, the vastly expanded network of schools and the similarly expanded network of railways, were top-down initiatives. Abdülhamid, as we saw in Chapter One, was not a believer in constitutionalism and was suspicious of popular initiative. He was a paternalistic ruler, and believed that it was his role to provide improvements that would help his subjects realise their potential, draw the different parts of the state closer together, include marginalised groups in the fabric of the state, and keep foreign powers and their influence out of the Ottoman Empire to the extent possible. Thus, it is only in the context of his modernisation schemes that the Hijaz Railway becomes intelligible. Most of these schemes had the dual immediate goal of strengthening the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim millet, and some of them also had the more distant goal of strengthening the entire Muslim umma and enhancing its capacity to resist imperialism. The Hijaz Railway was a prime example of the latter kind, combining in itself all three features.

There are several factors which make the Hijaz Railway different from all other railways built in the Ottoman Empire. These reasons flow out of the location of the railway, about half of which lay in the vilayet of Hijaz, the land of the two holiest cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina. The reason this location made a substantial difference is that the Hijaz was unlike any other Ottoman province. It was not autonomous, as Tunisia or Egypt had been before their takeover by European powers, or as Serbia and Montenegro had been before their declaration of independence. Neither was it a regular Ottoman province ruled by a vali. Rather, it had a unique political arrangement, whereby power
was shared between the governor dispatched by Istanbul and the emir of Mecca, chosen from among the leading members of the Sharifs (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) of that city. The emir headed a parallel administration to that of the vali; he had a separate budget (drawn partially from a tax on camels rented to pilgrims), as well as courts (which followed the Shari‘a exclusively, rather than Ottoman civil law), and even his own network of prisons.  

This state of affairs was quite different from that which obtained in other parts of the Ottoman Empire at the same time. Even in places where local forces were sometimes stronger than the Ottoman state (for instance, in eastern Anatolia with its Kurdish militias), the Ottomans did not officially recognise any sort of parallel provincial administration. The general Ottoman practice from the early days of the Empire had been to try to assimilate local ruling families by giving them positions within the Ottoman state structure, rather than outside it; such was the case in the twin centres of Ottoman power: Anatolia and Rumelia.

The Sharifs of Mecca were allowed to run their separate administration out of practical considerations, the most important of which was the inability of the Ottoman state to project sufficient power in the Hijaz to counter the strength of the emir. Respect for the historical heritage represented by the emir was likely another factor. The emir’s position was older than the Ottoman presence in the region. Even under Mamluk rule prior to the Ottoman conquest of the Hijaz in 1517, the Sharifs had been a power in their

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own right. After the conquest, this arrangement continued, except that the emir of Mecca had to acknowledge the supremacy of the Ottoman sultan, have his name mentioned during the Friday sermon, and accept an Ottoman military garrison in Jidda, as well as an Ottoman mufti in Mecca. However, the Ottoman state had few direct dealings with the Bedouin inhabitants of the Hijaz interior; it was the emir, drawn from the Sharifs, who essentially became the intermediary between the Bedouin and the state. By the nineteenth century, this arrangement had undergone some modification, including the appointment of an Ottoman governor, but the governor’s writ only extended to the townspeople in Mecca, Medina, Jidda and Ta’if, as well as a few garrisons meant to protect the pilgrimage route from Damascus, and a few villages on the coast.

Other than that, the province was inhabited and controlled by several Bedouin tribes, such as the ‘Anaza, Huwaitat, Juhayna, Harb and Mutair, who were essentially a law unto themselves. The nomadic Bedouin formed about three quarters of the population of the province (which stood around a million overall), and many of the rest were semi-nomadic inhabitants of agricultural oases. In the cities, on the other hand, the demographic picture was quite different. Being the centres of pilgrimage from all over the Muslim world, they had a cosmopolitan makeup. For example, of Mecca’s 150,000 people, only about 25,000 were of Bedouin origin; the rest consisted of Arabs from other Arab areas, as well as non-Arab Muslims, such as 20,000 Central Asians, 15,000 South-East Asians, 12,000 Indians and 10,000 Afghans. This diverse population was

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684 Ibid., 91.
685 Ibid., 17-18. The Ottoman authorities were not happy about the presence of large numbers of foreigners in the Hijaz; correspondence between the Porte and the Hijaz in 1880-1881 shows that the sale of land to foreigners in the province was forbidden. See Emir ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s report, BOA, Y.EE. 88/67, 11 Muharram 1298 (14 Dec. 1880), and the Porte’s letter to ‘Abd al-Muttalib, confirming that Abdülhamid does not want land to be sold to foreigners in the Hijaz, BOA, Y.EE. 88/77, 24 Dhu al-Qa’d 1299 (18 Oct.
protected (as well as controlled and taxed) by fewer than 7,000 Ottoman troops in the whole province, mostly located in Mecca, Medina and Ta‘if (in 1898). Further, the cities also had small Ottoman gun batteries; for instance, Mecca had six cannon, while Medina had 12.686

Given the large and dispersed Bedouin population, extending effective Ottoman control over the province with this number of troops and equipment was next to impossible. Therefore, the sole rational course of action for the Ottomans around the turn of the century was to allow the emir to act as the informal head of the Bedouin tribes. Furthermore, the Ottomans held the emir (who lived in Mecca and was thus within the reach of the Ottoman administration) personally responsible for the actions of the Bedouin. For example, if a Bedouin tribe killed someone in a raid and the Ottoman administration had no means of reaching the tribe, they would force the emir to pay compensation to the victims. As a result, the emir had a vested interest in encouraging the Bedouin to keep the peace. When they did not, he would employ one of two strategies to bring them to heel. One was to attack them directly using his small military force (numbering about 300 men) consisting of black soldiers, known as the *bisha*. Occasionally, the *bisha* would launch a raid in collaboration with regular Ottoman troops. Another technique was for the emir to ally himself temporarily with one tribe and then attack the recalcitrant tribe with the help of his allies. Generally, however, the Bedouin

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686 Ibid., 93-95. Regarding the Ottomans’ use of the army to force tax payments from the inhabitants of Mecca and even pilgrims in 1897, see ibid., 107.
tended to respect the authority of the emir (unlike Ottoman authority) to some extent, and brought their disputes to him to settle.\textsuperscript{687}

Nevertheless, the Hijaz was an unsettled region. Almost every mention of it in Ottoman documents of the late nineteenth century has to do with some form of violence or disorder, sometimes realised, but just as often only planned or rumoured. These documents give the impression of an Ottoman administration that felt itself to be under siege and deeply distrusted the local population, as the examples below illustrate. As mentioned above, while the emir tried to keep the Bedouin under a certain degree of control, the Ottomans did the same with the emir. There were occasions, however, when the Ottomans were afraid that the emir may escape from their control, causing them to lose the province entirely.

Thus, in July 1881 the Ottomans became concerned that the Arabs of the Hijaz were planning an “armed struggle” (\textit{silahlı mücadele}) in order to gain “autonomy” (\textit{muhtariyet}) and even possibly try to transfer the caliphate to the Hijaz.\textsuperscript{688} This news came in the context both of the Mahdist rebellion in Sudan, which the Ottomans were quite concerned about, as well as alleged efforts by the former Khedive Isma‘il (recently deposed by Abdülhamid) to “set up a new caliphate” (\textit{yeni bir hilafet kurmak}) in Egypt.\textsuperscript{689} Later in 1881, the Ottomans became concerned that Emir ‘Abd al-Muttalib of Mecca may be plotting with the Mahdists. Although this rumour was considered “doubtful,” Ahmed Ratip Paşa was dispatched to the Hijaz anyway with three battalions and a gun battery in

\textsuperscript{687} Ibid., 114-115. On the institution of the \textit{bisha}, see ibid., 98-99.
\textsuperscript{688} BOA, Y.PRK.DH. 1/35, 17 Sha‘ban 1298 (15 July 1881). Of course, such a revolt did eventually take place, but not until 1916.
\textsuperscript{689} BOA, Y.PRK.MK. 1/50, 5 Muharram 1298 (8 Dec. 1880).
a show of force in order to deter any potential rebellion. Ahmed Ratip used his superior military strength to force ‘Abd al-Muttalib to cancel the food supply monopolies he had granted to several businessmen (which were exacerbating shortages on the market), and also tried to force him to stop playing his leading role among the tribes.

The following year, the subsequent Ottoman vali, Osman Paşa, found another way to get rid of ‘Abd al-Muttalib. In September 1882, as Britain was in the process of conquering Egypt, the Ottoman vali, intercepted letters allegedly written by ‘Abd al-Muttalib to several tribal shaykhs asking them for their cooperation in a British-backed revolt against Ottoman authority. Apparently, ‘Abd al-Muttalib had received weapons and gunpowder from the British for this purpose. Consequently, he was arrested, and held prisoner in the Ottoman barracks at Ta’if. Osman replaced him with another Sharif picked by himself, ‘Abdullah Paşa. According to the British, these letters had been forged by ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s rivals, the Dhawi ‘Awn branch of the Sharifian family. In any case, it did not make much sense for ‘Abd al-Muttalib to be plotting with the British. In fact, the British considered him to be a “fanatical Wahhabee,” and had asked the Sultan not to appoint him to the position of emir in the first place. After being appointed despite British protests, ‘Abd al-Muttalib encouraged a group of Indian Muslim guests to unite with the Afghans and rise up against British rule, allegedly saying that it was their duty to kill Christians. When Wilfrid Blunt (whose role in Ottoman affairs we discussed in earlier chapters) and his wife applied for permission to travel in

692 BOA, Y.EE. 88/47, 29 Shawwal 1299 (12 Sept. 1882).
693 Al-Amr, “The Hijaz under Ottoman Rule,” 123.
the Hijaz, ‘Abd al-Muttalib replied that no Christian would be allowed to travel in the province as long as he (the emir) was alive. Thus, the evidence indicates that ‘Abd al-Muttalib was a highly unlikely figure for the British to make into an ally.

Abdülhamid was somewhat taken aback at Osman Paşa’s summary dismissal of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, but let his decision stand, partly because a few months previously (in July 1882), his interior minister, Mahmud Nedim Paşa (1818-1883), had suggested that ‘Abd al-Muttalib dreamed of becoming Caliph himself, and was ready to cooperate with the British in order to achieve this aim. Thus, the Sultan let ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s dismissal stand, but to assert his authority over Osman, he also removed ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s successor, ‘Abdullah, from office and appointed ‘Awn al-Rafiq in his place in October 1882. He also sent an official named Lebib to investigate the matter of ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s letters, and Lebib concluded that the letters had indeed been forged, although he could not find out who had ordered the forgery. Eventually, ‘Abd al-Muttalib was given a pension by Abdülhamid, but kept complaining to the Sultan of mistreatment by Osman Paşa’s soldiers.

The incident with ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s deposition demonstrates not only the competitive nature of Hijazi politics in the late nineteenth century (with the vali and emir sometimes vying for an increase in power at the other’s expense), but also the inability of the Sultan to regulate the affairs of the province from Istanbul. The vali sent by the Sultan could become a law unto himself as much as an emir could.

695 Ibid., 6.
696 Ibid., 14.
In addition to the administrative confusion sometimes reigning in the province, the settled areas often lived under the threat of Bedouin attack. For example, in August 1883, reports were received in Mecca that the Bani Harb tribe was preparing an attack on the city. As a result, many of the foreign merchants living in Jidda, as well as local Orthodox Christians, fearing that the attack would spread on their city as well, prepared to flee by ship, in order to “save their wealth and lives” (*mal ve canlarını kurtarmak*). However, it turned out that the rumour about the impending attack was false. 699

Meanwhile, Istanbul was concerned about the influence of the Sudanese Mahdi on the Hijaz. ‘Awn al-Rafîq assured the Porte that the Mahdi did not have much influence among the Bedouin, but promised to keep investigating. 700 Meanwhile, Osman Paşa wrote a letter to Istanbul arguing that the province needed more troops, given its high importance to the Empire. 701 The Ottoman authorities in the Hijaz were indeed afraid that a disaster could strike Ottoman rule there at any time. Early in 1884, they heard rumours that the British had been distributing weapons to Bedouin tribes living between Jidda and Yanbu‘ al-Bahr. Upon investigation, those rumours were found to be false. 702 Nevertheless, unpleasant incidents kept occurring on a smaller scale. For instance, in 1890, a group of Jidda-based merchants complained about being robbed by Shaykh Muhammad b. Fahd of the Ahamid tribe. 703 The following year, an Indian hajj caravan was attacked by “Bedouin bandits” (*Urban eşkiyası*). 704 In 1895, a group of Bedouin stole a mailbag that was being taken from Mecca to Medina. 705 Later that year, the British

699 BOA, Y.EE. 42/29, 8 Shawwal 1300 (12 Aug. 1883).
700 BOA, Y.EE. 127/80, 1 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1301 (31 Dec. 1883).
701 BOA, Y.EE. 4 Safar 1301 (5 Dec. 1883).
702 BOA, Y.A.HUS. 177/27, 13 Jumadi al-Awwal 1301 (11 Mar. 1884).
703 BOA, Y.A.RES 50/32, 3 Rajab 1307 (23 Feb. 1890).
consul in Jidda complained that a caravan of pilgrims who were British subjects (presumably Indians) was attacked by the Bedouin on its way to Mecca.\textsuperscript{706}

British documents also indicate that Ottoman control of the region was tenuous at best. Thus, in April 1892, a group of about 200 Bedouin attacked an Ottoman guardhouse a mere half hour’s journey from Jidda, killing several soldiers and kidnapping the wives of two of them. The Ottomans responded by capturing one of the ringleaders and decapitating him, after which they displayed his head in front of the Jidda governor (kaimakam)’s office.\textsuperscript{707} In May 1892, a group of Bedouin under Shaykh Abdullah b. Asim attacked a caravan of 500 Indian pilgrims and robbed the pilgrims. He later told the British that he had done so under the mistaken impression that the pilgrims were actually Ottoman merchants.\textsuperscript{708} That same month, when Mahmud Ağa, the chief of the Mecca police, was on his way to Jidda in order to help a group of escaped slaves travel to new homes in Izmir (in Anatolia), a group of Bedouin captured and killed him, and wounded an Ottoman army surgeon and a soldier who had been accompanying him.\textsuperscript{709}

Additionally, there were persistent rumours that the British were planning to occupy the Hijaz and install a new caliph there, possibly an Indian.\textsuperscript{710} Such fears were certainly not groundless. Apart from any clandestine British activity, there was open discussion in the British press about setting up a new Caliphate under British tutelage. For instance, in November 1895, the London \textit{Standard} suggested that since Britain

\textsuperscript{706} BOA, Y.A.HUS 335/40, 5 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1313 (26 Aug. 1895).
\textsuperscript{709} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{710} BOA, Y.PRK.ESA 18/22, 29 Dhu al-Hijja 1310 (14 July 1893); BOA, Y.PRK.TKM. 37/41, 23 Dhu al-Qa‘da 1313 (6 May 1896). The latter report cites an article in the London \textit{Standard} as a cause for concern.
already enjoyed hegemony over the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, it would be natural to extend this hegemony over the land between these two seas, that is, Arabia. In the newspaper’s opinion, Abdülhamid was not truly qualified to be Caliph, since he was not a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, if the Ottomans were “compelled to withdraw from Arabia” by an Arab revolt, it would be the “moral duty” of Britain to set up a protectorate over the region. Such a move, in the paper’s view, would protect Britain’s sea route to India, and would, moreover, be welcomed by “the fifty millions of Mohammedans in India.”

The Hijaz was thus a province isolated from the rest of the empire, and facing a unique range of problems from the Ottoman point of view: British territorial ambitions, an unclear and unstable division of responsibilities between the heads of the two parallel local administrations, and a population consisting largely of restive Bedouin tribes who had little loyalty for the Ottoman Empire or its institutions, and whom the Empire had no trust in. And yet, this same province was home to Mecca and Medina, key symbols of the Ottoman-held Caliphate. It is not a coincidence that the British had dreams of establishing a new caliphate in the Hijaz rather than, say, India. No part of the Muslim world had as much religious significance to the global umma as the Haremeyn-i Muhteremeyn (Two Honoured Shrines) of the Hijaz did. Meanwhile, the Ottomans, who did hold the Holy Cities, could not guarantee that the pilgrims who travelled there would not be attacked by Bedouin tribes. It was also becoming increasingly clear to Ottoman officials as well as Abdülhamid that the situation in the Hijaz could not continue as it was. Several of the Sultan’s advisers suggested an abolition of the emirate of Mecca and

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711 Standard, 26 Nov. 1895.
the transformation of the Hijaz into a regular province like any other, ruled by its vāli.\footnote{Karpat, \textit{The Politicization of Islam}, 248.} Abdülhamid’s solutions, however, were different, both from those advocated by these advisers, and from those of his Tanzimat-era predecessors. The first was to open a “Tribal School” (as discussed above) to educate the sons of Bedouin tribal shaykhs, as part of a long-term strategy of incorporating these tribes into the state by winning over the younger generation. The second was the project that was to mark Abdülhamid’s reign in the popular imagination of the Ottoman Empire and the outside world more than any other: namely, the Hijaz Railway, linking Medina to Damascus and the rest of the Empire.

**Problem-Solving through Modernisation: The Case of the Hijaz Railway**

Although the construction of the Hijaz Railway began in 1900, the idea had arisen much earlier, and although its urgency waxed and waned over time, eventually a consensus grew in Istanbul that it should be built. The first time the idea for a railway in the Hijaz was aired seems to be in 1864 (during the reign of Abdülaziz I), when the German-American engineer Charles Zimpel suggested to the Ottomans that they build a railway linking Damascus and the Red Sea. However, because of opposition from the Arab tribes living in the area the railway would potentially be built in, the project came to nought.\footnote{Ufuk Gülsoy, \textit{Hicaz Demiryolu} (The Hijaz Railway) (Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık ve Kitapçılık, 2004), 31.} In 1872, another German engineer, Wilhelm von Pressel (1821-1902), who eventually became one of the motive forces behind the Baghdad Railway, suggested in 1872 that the
Ottomans build a railway to the Hijaz in order to improve their military control over the area.\textsuperscript{714}

In 1874, an Ottoman major named Ahmed Reşid also suggested that a railway should be built from Damascus to Jidda via Mecca in order to bring the Hijaz under tighter Ottoman military control. In 1880 (after the Russo-Ottoman War in the early part of Abdülhamid’s reign), the Minister of Public Works, Hasan Fehmi Paşa, proposed building a railway from Anatolia to Baghdad, with branches extending from Baghdad to other Arab lands, including the Hijaz. Although thought started being given to a railway to Baghdad in the early 1880s, as we saw above, the idea of a railway to the Hijaz did not gain widespread support in the Ottoman ruling class until later. In 1884, the vali of the Hijaz, Osman Nuri Paşa, wrote a report outlining his vision for the future of the Arabian Peninsula, in which he argued that a railway should be built connecting Damascus, the Hijaz and Yemen. This railway would protect the entire region from possible external dangers, in his view.\textsuperscript{715} Nuri’s proposal was especially pertinent because of its timing, coming as it did two years after the British occupation of Egypt (and, with it, the western shore of the Red Sea), as well as his conflict with Emir ‘Abd al-Muttalib.

Perhaps as a result of the failure of the large-scale proposals to get off the ground, the suggestions that came in during the few subsequent years were much more modest in scale. For instance, a district governor (\textit{kaymakam}) named Şakir, who was also a doctor, accompanied a group of Hajjis from Adana in Anatolia to Jidda by boat in 1890. He found that the most dangerous part of the journey for the pilgrims from a medical point of view, however, was the segment from Jidda to Mecca and then on to the plain of Arafat.

\textsuperscript{714} Ibid., 32. For von Pressel’s role in the Baghdad Railway project, see, for example, McMurray, \textit{Distant Ties}, 41-42.
\textsuperscript{715} Gülsoy, \textit{Hicaz Demiryolu}, 32-33.
He thus suggested to the Ottoman government that a railway be built connecting Jidda with Arafat to minimise the pilgrims’ discomfort. It seems that his proposal, too, fell on deaf ears for the time being. In 1892, the Ottoman government’s attention was aroused when Osman Nuri Paşa (who had been dismissed as vali and replaced by his predecessor, Ahmed Ratip Paşa) wrote to the Porte in his role as the commander of the Ottoman army units stationed in the Hijaz, and pointed out that a railway should be built between Jidda and Mecca. He argued that this distance of less than 100 km was a dangerous one for pilgrims to traverse, because the journey was expensive and uncomfortable and, moreover, the pilgrims undertaking it were sometimes subjected to Bedouin attacks. A commission consisting of three paşas was formed to study Osman’s proposal, and its members agreed unanimously that the Hijaz authorities (namely the vali and emir) should be encouraged to build such a railway. Nothing further came of this measure, however.\footnote{Ibid., 34; Al-Amr, “The Hijaz under Ottoman Rule, 129.}

Evidently, the vali and emir were not interested in implementing the suggestions of a former vali.

Others came back to the idea of a railway linking the Hijaz to more northerly regions. In 1891, a junior officer named Süleyman Şefik went on Hajj with his father, and kept detailed notes, which he then turned into a travelogue that he presented to Sultan Abdülhamid the following year. In this travelogue, he pointed out that, should the Ottomans go to war with Britain, they would effectively find the Suez Canal closed to Ottoman traffic, and would isolate Hijaz and Yemen from the rest of the Empire. The solution, then, was to build a railway from the Mediterranean coast to the Gulf of Aqaba.
Such a railway would circumvent the Suez Canal, and would even allow the Ottomans to develop Aqaba into an important port in peacetime.\textsuperscript{717}

One of the most effective arguments in favour of the Hijaz Railway, however, was that of Ahmed İzzet Efendi (the future İzzet Paşa, who eventually became Abdülhamid’s secretary, and one of his leading advisers), written in a policy brief in 1892. İzzet, who was originally from Syria, had previously served as the Director of Pious Endowments (awqaf/evkaf) in Jidda, and had become familiar with the Hijaz. İzzet pointed out that, throughout most of the history of the Hijaz, peace in the area was only maintained during the Hajj season, the reason being the area’s isolation from the capitals of Muslim states for most of its history. İzzet also described the chronic poverty of the province, caused by its unsuitability for agriculture and dependance on resources brought in by pilgrims. The solution, according to İzzet, was to build a railway to the Hijaz from Damascus or some other city outside the province, which would improve both the Ottoman Empire’s ability to control the Hijaz militarily, and the province’s economic state.\textsuperscript{718} This was certainly an idea whose time had come. The brief was shown to Sultan Abdülhamid, who passed it on to the Chief of Staff of the Ottoman armed forces, Major-General Mehmed Şâkir Paşa (1855-1914), for his opinion. Mehmed Şâkir approved İzzet’s idea, and suggested that the railway run from Damascus to Medina.\textsuperscript{719} Nevertheless, no practical steps were yet taken for the construction of the railway.

In 1897, however, three inter-related developments once again brought the issue of the Hijaz Railway to the forefront of Istanbul’s attention. The Ottoman High Commissioner for Egypt, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa (1839-1913), warned the Sultan that the

\textsuperscript{717} Gülsoy, \textit{Hicaz Demiryolu}, 35.
\textsuperscript{718} Gülsoy, \textit{Hicaz Demiryolu}, 38.
\textsuperscript{719} Idem.
British war against the Mahdists could have dangerous ramifications for the Ottomans. In particular, he stressed the fact that the British were aiming to re-establish control not just over Khartoum, but also over the Red Sea coast around Suakin. In order to achieve this goal, the British were planning to raise Egyptian military strength to 25,000, a considerable increase from the 18,000 troops that Egypt was allowed to have under the terms of an Ottoman imperial decree accepted by the the ruler of Egypt, Muhammad ‘Ali (r. 1805-1848) in 1840. Thus, a large concentration of potentially hostile troops was building on the western shore of the Red Sea, exposing the Hijaz to the imminent danger of a British takeover. The solution, according to Muhtar, was for the Ottomans to build a railway from Damascus to Aqaba, to be called the “Hijaz Railway” (*Hicaz şimendifer hatti*), which would not only protect the Hijaz from British attack, but also enable the Ottomans to exert influence on Egypt which, in Muhtar’s view, was the geographical key to routes leading to both India and inner Africa. Muhtar was thus quite aware of the crucial role of Egypt in Britain’s hegemony over the Indian Ocean World, and believed that the Ottomans could not challenge this hegemony without a bold infrastructure project that would reduce the importance of the Suez Canal.

Meanwhile, the British started planning a railway route from Aqaba to Basra and thence to Kuwait (as mentioned above), which led the Ottomans to further realise the immediacy of the danger posed by British encroachment into the region and intensified plans for the construction of an Ottoman-German railway to Kuwait to forestall the

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British plans. In response to the British railway project, a Punjabi-speaking Indian journalist named Muhammad Inshaullah started advocating the construction of a railway to the Hijaz, using a variety of media, including his newspaper *Wakil* (published in the city of Amritsar), as well as a book, and letters to the editor of newspapers in Cairo (Rashid Rida’s *al-Manar*) and Istanbul (the semi-official *Malûmat*). He also sent a copy of his proposal to the Ottoman consul in Karachi, Hüseyin Kâmil (whom we met in Chapter Four), as well as his own friends living in various parts of the Middle East. What distinguished his proposal from all others is that he advocated the exclusive use of Muslim capital for the construction of the railway (as well as the use of the name *Hamidia* to give it a direct link to the Caliph). The editors of *al-Manar* and *Malûmat* published Inshaullah’s letters, but added their own comments calling his ideas unrealistic.

However, the setback was only temporary. In 1898, Inshaullah forwarded funds collected in India for Muslim refugees from Crete to the Ottoman government, and included a letter on the advisability of the railway. Soon after, Sultan Abdülhamid ordered the construction of a telegraph line from Damascus to Mecca via Madina. Later that year, Mehmed Şakir Paşa wrote an article in *Malûmat* praising the railway idea, and, in acknowledgement of Inshaullah’s role in advocating the project, the editor of *Malûmat* sent him a personal letter. Muhammad Inshaullah was convinced that his role in making the *Hamidiye* Hijaz Railway a reality was greater than that of İzzet Paşa.

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723 Ibid., 63-66.
Whether or not that was the case, Inshaullah did certainly play an important role in making a public case for the Hijaz Railway; it was thanks to his letter that the Istanbul-based *Malûmat* newspaper approached the subject in the first place. In any case, by the late 1890s, Sultan Abdülhamid had grown thoroughly convinced as to the merits of the railway project and adopted it as his own. Thus, in 1899, he called the Hijaz Railway, together with the Baghdad Railway, the “most important task which we have to accomplish.” In an entry in his memoirs dated 1900, he notes that the British were plotting to found a new caliphate, referring to yet another article on that score in the *Standard*. He also describes the British-controlled port of Aden on the Yemeni coast as “the Gibraltar of Arabia,” since control over that city meant strategic control over the route to East Africa. According to Abdülhamid, the British followed an insidious policy of fomenting rebellions and internecine warfare in Yemen in order to deepen their presence there. In fact, he states that, were it not for “bribes and gifts” constantly paid to tribal chiefs in Yemen, the Ottomans would have lost that province entirely. The Sultan’s solution to this problem was twofold: first of all, to build the Hijaz Railway, in order to make Arabia more accessible to Ottoman troops, and secondly, to strengthen Islamic solidarity, which would become a “rock” that the British plots would shatter themselves against.

It was in 1900, the year when Abdülhamid expressed this sentiment, that he finally ordered the railway to be built. As we have seen, the railway had been under discussion in Istanbul for over three decades. The debate still continued until the Sultan

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725 Ibid., 121-122. As William Ochsenwald points out, the Ottomans had made successful use of a railway in the 1897 war with Greece, and this may have demonstrated the military effectiveness of railways to Abdülhamid. See Ochsenwald, *The Hijaz Railroad* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 9.
put a stop to it in a decree, in which he ordered the government to launch the construction of the railway, relying on “the help of grace” of God and “the spiritual support” of the Prophet. From that point on, the construction of the Hijaz Railway would be presented by Abdülhamid and his government as a religious duty. As we saw above, however, the main reasons that the Sultan wanted the railway built were strategic rather than spiritual or pious; the British threat loomed to the west of the Hijaz, while within the province Ottoman control was questionable even in the cities, and nonexistent in the countryside. Yet that does not mean that the appeal to Islam was a cynical ploy on his part in order to legitimise his rule by exploiting the gullibility of his subjects.

Figure 2: A map showing the route of the Hijaz Railway (simplified). Note the Persian Gulf (the site of the planned terminus of the Baghdad Railway) in the eastern portion of the map.

726 Decree dated 2 May 1900, quoted in Gülsoy, Hicaz Demiryolu, 41.
Control of the Hijaz was crucial if the Ottomans wanted to retain the Caliphate and not lose it to a British-backed Arab pretender. And as we saw in Chapters Three and Four, Abdülhamid truly did believe that the Ottoman Empire could be of service to the Muslims of the world. However, its standing outside its own borders depended largely on its being the seat of the Caliphate. Thus, losing the Caliphate would also mean losing at least a theoretical leadership role in the Muslim world to the British, one of the biggest colonisers of Muslim lands. To prevent such a possibility was no doubt nothing less than a religious duty to Abdülhamid. As we have also seen, to Abdülhamid the Ottoman Empire was no less important than the umma, partly because it was the last great independent empire that the umma possessed, and partly because Abdülhamid was an Ottoman patriot, even if he did not acknowledge this himself. The seizure of Hijaz by the British (which started to look like a distinct possibility from 1897 onwards) would be a severe blow not just to the umma but to the Ottoman state, and Abdülhamid, who had
successfully prevented a French invasion of Tripolitania after their invasion of Tunisia (as seen in Chapter Two), now proved equally adept at preventing a British invasion of the Hijaz after the reassertion of British rule across the Red Sea, in Sudan. Such a British invasion did eventually come, of course, but only years after the end of Abdülhamid’s rule.

The Sultan and his pro-railway advisers were certainly not the only ones who were enthusiastic about the railway project. We can catch a hint of what the educated bureaucratic classes of the Empire thought of the Hijaz Railway project by looking at the above-mentioned book on the railway written by Sayyid Muhammad ‘Arif, the head of the education council of the district of Damascus.\textsuperscript{728} To ‘Arif, the railway represented “preparation of force against enemies,” whom he does not mention, although it is clear from the context that he essentially meant the British. The railway was necessary for defence, because “if there is no way to reach the required spot, soldiers and weapons are as if non-existent.” Thus, ‘Arif, although not a very high-level official, was quite aware of the fact that the Ottoman army was not very mobile or effective in the Hijaz.\textsuperscript{729}

However, military considerations were not the only reason, or even the most important reason, for the construction of the railway for ‘Arif. What was more important to him was the safety of the pilgrims; improving their safety was a matter that was laudable from the point of view of the Shari‘a as well as humanity (\textit{shar'an wa insaniyyan}). The best way to do this was through a railway, which was the fastest and

\textsuperscript{728} On ‘Arif’s position in the Ottoman bureaucracy, see Landau, \textit{The Hejaz Railway}, 21. Incidentally, ‘Arif also occasionally wrote for \textit{Malumât}.

safest form of transportation. Moreover, the railway would bring benefits for the permanent inhabitants of the Hijaz as well, according to ‘Arif. It would allow the people of the region to plant vegetables and fruit in excess of what they need for their own consumption, and to send the produce to market using the railway, earning a cash income.

As for the Bedouin, they lived off the produce derived from their animals, such as skins and sour milk, which they sold at low prices. The introduction of the railway and the consequent opening of new markets would, in ‘Arif’s opinion, allow the Bedouin to start adding value to these products, such as turning the sour milk into cheese, or tanning the hides, before selling them. This would bring them “luxury and wealth,” which would allow them to stop raiding each other’s tribes, and would thus also increase the general safety level of the province. The Bedouin could also start selling their produce to the passengers of the railway, further increasing their profits. As for the Ottoman state, its increased presence in the province would enable it to establish more schools, which would teach the local inhabitants “religious sciences” (al-‘ulum al-diniyya) and “desirable morals” (al-akhlāq al-radiyya). The inhabitants of the Hijaz needed to be taught these things because, in ‘Arif’s view, they lived in a state of “ignorance, squalor, and indolence” (al-jahala wa al-kadhara wa al-khamul). Once they went to school, the Hijazis would no longer wear dirty clothes or eat the same food all the time. In short, “civilization” (al-hadara), which they currently lacked, would spread among them.

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730 Ibid., 124-125 (Arabic text in ibid., 219).
731 Ibid., 126.
732 Ibid., 127-128.
733 Ibid., 128 (Arabic text in ibid., 215).
Along with this fine example of Ottoman Orientalism (espoused by an Arab Muslim about fellow Arab Muslims, although evidently there was a world of difference in the lifestyle of a Damascene writer and a camel-herding Bedouin from the Hijaz), ‘Arif also held out the promise of mineral wealth, arguing that the railway would allow the Ottomans to “dig in the earth and sand, and to pierce the stones,” which would enable them to find coal and other minerals, bringing “luxury” to the inhabitants of the Hijaz.\textsuperscript{734} With hindsight, ‘Arif’s prediction seems uncanny, although the Ottomans did not have a chance to benefit from Arabian oil.\textsuperscript{735}

The Hijaz Railway project cost over 4 million Ottoman liras in total. Early on, the Ottomans decided that the railway would be built by Muslims, that is, by the Ottoman Empire itself, rather than through a concession to a foreign (Christian) power. Partly, this was a practical consideration, since, as we have seen, Christians were not able to live or move about freely in the Hijaz outside Jidda. Self-reliance regarding the railway was taken to its logical limit: if the Muslims could build the railway, they could finance it themselves too (just as Muhammad Inshaullah had argued a few years previously). Doing so, however, was no small feat, since the railway represented about 15 percent of the entire Ottoman budget. Hence, the Ottomans resorted to a range of methods to collect the needed funds. About two-thirds came from non-voluntary contributions, including several taxes and special stamps affixed to official correspondence. The remaining third, however, was raised from Muslims not just in every part of the Empire, but also in

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., 128. For the concept of Ottoman Orientalism, see Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism.”
\textsuperscript{735} In what became Saudi Arabia, oil only started being exploited on a large scale in the 1950s. Although it raised the general standard of living, oil replaced the Hijazi elite with a new elite from the Najd. See Mai Yamani, \textit{Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 54.

In 1900, the \textit{valis} of all Ottoman provinces were asked for estimates of the amount their province might be able to contribute within the next two years. The table below lists the provinces that promised contributions of 10,000 Ottoman lira or more, and compares these pledges to the actual amounts obtained from these provinces by 1902.

Table 1: A List of Promised and Fulfilled Contributions for the Hijaz Railway by Province, 1902\footnote{Based on data in BOA, BEO 143255, n.d, reprinted in Gülsoy, \textit{Hicaz Demiryolu}, 267. Although this document is undated, other evidence presented in ibid., 68 makes it clear that these amounts were valid as of 1902. I have only included provinces that pledged 10,000 liras or more in this list, excluding smaller contributions from a number of provinces.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank in Pledges</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Amount Pledged (in Ottoman Liras)</th>
<th>Percentage Actually Donated</th>
<th>Rank in Actual Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hijaz</td>
<td>Arabia</td>
<td>108,000</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aydın</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>86,000</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hüdavendigâr</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>81,200</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Greater Syria</td>
<td>43,500</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Beirut</td>
<td>Greater Syria</td>
<td>43,200</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sivas</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>40,200</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Konya</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>26,065</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aleppo</td>
<td>Greater Syria</td>
<td>24,940</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Erzurum</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>23,900</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Basra</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>21,600</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>21,540</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Diyarbakır</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>18,080</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Trabzon</td>
<td>Anatolia</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mosul</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this table demonstrates is that, predictably, the wishes of the some of the provinces often did not correspond to their means. At first glance it is surprising that the two provinces the railway would connect, Syria (Suriye) and the Hijaz, were not at the top of the actual contributors’ list (although the Hijaz did make the largest pledge, of which it was only able to fulfill about a tenth). Rather, it was the Hüdavendigâr vilayet in western Anatolia that raised the largest amount, while Syria’s neighbour Beirut came second. Given Hijaz’s overall poverty (as noted by İzzet Efendi or Muhammad ‘Arif), however, it is not unexpected that the province itself would not be able to make a large financial contribution to the construction of the railway. On the other hand, the large contributions from Anatolia demonstrate that the Hijaz Railway was seen as a genuine Islamic cause all over the empire, and especially in its Anatolian heartland (Hüdavendigâr, for example, was the area where the Ottoman Empire had originated in the first place).

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738 At the turn of the century, the province of Syria included the districts of Damascus, Hawran, Hama and Karak. See M. Nasrullah, M. Rüşdü and M. Eşref, *Osmanlı Atlası (XX. Yüzyıl Başları)* (An Ottoman Atlas from the Early 20th Century) (Istanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı Yayınları, 2003), 92.
The *vilayets* had raised a total of 335,166 liras in voluntary contributions by 1902.\(^{739}\) Overall, by 1908, 1.1 million lira was raised through donations, both within the empire and abroad.\(^{740}\) The Sultan himself was the first to donate, giving 50,000 liras in 1900 and calling on all Muslims to give what they could.\(^{741}\) Those who responded represented a true cross-section of Ottoman and foreign Muslim society. The Grand Vizier, Halil Rifat Paşa (1820-1901), donated one month’s salary, 810 liras. Such generosity extended beyond the elite and was imitated by government employees of the middle and working classes as well, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Thus, even the British dock workers employed by the Sultan in Istanbul promised one months’ wages to the project. Muslims working for the tobacco administration did the same. Local officials and notables also contributed substantial sums, including the *vali* of Beirut, who gave 100 liras, the head of the Haifa city council, who gave 50 liras, and members of city councils in other places who gave 10 or 20 liras. Nevertheless, the level of donations did not live up to the expectations of the government, and Abdülhamid issued a decree requiring all non-military government employees, including Christians, to “donate” one month’s salary for the railway.\(^{742}\)

As for donations from private individuals, some came voluntarily from people happy to donate to the cause, while others were coerced. For instance, in certain villages in Syria, the police would be sent in by the provincial administration into villages and would not leave until the amount they demanded was handed over. The police then gave a portion of the requisitioned amount to local notables to ensure their cooperation, and

\(^{741}\) Hülagü, *The Hejaz Railway*, xxiv.
the rest was used for the needs of the railway. However, many people also gave of their own free will. For instance, a woman from Selânik (Thessaloniki) left 100 liras for the railway in her will. A Damascus candy seller set aside a certain percentage of his profits for the Hijaz Railway. Several merchants and corporations gave large donations.\footnote{Ibid., 135-136.}

Donations also flowed in from all over the Muslim world. In those lands around the Indian Ocean rim which hosted Ottoman consuls, the consuls often led the fundraising efforts. For instance, Rasim Bey, the consul in Batavia, urged the Hadrami merchants there to donate for the railway in 1903 a “purely religious cause” and a “glorious work.”\footnote{Sumit K. Mandal, “Natural Leaders of Native Muslims: Arab Ethnicity and Politics in Java under Dutch Rule,” in Ulrike Freitag and W.G. Clarence-Smith (eds.), \textit{Hadrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s} (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 196.} Nowhere, however, was the response more enthusiastic than in India. There, Muhammad Inshaullah teamed up with two imams to launch the “Central Committee of the Hejaz Railway,” which appealed to both Muslims and Hindus all over India to donate for the project by highlighting both the difficulty of the pilgrim route from Damascus, and the commercial benefits which might come about as a result of the railway. Large numbers of Indians donated, and some even reduced wedding or funeral expenses in order to be able to donate more.\footnote{Azmi Özcan, \textit{Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain (1877-1924)} (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 109-110.} By December 1903, eight Indians had contributed 100 Ottoman liras each or more, and were rewarded with commemorative gold medals issued by the Ottomans.\footnote{BOA, İrade-T 40, 7 Shawwal 1321 (26 Dec. 1903), reprinted in Gülsoy, \textit{Hicaz Demiryolu}, 268. In all, Indians donated at least 15,000 liras. See Ochsenwald, “The Financing of the Hijaz Railroad,” 142.}

Other parts of the Muslim world contributed as well. In early 1901, a donation of 3,000 Russian roubles raised by Astetakol Kuş Bey, the governor of Hisar (in modern-
day Tajikistan), arrived in Istanbul.\textsuperscript{747} Egyptian Muslims, recently colonised like the Muslims of Central Asia, also contributed to the railway.\textsuperscript{748} Not all fundraising was genuine, however, and sometimes a clever operator could defraud people by claiming to be acting on behalf of the railway project. Such was the case with a man named Sayyid Mahmud Osman, who raised donations for the railway in China, only to pocket them himself.\textsuperscript{749} The case of Mahmud Osman demonstrates that, even in China, the standing of the Ottoman Empire was high enough that Muslims there were willing to donate for the cause, even if the fundraiser turned out to be an impostor.

Using all of these funds, both voluntary and otherwise, the Ottomans were able to quickly construct the 800-mile-long railway; within eight years of the beginning of the project, passenger service had been launched on the railway. In its first year of operation, the Hijaz Railway carried almost 250,000 passengers, the majority of them civilian. The long journey now took only three days to complete, instead of a month, as had been the case previously.\textsuperscript{750} Moreover, between 1902 and 1905, the Ottomans had also built a branch line from the Hijaz Railway to the Mediterranean town of Haifa, allowing them to export Syrian grain more easily, and partially fulfilling the dream of circumventing the Suez Canal.\textsuperscript{751}

The social base for the railway was very wide but, unfortunately for the future of this triumphant infrastructural project, it did not include one important constituency, the Bedouin tribes who lived in the vicinity of the railway line. Unlike what Muhammad

\textsuperscript{747} BOA, Y.EE. 53/95, 5 Shawwal 1318 (26 Jan. 1901).
\textsuperscript{748} Ochsenwald, “The Financing of the Hijaz Railroad,” 143-144.
\textsuperscript{749} BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ. 51/18, 17 Sha‘ban 1323 (17 Oct. 1905).
\textsuperscript{751} Ochsenwald, The Hijaz Railroad, 46-47.
'Arif may have imagined, the Bedouin were not waiting for the Ottoman state to come and educate them and help them wear clean clothes. As ‘Arif himself notes, the Bedouin rented out as many as 27,000 camels to pilgrims during Hajj season, mainly to cover the Medina-Mecca route. If the railway were ever extended to Mecca, which the Ottomans were certainly planning to do, the resulting economic changes could spell disaster for the Bedouin. Understandably, they did not welcome such a prospect, and the Hijaz Railway thus had to suffer from repeated Bedouin attacks. The Ottomans never managed to resolve this conflict, but only kept it on the backburner by reinforcing the troop detachments guarding the stations of the railway. Eventually, this festering conflict was to contribute to the Arab Revolt of 1916, during which the Bedouin, together with T.E. Lawrence (1888-1935), helped destroy much of the railway. An appeal to Islam and “civilization” was certainly not enough to win over the Bedouin, who seemed to view the railway as an unjust imposition.

Conclusion

In an entry in his memoirs written in 1906, Sultan Abdülhamid describes the Hijaz Railway as his “old dream,” and as “my idea.” In fact, as we saw above, the Sultan had to be persuaded over the course of a number of years about the advisability of such a railway project, but once persuaded, he became its patron and biggest supporter.

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754 Abdul-Hamid, Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, 90.
Abdülhamid was particularly impressed by the speed with which sufficient funds were collected to make the Hijaz Railway project a possibility, and was particularly pleased to see the large number of donations from India and elsewhere in the Muslim world. For Abdullah, the railway proved to the world that the Ottoman Empire could achieve “progress,” and could even out-manoeuvre the world’s leading power, Britain. What made the Sultan the happiest of all regarding the railway, however, was that the Ottoman Empire was now less dependent on Britain’s Indian Ocean hegemony. No longer would the Ottomans have to send troops to the Hijaz using the British-controlled Suez Canal; now it was simply a matter of sending them south by train.755

The Hijaz Railway thus temporarily gave the Ottoman Empire what Abdülhamid wanted most for it: independence from any form of European tutelage as a means to build internal strength. The Baghdad Railway and the modernisation of Ottoman education were ultimately aimed towards the same goals. Moreover, the railway also did perhaps more than any other of the Sultan’s project to strengthen the bonds of Islamic unity within and outside the Empire. However, it also demonstrated some of the limits of Abdülhamid’s Pan-Islamism. Enthusiasm for the Hijaz Railway on the part of Indian Muslims could not assure a stable future for the railway; for that, the consent or even active support of the Bedouin was needed. On the other hand, the Ottomans viewed the Bedouins as a military problem. It is thus no surprise that the success of the Hijaz Railway was short-lived. During its brief heyday, however, the Hijaz Railway demonstrated not only the weaknesses, but also the strategic thinking, organising power, Islamic brotherhood and sheer willpower that were the hallmarks of the Hamidian regime.

755 Ibid., 91.
Conclusion

The reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II remains controversial to this day, partly because of his attitude towards religion. Unlike the Tanzimat era which preceded him or the Young Turk era that followed him, his reign does not fit into the conventional, teleological narrative of Ottoman modernisation accompanied by secularisation, leading ultimately to the modern-day Turkish Republic. This narrative, propagated by the republic’s ideologues since its early days, is still often used as an analytical framework for the study of Ottoman history both within Turkey and in the West. This dissertation has demonstrated the untenability of such a view. Abdülhamid’s reign was not an aberration; rather, it represented a continuation of certain trends in Ottoman socio-political, intellectual and religious life. While many historians tend to focus on the Sultan’s “autocratic” rule, few of them are willing admit (although this is beginning to change) that Abdülhamid genuinely believed the centralisation of power to be necessary for the welfare of the Empire.

Rather than focusing on the manner in which Abdülhamid ruled (that is, the form), this dissertation has examined what the Sultan sought to achieve through his rule (that is, the content). Seen through this perspective, Abdülhamid’s rule is notable for his sustained efforts to build up the Ottoman Empire’s capacity for independent action, both at home and on the world stage. Coming to power at a time when Ottoman territorial integrity was being challenged by Russia, Britain, Austria-Hungary and France, Abdülhamid managed to stabilise the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire through a
combination of skillful diplomacy and alliances with Sufi orders. He believed in preserving the Ottoman Empire not just for its own sake, but also as the sole remaining bulwark of Muslim geopolitical strength in the world. His ultimate, though unrealisable, hope was that the majority of the world’s Muslims, chafing under colonial rule, would rise up against their rulers with Ottoman help. Short of that goal, Abdülhamid demonstrated the capacity of the Ottoman Empire for technological and economic development, and the capacity of the Islamic umma for mobilisation, through the construction of the Hijaz Railway. His rule demonstrates that Westernisation was most certainly not the only path to advancement open to the Ottomans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This dissertation opened with the question of why the Hijaz Railway was constructed. As we saw in Chapter Five, Abdülhamid described the railway as his “dream.” Hence, what this dissertation sought to do is explain why and how this railway came to be the Sultan’s dream. To find the answer to this question, it was necessary to examine the manner in which Abdülhamid came to power (which made him wary of extra-palatial politics for the remainder of his reign and led him to concentrate power in his own hands to a large degree); the way in which the strategic threat from Russia gave way to an equally serious threat from Britain; the manner in which the Sultan understood Islam and its role both in the Ottoman Empire and abroad; the way in which he applied this understanding to protect Ottoman territorial integrity in North Africa and to extend Ottoman influence in a broad arc from East Africa to South-East Asia; and, lastly, the way he understood modernisation. The Hijaz Railway combined in itself the key themes of Abdülhamid’s reign: the primacy of Islam in his political considerations, the
importance of the worldwide umma, primarily concentrated in the Indian Ocean world, and the crucial importance of resisting Britain’s attempts to impose its hegemony on the Ottoman Empire.

It seems, though, that Abdülhamid relied on too narrow a social base to sustain his reforms, which, after his removal from power, contributed in the replacement of a universalistic Islamic modernism with a growing nationalism as the dominant ideology of the state and the elite. Ironically, many representatives of the very urban, Muslim middle classes the Sultan tried to foster through his reforms in education and the economy ended up turning against him; increased education led to demands of personal freedom and political reform of a degree not realisable under Abdülhamid II. His long reign, while laying the seeds of its own future overthrow, not only succeeded in preserving the Ottoman Empire from outside aggression, but also in transforming it from the inside.
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