
Chair Report

Ottoman Imperial Council

*“Resolving the chaos surrounding the death/assassination of the Ottoman Sultan
Abdulaziz”*

President Chair: Maryam Farooqi

Co-Chair: Ahmed Alkhateeb



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Introduction

Sultan Abdulaziz was the 32nd Sultan of the Ottoman Empire and reigned from 25 June 1861 to 30 May 1876, when he was overthrown in a government coup. Abdulaziz was most well-known for his establishment and growth of the Tanzimat reforms that were beginning to sweep the empire. The Tanzimat were a series of reforms that were heavily influenced by European ideas, and were intended to effectuate a fundamental change of the empire from the old system based on theocratic principles to that of a modern state. In essence, they were designed to promote secularism and mimic western ideals into the Ottoman empire.

Many of the key provisions of the Tanzimat reforms were set forth in the *Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane* (1839; “Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber”). This document called for the establishment of new institutions that would guarantee security of life, property, and honour to all subjects of the empire regardless of their religion or race. It also authorized the development of a standardized system of taxation to eliminate abuses and established fairer methods of military conscription and training. To some extent, the Tanzimat influenced positive changes into the empire: the reforms included the development of a new secular school system, the reorganization of the army based on the Prussian conscript system, the creation of provincial representative assemblies, and the introduction of new codes of commercial and criminal law.

However, it was the success of the Tanzimat reforms under Abdulaziz’s reign that caused a massive imbalance in the empire. The centralization these reforms caused removed the checks and balances system that had previously been imposed to keep the sultan in check as two of his successful viziers died. Because of this, Abdulaziz found himself with unrestrained power and abused it in various ways. He spent lavishly on the Ottoman navy and the building of new palaces, and yet drought in 1873 and floods in 1874 had produced widespread discontent and even famine among the Ottoman peasantry, who were also disturbed by a new landholding, conscription, and taxation system which was used to try and repay Ottoman national debt; which had, because of sultan Abdulaziz, been aggravated to around 200 million euros.

Furthermore, discontent in the Balkans had been supported by Serbian and Russian forces, leading to Christian uprising against Muslim lords. Ottoman efforts to suppress the

uprisings led to war with Serbia and Montenegro in July 1876. The war ended in a defeat for the Ottomans, however due to relations the Ottomans had with France and Great Britain, a treaty was established that allowed the Ottomans to retain sovereignty: however, they had to concede much land and recognize autonomy of regions in Bosnia, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and Austria-Hungary.

While no one incident precipitated his deposition, the 1873 agricultural disaster, his excessive spending on the Ottoman Navy and new palaces he had erected, rising public debt, and the land loss due to his defeat in the war with Russia all conspired to create an environment favourable to his removal. Students in Istanbul held massive demonstrations demanding the dismissal of the Grand Vizier (Mahmud Nadim Pasha) and Sheikh of Islam (Hasan Fahmi Effendi) due to the crises Sultan Abdulaziz caused. A powerful minister in the Sultan's court, Medhat Pasha, who had been coveting the position of the Grand Vizier, took advantage of the events and arranged for a coup against the Sultan. With the ambassadors of England and Austria, the pasha informed the English fleet to intervene to save the coup leaders in the event of any emergency. On 30 May 1876, Abdulaziz was officially ousted by his ministers and held in captivity in Topkapi and then Feriye Palace.

The transfer between palaces took place due to Abdulaziz's concerns on his safety. He had grown increasingly nervous and paranoid about his security. In the morning of 5 June 1876, Abdulaziz asked for a pair of scissors to trim his beard. Shortly after this, he was found dead in a pool of blood flowing from two wounds in his arms. His body was permitted to be examined by many doctors, all of which certified that the death had been "caused by the loss of blood produced by the wounds of the blood-vessels at the joints of the arms" and that "the direction and nature of the wounds, together with the instrument which is said to have produced them, lead us to conclude that suicide had been committed". According to these doctors, his skin was entirely free from bruises, marks or spots of any kind whatever; nothing indicating suffocation nor any sign of pressure having been applied to the throat. The coup authorities formed an investigation headed by Hussein Awni Pasha. Oddly, the investigation lasted for only two hours, and it was announced that the Sultan had killed himself. Abdulaziz's death was officially documented as a suicide.

Shehzade Murad V, Abdulaziz's nephew who'd been known for his liberal tendencies, was informed of his new position as the Sultan after the coup's completion. While Murad was previously known as a man of high intelligence and had been known to strongly advocate for new reforms that would build a constitutional government, only a few days after the death of Abdulaziz and the murder of some of his key ministers, Murad suffered mental collapse.

The Ottoman Imperial Council was set on June 10th, 1876. The goal of this council is to create a new Ottoman constitution which would effectively turn the Ottoman Empire into a constitutional government with a symbolic monarch, implementing democracy and secularism into the state— in essence, debating on whether to continue and expand on the Tanzimat reforms of Abdulaziz's time with a huge twist: the necessity of a permanent check upon the power of the sultan.

Definition of Key Terms

- **O.I.C:** Ottoman Imperial Council that was tasked with switching the ottoman government into a constitutional monarchy.
- **Sultan Abdulaziz:** 32nd Sultan of the Ottoman Empire and reigned from 25 June 1861 to 30 May 1876.
- **Ottoman Empire:** an empire that, between the 14th and the early 20th centuries, ruled over a large portion of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa.
- **Constantinople:** former capital of the Roman Empire, the eastern Roman Empire, and then the Latin empire, and finally the Ottoman Empire. (Modern Day Istanbul)
- **1876 Ottoman coup d'état:** a coup that took place in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, and Murad V was subsequently named the new sultan.
- **Tanzimat Reforms:** An era of reform in the Ottoman Empire that began with the Gülhane Hatt-erif in 1839 and lasted with the First Constitutional Era in 1876.
- **Fuad Paşa:** an Ottoman administrator and statesman who played a significant part in the Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 19th century.
- **Ali Paşa:** ottoman statesmen during the tanzimat reform period who was known for the ottoman reform edict of 1856.
- **Vilayets:** a large administrative district or province with its own governor.
- **Feriye Palace:** the palace sultan abdulaziz commissioned and was found dead in.
- **Murad V:** successor of sultan abdulaziz from 30 May to 31 August 1876 and was an advocate of a constitutional monarchy government.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

→ **Shehzade Abdulhamid II** : brother of Sultan Murad V and nephew of the late Sultan Abdulaziz. On close terms with Midhat Pasha, however he is strongly against the establishment of his brother as the Sultan due to his mental instability which made him vulnerable to the control of the constitutionalists. Against the constitutional government that places extreme power control on the sultan (because he may one day be one). (Please be especially aware of the timeframe of this committee in regards to Shehzade Abdulhamid II)

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abdulhamid-II>

→ **Yusuf Kamil Pasha** : former Grand Vizier to Sultan Abdulaziz from 5 January 1863 – 1 June 1863. Old and retired but a respected traditionalist of the empire who had always been loyal to the late Sultan Abdulaziz. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yusuf_Kamil_Pasha

→ **Mehmed Rushdi Pasha** : the Grand Vizier to Sultan Abdulmajid (father of Abdulaziz) from 1859-60 and Grand Vizier of Sultan Abdulaziz at the time of his death. He had been Grand Vizier to Abdulaziz once before in 1872-73, and had been installed again only a few months before his death to try and stabilize the empire in the wake of riots and protests. However, he was unsuccessful and is currently the Grand Vizier of Murad V. Fervent, supporter of the Tanzimat reforms to uphold a constitutional government and strongly dislikes Shehzade Abdulhamid.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehmed_Rushdi_Pasha

→ **Mahmud Nedim Pasha** : Ottoman diplomat and grand vizier (served 1871–72 and 1875–76) whose conservative policies and hostility to reforms permitted Sultan Abdülaziz to become an absolute monarch and fall into severe national debt. Very opposed to a constitutional monarchy, very much a radical traditionalist. Much disliked during his time as Grand Vizier because he fell much under the influence of General Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatiev during a time of high tensions with Russia. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahmud-Nedim-Pasa>

→ **Midhat Pasha** : a powerful vizier in the empire during Abdulaziz's time. He expressed opposition to the absolute authority and power of the sultan Abdulaziz abused and was the leading power in the coup to depose of him. He strongly advocates for a constitutional government that imposes power checks on the sultan so great he is in essence a puppet.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midhat_Pasha

→ **Ahmed Esad Pasha** : former Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire in 2 terms (1873 and 1875). He was a highly conservative statesman and against the constitutionalists. He believed in a monarchical system and thought the success of the Tanzimat reforms under Abdulaziz were proof of that.

→ **Namik Kemal** : an aristocratic Turkish prose writer and poet who greatly influenced the Young Ottoman movement during this time period and contributed to the westernization of Turkish literature. He was exiled for a period of time and continued his writings in London where he denounced the non-secularism of the empire before his return to Istanbul in 1972. He is a representative of the Young Ottomans in the committee and is very much for the constitution that would improve the Tanzimat principles, creating a constitutional and secular government.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Namik-Kemal> ;
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Young-Ottomans>

→ **Hüseyin Avni Pasha** : former Grand Vizer to Sultan Abdulaziz in 1874-75 and the governor-general in charge of the investigation behind Abdulaziz's death. He took only 2 hours to close the case as an act of suicide and brush it under the rug. He is accused by Neşerek Kadın and Durrinev Kadın of murdering Sultan Abdulaziz. A fervent supporter of Midhat Pasha.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C3%BCseyin_Avni_Pasha

→ **English Ambassador** : Sultan Abdulaziz had good ties with Great Britain during his reign. Abdulaziz was the first Ottoman sultan to visit Western Europe, and he maintained friendly ties with Britain and France. However, he took many loans from these two countries that he was unable to pay back in full due to his constant spending and that cultivated some ill will towards the end of his regime. It has been reported that the English Ambassador to the Ottomans had sent word back to England to help the coup leaders against Abdulaziz escape to the UK should things go wrong, thereby supporting the coup. As a western country, they would prefer spreading democratic ideals through making the Ottoman empire a constitutional monarchy.

→ **Russian Ambassador** : Nikolay Palvovich was the Russian ambassador to the Ottomans during this period of time. More is known about him due to his strong friendship with the former Grand Vizier, Mahmud Nadim Pasha. He was generally interested in creating unrest in the Serbian and Bosnian lands the Ottomans controlled so they could have autonomous states loyal to Russia. His general goal is to create as much unrest in the empire as possible to weaken them in the forthcoming wars and unrest with Russia over the Balkans region.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nikolay-Pavlovich-Graf-Ignatyev>

→ **German Ambassador** : after the Berlin Congress in the wake of the recent Ottoman-Russian war, Germany has grown to be a great ally to the Ottomans in defending them in the face of

Western Europe. However, due to their own national interests which involve keeping the Ottoman empire at odds with Russia so Russia cannot turn its own eyes on Germany, they are against the constitutionalists.

→ **Austria-Hungary Ambassador:** during the majority of its history, Austria-Hungary was an enemy of the Ottoman Empire, and many Hapsburg-Ottoman wars occurred. In 1876, Austria-Hungary was looking to take advantage of a failing Ottoman dynasty similarly to other European powers at the time. (Keep in mind that Austria-Hungary launched a conquest on Bosnia in 1879, 3 years after the death of Sultan Abdulaziz and the time period of this committee). Although a sworn enemy, Austria-Hungary did not desire that the Ottoman break apart (unlike the Russians and French), as due to their multi-ethnic nature, the independence of several Balkan states threatened their sovereignty.

→ **French Ambassador:** the French, a growing European and global power in 1876, are currently interested in maintaining ties with the Ottoman Empire. Abdulaziz maintained close ties with the French and even visited the country on his tour of Europe. However, due to the fact he took many loans and built much Ottoman debt from Abdulaziz, nearing the end of his reign, they began to act more distrustfully of him. Much like the English, they supported the beginnings of a constitutional monarchy that would (in their eyes) prevent a sultan from abusing his monetary power again.

→ **Mawliyyah :** the Mawliyyah (also known as the ulama) are the Islamic scholars of the Ottoman empire. Traditionalists, they are the ones who derive sharia law from the Quran that are the basic principles of the early Ottoman regime. They are highly against the constitutionalists due to the widespread adoption of western principles and apparent disregarding the Quranic laws.

→ **Hasan Hayrullah Efendi :** the Sheikh-al-Islam of Sultan Abdulaziz who ironically was the one who gave a fatwa to many of the key players in the coup against him to rise up and go through with it. He was dissatisfied, as many muslim scholars and mawliyya were, with the Sultan's Tanzimat reforms because they were too western. He also had issues with the sultan's luxurious spending. (Keep in mind the Ottoman Sheikh al-Islam performed a number of functions, including advising the sultan on religious matters, legitimizing government policies, and appointing judges). However, he is against the constitutionalists because of the potential secularization of the government. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaykh_al-Isl%C4%81m

→ **Durrinev Kadin :** the favorite consort of Sultan Abdulaziz. She had deep loyalty to him and his regime and gave birth to his favorite son. She is convinced his death was not suicide, but murder. She is against the constitutionalists and remains adamant that the true strength of the

empire remains in the Sultan's power.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%BCrriye_Kad%C4%B1n

→ **Neserik Kadın** : another consort of Sultan Abdulaziz. She and her younger brother (Cerkes Hassan Bey; not present) are convinced that the Sultan was murdered by Hüseyin Avni Pasha. She is currently in shock and distress at the death of her husband. She is against the constitutionalists. [Keep in mind she dies a few days later and her brother murders Hüseyin Avni Pasha in revenge].

→ **Shehzade Yusuf Izzeddin**: the eldest son of Sultan Abdulaziz born before his ascension to the throne. This made Izzeddin an illegitimate prince and therefore is not eligible to be sultan despite his late father's best efforts to change the law. He has sway among the traditionalists, however he and Abdulhamid are constantly at odds. Therefore, he may support a constitutional monarchy if it means he may be able to gain the throne and change the law that dismisses him from it. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Ehzade_Yusuf_Izzeddin

Timeline of Events

Date:	
February 9, 1830	Sultan Abdulaziz was born in Constantinople, Ottoman Empire (now modern day Turkey)
1861-1876	Reign of Sultan Abdulaziz
1871	Westernized influenced reforms began from his predecessors after which his rule became an absolutist one.

1861-1871	Reforms were carried out under the capable chief ministers of Abdülaziz, Fuad Paşan and Ali Paşa.
1864	Adminstrage districts (called vilayets) were established.
1868	A council of state was created.
1871	Abdülaziz's ministers Âli and Fuad were dead, and France, his western European model, had been defeated by Germany.
1876	When the Bosnian and Herzegovina insurrection reached Bulgaria, resentment toward Russia for supporting the uprisings increased.
1873	The 1873 harvest failure, the sultan's extravagant spending, and the growing national debt had all contributed to widespread unhappiness.
1876	Abdülaziz was removed from power by his ministers; and he died a few days later due to an "suicidal attempt" in reality he was brutally murdered.

Previous Solutions and Attempts to Solve the Issue

→ Implementation of the Tanzimat reforms which were meant to progress the nation into more of a secular state, diminish the discrimination against Christians, change conscription and taxation laws, and improve the education and military systems by making them based on Western ideals. However, these reforms notably lacked a check and balance system on the power of the Sultan, which is what led to Abdulaziz's abuse of it.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the main cause of the assassination of Sultan Abdulaziz?
2. What parties / entities were involved in the assassination?
3. Who were the Sultan's Allies? Who were his enemies?

4. Were there any previous attempts at killing the sultan before? What happened, why did they fail, why were they conducted, and who conducted them?
5. Did Sultan Abdulaziz address the problem or any issues that could've that led to his assassination?
6. Were there any external players who influenced the assassination?
7. Was sultan abdulaziz assassination justified or was or unjustified?
8. What was done after his assassination, and how did it affect or change the dynamics of the region & Ottoman Empire
9. What were the sultans' weaknesses & strengths as a ruler of the Ottoman Empire?
10. What was the goal of the coup that overthrew Sultan Abdulaziz? Did it succeed?
11. What could've or should have been done to avoid the coup and overthrowing of the Sultan?

12. What difference does the new constitution make to the Ottoman Empire?

Possible Solutions

- Creating an effective checks and balances system on the power of the Sultan
- Creating an institution that manages government spending and national debt
- Implementing a constitution that upholds certain traditionalist ideals to garner their support (such as the janissary system or funding muslim scholars scientific progress)
- Conserving the monarch's power but bringing back the practices of shielding them from corruption and educating them well from birth

Conclusion

Following a failed effort in 1876, a parliamentary monarchy was reinstated in the Ottoman Empire on July 23, 1908. One of the most significant historical occurrences occurred on this day. The Ottoman Empire's regime was altered, and the ruling parties were replaced by the army and the government, which are collaborating forces. The first period of constitutional monarchy in the Ottoman Empire began in 1876. In actuality, the Ottoman Empire was never an absolute monarchy like the monarchies in Europe because of the ruler's restrictions on things like religion and traditions.

The new Sultan, Murad V will not be represented in the committee due to his mental condition and his effective puppet role: he will NOT be represented by a delegate. Abdulaziz died less than 15 days ago. Murad is in power but is not present on the committee. There is already talk of demoting Murad from power and installing Shehzade Abdulhamid II in his stead, however this is not the main topic of discussion.

Delegates will discuss and debate on the move of switching the Ottoman Empire into a parliamentary monarchy after the coup that overthrew Sultan Abdulaziz and the new regime that instilled secularism and democratic values.

The chairs would like to wish all the delegates all the best in their research and hope to formulate fruitful debates and discussions.

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