



Abdul Hamid II's diary exposed his deeds

## The Bribed Sultan approved Espionage and Legitimized it

The sultan's diary still surprises us with many paradoxes that a man cannot understand, nor overlook. He was supposed to be the ruler, and the representative of Muslims, and Allah on Earth. Yet, his diary reflected the truthful side to his character, that many readers cannot get over whenever they compare it to his previous holy, divine description, with which his people were fooled due to the sublime, religious sentiments they used to have for him.

### The Halal bribe

The wrong understanding, or rather the distorted interpretation, of Islamic doctrine, that Sultan Abdul Hamid II used to promote, were exposed. Bribery has been legitimized. Gifts and [Baksheesh] were given to officials to do their job, properly, or to overlook a certain violation. And [of course] we are all familiar with the disastrous consequences that would arise from doing such things. As for the Islamic doctrine, it prohibited such doing; The Prophet (ﷺ) as saying: When we appoint someone to an administrative post and provide him with an allowance, anything he takes beyond that is unfaithful dealing. It was already agreed upon that bribery is unlawful. Yet, what has the Sultan ever done to carry out such doctrine? Unfortunately, the Sultan was busy doing the opposite: legitimizing bribery to be given to officials for any ridiculous reason, as European countries used to do. He considered it a tradition.

Therefore, the Sultan's point of view, concerning bribery, has been made clear. A poor, lower official cannot live on his salary, as it is not enough to feed his children. That's why, he considers the bribe a right and a normal thing. Besides, bribery has been justified because the country's economic state was quite bad, thus, the government will not be able to pay the salaries every month, hence, giving it a humane cover as it is meant to help the lower class. Besides, any government, that is facing the same terrible economic state as the Ottoman's, according to the Sultan's views, should do the same.

He has written in his diary: "in fact, bribery is a prohibited thing as it may harm our society. However, we may overlook the little gifts or [Baksheesh] given to second-string, poor workers because their salary is not enough, and not that handsome, whereas top officials should not accept these Baksheesh, as they already receive a generous salary. Instead, it should be handed to the Empire's treasury." He even detested that the Governor of Beirut and the head of the police took 3 Liras as a bribe from each illegal immigrant to give them official documents. Doing this, as he believed, they stole millions of Liras from the treasury of the Empire.

It is truly a shocking thing to know how the Sultan justified and legitimized bribery, considering it a mere tip given to help. Throughout his reign, Abdul Hamid II founded this corruption in the government and justified it: gifts should be given to lower, poor workers, but not to top officials. And that was not because the Islamic doctrine prohibited it, but because these Baksheesh belong to the Empire's treasury. How outrageous to know that the supposed- to- be representative of Muslims did not attempt to organize the state but rather liked to monitor bribery!

### The Sultan obsessed with Espionage

During sultan Abdul Hamid II's reign, he used the intelligence to control the empire. In other words, he used the intelligence to deal and monitor the empire's internal and foreign affairs. It was even said that "within every single spot of the empire, there is an Ottoman spy." In this manner, he managed to establish a metaphorical fort, behind which he spied over his people and caused conflicts to get them to fight each other, so as to achieve a desired result. In this way, by establishing an Empire based on fear and distrust, he managed to rule for 3 decades. And as usual, he justified his method by explaining: this was a must to keep the empire from any foreign intervention, in spite of knowing that the empire had already been attacked during the reign of Sultan Suleiman The Magnificent: when he paved the way for European countries to intervene, on granting France the privilege to meddle in the Empire's affairs.

And quoting the Sultan's reflection over espionage, he says, "it is a shameful manner to spy, yet it is an indispensable thing. Besides, we do not believe that there is any place on earth, where people conspire against their ruler like what happens here in our empire." He goes on with criticizing detectives and spies, and calling them bastards by writing, "our religion damns whoever distorts the truth. However, if it was not for the intelligence, it would be impossible to protect myself from any danger. Is not that what Rulers and Emperors do?"

Abdul Hamid II detested espionage and the intelligence, yet he considered it important to achieve his political agenda, and expand his power over the whole empire. His spying policy restricted freedom, in general, and press, and intellectual freedom, in particular. Under his reign, many newspapers were shut down, and their founders were hunted down and arrested or banished out of the Empire. There are many examples that could be given when looking into the history of Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq.

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He established an empire based on fear and distrust.”

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He banned pens, newspapers and papers, and rumored that Murad was illiterate.”



1) Sultan Abdul Hamid's diaries: My Political diaries, 2nd Edition (Beirut: Al-Resalah Foundation, 1979).