



After the Humiliating Defeat Against Russia and the Independence of the European States

He Exploited the Pilgrims to the House of Allah for Rejuvenating the Spirit of the "Sick Man"

The project of completing the Hejaz railway was a significant event for the Ottoman State and the rest of the territories that it occupied. Even the project was described by some people as a new Islamic conquest. This was in light of the Ottoman “propaganda”, which promoted this project, and considered it as a response to the urgent necessity of Muslim pilgrims, who suffered during the pilgrimage season from complicated problems owing to the great distance and the length of journey. In addition to the troubles that were caused by some bandits, who were targeting the convoys of pilgrims that were heading towards Hejaz.

Historically, the interest of Ottoman State in establishing the Hejaz Railway began in the early second half of the 19th century. When the American engineer, Zimpel, in (1864 AD) provided the first sketch of the project that was related to the establishment of the railway to be extended from Istanbul to Medina. Nevertheless, the high cost of the project led the Sultanate to reverse its implementation on the ground.

With assumption of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the reigns of government in (1876 AD). He tried to restore the spirit to the Ottoman State, which practically began its stage of collapse after the repeated defeats on the Western Front. Perhaps the most important one of which was the immense defeat, which it suffered by the Tsarist Russia that allied with the Balkans countries. Sequentially, these latter demanded independence from the Ottoman State. As they were sapped of taxes that were imposed by the Ottoman family to cope with the effects of the drought in the Anatolian region, the heart of the Ottoman Sultanate, that caused the famine of (1874-1873 AD).

Facing these repeated strikes and setbacks in Eastern Europe and rising nationalist demands for independence from the Ottomans, Abdul Hamid II attempted to focus on and preserve the Islamic side of the Ottoman State through re-mobilizing the institution of the Islamic Caliphate. This situation forced him to think about the need for continuing subjugation of the Hejaz and Jerusalem under his power. Knowing that the Holy Places remain holding a great religious symbol and presenting the center of gravity for the Islamic world. Further, any success for the independence demands in these regions would practically lead to losing the dreams of the Ottoman Empire and losing that religious impetus provided to it by a region that has a religious nature such as the Two Holy Mosques.

From this perspective, Abdul Hamid II tried to revive and implement the Hejaz railway project in an attempt to prevent - or at least delay - the quick collapse of the empire of the "Sick Man". In addition to avoiding the isolation from which the Ottoman state was suffering. This promoted him to think about a mechanism that guarantees a rapid intervention and access to the region that were known to experience independent activity against the Ottoman occupation, especially in the Arabian Peninsula.

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Reviving the Hejaz Railway Project to prevent the collapse of the “Sick Man” empire.
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This strategic coercion was expressed by the Turkish historian and head of the Turkish History Academy, Matin Hulagu in his book, the Hejaz Railway, "The mega Project of Sultan Abdul Hamid II" (who is one of the most important Turkish historians who are defending Abdul Hamid), as he says: "In this regard, it should be noted that the railways were considered to be among the most important war mechanisms that, in any case, could not be indispensable at that era. As they strengthen the defense aspects of States and provide substantial assistance in travelling, movement and transportation. For all these reasons, Sultan Abdul Hamid II permitted, on May 2nd, (1900 AD), to commence the completion of the Hejaz Railway Project". Probably this argument intersects with a set of conclusions that asserted that religious considerations were not the key motivation in launching the Hejaz Railway Project.

In this context, although Abdul-Hamid II tried to promote this project as if it arose from his religious duties towards Muslims, in his capacity as a “Commander of the Faithful”. Moreover, that he aimed at overcoming the difficulties that faced by pilgrims to the House of Allah. However, the political and military coercions were the real motivation behind the completion of this line. While the religious consideration remained as a sub-part, by which he aimed at ensuring the collection of donations to complete this project. That project was financed exclusively with the funds of Muslims, who hurried to contribute to this project, which some of them believed it was as of Jihad with money. This fact was confirmed by Matin Hulagu in the aforementioned book, where he affirms - implicitly - that the religious element was a secondary determinant for the decision of the Ottoman State to complete the railway line, as he said: "There is no doubt that the main motivation behind the establishment of the Hejaz Railway was the political and military ambition, as well as religious motivation".

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In the same direction, the British historian Charles Swallow believed, who is the author of "The Sick Man of Europe" book: From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish one (1923-1857 AD) ", where he said: "The Hejaz Railway Project, which connects Levant, Medina and Makkah to each other, became one of the most important projects that the Sultan bore the burden of its implementation upon his shoulders after his completion of the Baghdad Railway Project. Since this project played a vital role in realizing the plans of Abdul Hamid and implementing the aims of Islamic unity policy that he was about to carry out".

Additionally, it seems that the idea of completing the project was originally a merely political idea that had nothing to do with the interest of Ottoman family in helping the pilgrims to the House of Allah. This fact was confirmed by the calls of the Ottoman governor in the Hejaz, Ottoman Nuri Pasha, who called for renewing and reviving the idea of this project, in the year (1892 AD), for military reasons. However, what remains well-established that Sultan Abdul Hamid II exploited the feelings of Muslims to promote them to finance a project whose real aim was far from religious motivations. This was what he achieved, as the writings were unanimous in concluding that the funding was mostly from the Muslims. Here we find that Matin Hulagu says: "There is no doubt that the Hejaz Railway was one of the most important religious and political initiatives during the era of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. It was entirely built with the funds of Muslims and their material and moral donations".

As for the strategic side, the Turkish colonialism suffered from the concentration problems of security and military build-up. As there were, at the outskirts of the Sultanate, increasing independence trends. This prompted the Ottoman to adopt a war strategy that would help it to intervene in the various regions under its sultanate. As that was in accordance with the strategic approach that was known as "Maneuvering on the Internal lines", which is a kind of strategy that the Swiss theorist, Antoine Henri de Jominy, was famous for. This strategy guarantees the freedom of maneuver and movement on internal lines and avoiding the concentration and establishing armies in separate regions. Therefore, the state would not be exhausted by many expenditures on the salaries of soldiers, equipment and supplies. This also assures the ease of moving them by train to the regions that were under the Ottoman State. As train was the preferred means of transporting soldiers at that time.

The coercion that was decisive, as we believe, to launch the Hejaz Railway Project. It was to achieve the strategic goal of rapid access to the Arab regions that were under the Ottoman occupation. Particularly that there was a group of major powers, which were looking for a foothold in the Arab region, as a result of the successive discoveries of oil. Where they exploited the Arab feelings of hostility against the Ottoman colonial project. As they tended to build alliances that contributed to the acceleration of the overthrow of Ottoman dominance as well as the emergence of some countries on the new map of the region.

References:

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