



Through The Hamidiya Knights

The Red Sultan used the Kurds to kill the Armenians and the Assyrians

As the Ottomans always do, they use mercenaries and foreign fighters, Abdul Hamid II established one of the bloodiest Ottoman military divisions, a purely Kurdish division, when he took advantage of the Kurds' submission to the Ottoman occupation, and began converting part of them to serve his tyrannical project and save his state, which was at risk to fall.

Abdul Hamid's state was groaning under the weight of decline, collapse and slow death when some Kurds agreed to engage in the Ottoman project after major massacres were committed against them by the Ottomans like other minorities, since whoever opposes the policy of Abdul Hamid II or refuses to work within his project, his fate is murder and torture. As the Ottomans did with the Armenians and Arabs, hundreds of thousands of whom were killed and displaced, only because some of them refused to fight with the Ottoman army against their opponents.

The Jordanian writer Khaled Bashir refers - in his post - to the "Hafriyat" blog that the Hamidiya Battalions, or the Hamidiya cavalry, were semi-regular Ottoman military divisions, formed from Kurdish fighting knights; their name was associated with the Ottoman Abdul Hamid II, who was the founder and sponsor. Soon enough, it was a reason why the Sultan's name was also associated with a series of horrific massacres, known as the "Hamidiya massacres".

The Russian-Ottoman war ended in (1878 AD) with the defeat of the Ottomans and they lost significant parts of the Caucasus region, while the eastern states remained free from the actual control of the Ottoman armies, which were exhausted and depleted by the war, leaving room for control by multiple local parties, such as Kurdish tribes, and the Armenian revolutionary groups that had begun to emerge and become active during that period among the Armenian villages and cities in the east of the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps the most prominent motives of Abdul Hamid II to resort to minorities to protect his throne are the grave dangers that hovered around his state, the disintegration of his army, and the erosion of trust in his ability to confront these upcoming dangers, especially after the successive defeats his army suffered.

The documents of the Kurdish clans say: The founder of the idea of the Knights is the Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman forces, Shakir Pasha, and the reason behind the establishment of the Hamidiya Knights is to facilitate the control of the Kurds. On the other hand, the Russians believed that the Hamidiya Knights had been formed with a British recommendation to stand against the Russians, and they suggested to the Ottomans that Zaki Pasha, the commander of the fourth army, be responsible for its formation, and the Ottoman Sultanate at the time was afraid of the repetition of Kurdish alliances, such as the holy alliance established by Badrakhan Pasha in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, and the League of Kurds established by Sheikh Obaidullah Al-Nahri in the eighties of the same century, in which more than 200 Kurdish clan chief and influential participated. For these reasons, Turkish officials in the capital eventually considered forming the Hamidiya Knights.

In the attempt of establishing the Hamidiya Battalions, Abdul Hamid II benefited from the Russians, who conducted a similar experiment by forming a force of Kurdish fighters living behind the Caucasus, so he formed two Kurdish regiments under the command of Colonel Loris Milikov, whose name was known as "The Cossacks" in (1878), and that force formed by the Russians for military operations. Nayef Karkari says in his publication about the story of the emergence of the Hamidiya divisions: "The motive for establishing the Hamidiya Knights was that the Ottomans were in constant conflict with the Russians, and they wanted to take advantage of the strength of the Kurdish fighter known for his courage and fighting ability, and to protect the Ottoman lands from British incursion in Anatolia. This is on the external level, as for the internal level, the goal was to get a hold on the Kurdish clans, especially the feudal clans - loyal to the Ottomans - and to extend their influence over Kurdistan in general, so that the clans would surrender to them and be under the control of the Ottoman Empire.

On the other hand, the goals of the Kurdish clans towards joining the formation of the Hamidiya Knights, varied; some of them wanted to form an armed force of their own power to protect the clan and to strengthen its clan influence, and there are those who entered into those formations to evade soldiering and military service.

In (1891 AD), the number of the Hamidiya regiments was estimated at 40. Later, it increased until it reached 30 brigades, and the regiment consisted of 180 knights, as a minimum, and up to 720 knights, as a maximum. As for the brigade, it consisted of 800 knights, as a minimum, and 1200 knights, as a maximum.

These regiments and brigades committed massacres with the arrangement, approval and planning of Abdul Hamid II. The Ottomans wanted to commit heinous massacres, but they never wanted to be accused, so the idea of the Kurdish regiments delivered a satisfactory solution for one of them to carry out bad deeds, such as confronting the Armenian movement that wanted to get rid of the odious Ottoman occupation, and it engulfed a large number of villages and cities in eastern Anatolia, and due to the unwillingness to show that the suppression of the Armenian revolution came by the regular Ottoman army, and the rejection and condemnation of the European International that this brings, it was decided to rely on the Hamidiya battalions to carry out the task of subjugating and suppressing the Armenian revolutionaries, so the result was: The Hamidiya massacres.

The results of the Hamidiya Knights Battalions were terrifying, following heinous massacres committed against everyone who stood in the way of the Ottomans and the authority of Abdul Hamid, whether they were Armenians or Assyrians and other Christian minorities, accompanied by displacements, demolitions and burning of houses and churches. While the total victims of the Hamidiya massacres in less than two years, according to the documents of the European consulates in the Ottoman Empire, were about 300,000 victims, in addition to the forced deportation of nearly 600,000 Armenians and Assyrians towards the southern regions of the Ottoman Empire. A series of sporadic killings, especially against the Assyrians, continued until 1900.

The Hamidiya Knights Battalions, which was sponsored by Abdul Hamid II, were famous for their unprecedented bloodshed and atrocities in wars, and the reason for such reliance on this type of irregular regiments known for not being bound by any boundaries or restrictions in wars and confrontations and such regiments are not subject to any standards or boundaries that regular military institutions are subject to. In addition to the emotional charge caused by anti-Armenian and Assyrian propaganda, which filled the Kurds' feelings with anger against other minorities, considering that other nationalities are traitors and agents, as described by the Ottomans.

The ferocious massacres committed by the Ottomans against the Armenians and the Arabs forced the Kurds agree to join the Turkish death squads.

Abdul Hamid II got the idea of the death squads from the Russians who recruited the Kurds behind the Caucasus in the Crimean Wars in 1853.

References:

- 1) Ali Hswan, The Ottomans and the Russians (Beirut: Islam House, 1982).
- 2) Muhammad Al-Alawi and Ban Al-Ghanim, The Armenian Issue and the West stand towards it during the Reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hameed II, Basic Education College Research Magazine at the University of Babylon, V (12), p.2012, 1).
- 3) Mishaal Zahir, Armenians during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II 1908-1876, Journal of Basrah University.
- 4) Majid Muhammad Yunus Zakhoy, Al-Hamidiya, a historical and analytical study, Council of the College of Arts, University of Mosul, (2006).
- 5) Khaled Bashir, What do you know about the Ottoman "Hamidiya Battalions"?, Hafriyat website.
- 6) Nayef Karaki, Al-Kharangiya from the Hamidiya Knights to the Tails of the Republic... The Story of Betrayal, Baznews Website.