

## The Politics of Reform in Iraq under Abdülhamid II, 1878-1908

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The problems faced by Abdülhamid II's policy regarding the provinces of Iraq are explored in this article in the light of Ottoman and British archival material. The analysis focuses on the need for reforms and the reform proposals and projects as viewed and formulated by the Ottoman government and the ineffectiveness of their implementation. The position of the center vis-à-vis the provinces of Iraq is examined with respect to the center's principle objectives and proposed solutions to its problems. The author argues that the relative regional "backwardness" of Iraq should not be viewed as a reflection of ignorance or indifference on the part of the Ottoman state. This is because Ottoman officials, both in the capital and in the Iraqi provinces, were well aware of the need for reform and development in Iraq and had reached a broad consensus on the means of amelioration.

The idea of reform was the most recurrent theme in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman history. The *Tanzimat* reforms, proclaimed in 1839, promised an overall reorganization of every state and social institution from more orderly tax collection to a fair and regular system of military conscription and from reform in education to reform in the justice system. In the provinces, the *Tanzimat* reforms envisaged a radical overhaul of provincial administration and a considerable strengthening of central control. *Tanzimat* reforms were gradually introduced in the empire, and continued until the early 1870s with ups and downs. From 1875 onwards, the *Tanzimat* regime entered a

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period of profound crisis, marked by the bankruptcy of the state treasury, a series of Christian rebellions in the Balkan provinces, a constitutionalist revolution, a major diplomatic confrontation with the European great powers, and a protracted and disastrous war with Russia, which ended in 1878 with the empire's territorial truncation by the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin.

Western and Arab studies generally agree in treating the 19<sup>th</sup> century Iraq as a "sleepy backwater" of the Ottoman empire or, in other words, as a region comparatively neglected by the centre. But, research into Ottoman official records challenges this perception. Iraq's relative "backwardness" was not a reflection of ignorance or indifference on the part of the state. Ottoman officials, whether at the centre or in the Iraqi provinces, were well aware of Iraq's need and potential for reform and development, and had reached a broad consensus on what needed to be done.

From the late 1840s onward, Ottoman authorities tried to implement centralising and modernising (Tanzimat) reforms in Iraq, from administrative and military reorganisation to land-tenure and from financial aspects to educational progress. They had almost fully established a new civil administrative and military organisation in Iraq by 1870; moreover, they managed in part to achieve certain reforms in the areas of finance, land and education. It was a long and gradual process that was interrupted primarily by tribal and financial difficulties. During the Tanzimat period, however, the step by step reform approach on the part of the Ottoman authorities was generally concentrated on the Christian-populated Balkans, and to some extent the central Anatolian provinces. After all, Iraq was not a region that constituted an imminent source of problems.

In August 1876, in the midst of the crisis, the throne passed to Sultan Abdülhamid II (1842-1918). The reign of Abdülhamid II was a continuation of the Tanzimat period regarding the reforms, and carried further the reforms started by the Tanzimat statesmen. Nonetheless, Abdülhamid's approach to the question of reform varied from that of Tanzimat statesmen on certain points. The source of these differences of opinion on the issue of reform in general lay in the immediately preceding and following events of the accession of Abdülhamid. His approach to the question of reform was also affected by his authoritarianism and centralism, his emphasis upon Islam and Muslim solidarity, and his financial prudence.

This article seeks to explore the problems faced by the Ottoman central government under Abdülhamid II and its official representatives in Iraq, by employing Ottoman and British archival material. It attempts to analyse the Ottoman administration's views on the possibilities for reforms in Iraq, the reform proposals and projects formulated by the Ottoman government and the ineffectiveness of their implementation. It asks how the centre saw the Iraqi provinces; what was its perception of the situation and problems of the provinces; what were its basic aims; and what were its solutions.

## I

The question of reform in Iraq was raised, shortly after Abdülhamid's accession, in the debates of the first Ottoman Parliament, which met between 19 March and 28 June 1877. The necessity of reforms in Iraq, in particular in the fields of land tenure and taxation, was urged in the Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*) on several occasions by the representatives of Baghdad.<sup>1</sup> The outbreak of war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia in the spring of 1877 precluded any further discussion of the issue, but in the summer of 1878, shortly after the war's conclusion, Abdülhamid invited the British Ambassador, Sir Henry Layard, to furnish him with a general report on the prospects for reform in the Empire.<sup>2</sup> Layard had personal experience of Iraq, where he had conducted archaeological excavations, and he devoted a section of his lengthy report to the region, lamenting its current backwardness and decay, but also stressing its considerable potential for development, particularly if it could be linked to the Ottoman capital by a railway.<sup>3</sup>

That this now neglected country [Iraq] could recover some, if not all, of its ancient prosperity there can be little doubt. This is shown by the improvement that has taken place in the trade of Baghdad during the last few years in consequence of the navigation of the Tigris by Turkish and English steamers, and even during the last few months on account of the opening of new lines of communications with Europe in consequence of the interruption by the war of the routes to Persia and Central Asia by Trebizond and Erzeroum. It now only remains for Your Majesty to put into execution your wise and benevolent intentions as regards the reform of the administration, and for Your Majesty to give every encouragement to foreign and native enterprise.. Amongst the public works which are necessary for the full development of the resources of Anatolia and Arabistan a railway connecting Your Majesty's capital with Baghdad, and hereafter with the Persian Gulf, is the most important. It would be equally advantageous to both provinces.

Abdülhamid appears to have been thinking on similar lines. The unsuccessful war with Russia had cost the Empire some of its most valuable Balkan provinces, which, in addition to being relatively well-developed, economically, had also been major contributors of revenue to the treasury, and there was much talk in government

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1 See *Meclis-i Mebusan: 1293=1877 Zabıt Ceridesi*, ed. Hakkı Tank Us (Istanbul: Vakit Matbaası, 1940), pp.176, 190, 380-81; for the representatives of Iraq, see R. Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1963.

2 See FO 198/90, "Memorials by Sir A. Layard to the Sultan regarding the state of the Ottoman Empire, reforms etc. 1878-1879." A Turkish translation of the report is found in the Yıldız Archive, and partially published by Münir Aktepe in *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, 22 (Temmuz 1969), as "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun İslahı hakkında İngiltere Elçisi Layard'ın II. Abdülhamid'e Verdiği Rapor", pp.13-27. For Layard and his travels in Iraq, see Gordon Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, John Murray, London 1963.

3 Ibid.

circles of the need to compensate for these losses by developing the Empire's Asiatic provinces.<sup>4</sup> Professor Shaw shows that, as early as the spring of 1879, Abdülhamid envisaged a detailed general reform project, concerning all issues from military to financial affairs.<sup>5</sup> In addition, in late 1879 and early 1880, Abdülhamid took up the issue of reform in Iraq separately, and asked every high civil official in the region, i.e., the *vali*, *mutasarrıfs*, and *kaymakams*, to prepare detailed reports on the needs and problems of their own districts. Although these reports are not yet available, a valuable summary of some of them is provided in a report drawn up, on 29 September 1880, by Abdurrahman Pasha, the *vali* of Baghdad.<sup>6</sup>

Abdurrahman Pasha's report began by describing the general needs of the country and the people. Abdurrahman Pasha emphasized five main needs, but placed the greatest emphasis on the first of them, *hüsn-i muaşeret* (civility), arguing that this was the key to the satisfaction of the others, namely education, agriculture, industry and craft, and trade and commerce. What he meant by "civility" in Iraq was simply the establishment of security and public order. He warned that since Iraq contained very different cultures, sects and customs, and since the only means to collect taxes and effect conscription was force, it was impossible to keep law and order by ordinary measures. Iraq, he argued, had more need of security and public order than any other region of the Empire, and the means to achieve this would be as follows: first, the existing, inadequate gendarmerie must be expanded and furnished with adequate funds, equipment, and qualified personnel; second, given that the gendarmerie required the support of regular troops in such matters as tax collection and suppression of brigandage and given that the voluntary cooperation of the local military authorities was not always forthcoming, the civil administration must be given some authority over the local army garrisons; and thirdly, the local courts and civil administration must be reinforced.<sup>7</sup> Once, by these means, proper security had been provided, the nomadic tribes could be encouraged to settle and expand cultivation, thus facilitating progress and prosperity. Even the "wild tribes" would not have enough power to do much harm.<sup>8</sup>

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4 For further elaboration of this point, see Engin D. Akarlı, "Abdülhamid II's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System" in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, ed. David Kushner, E.J.Brill, Leiden 1986, pp.74-89, and his "Abdülhamid II's Islamic Policy in the Arab Provinces" in *Türk-Arap İlişkileri*, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayınları, Ankara 1979, pp.44-60.

5 For details, see Stanford J. Shaw, "A Promise of Reform: Two Complementary Documents", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 4 (1973), 359-368.

6 See YEE 14/205/126/7, "Bağdad Valisi Abdurrahman Paşa'nın Irak'ın İslahına dair Lâyihası", dated 24 Şevval 1297-17 Eylül 1296.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

Having made this point, Abdurrahman Pasha went on to discuss the other four needs. He began with education, noting that at that time, education in Iraq was confined to the upper classes of the towns and cities and was largely traditional religious education taught in irregular madrasas and private houses by the ulama. Education in the modern sciences was poorly developed though popular demand for it was not lacking. Primary and secondary schools should be expanded, and primary education should be made compulsory.<sup>9</sup>

The third issue on the *vâli*'s agenda was agriculture. He deplored the fact that Iraq, which had much fertile land, had made no agricultural progress to date, and had even been obliged to import grains from India and Europe in times of natural disaster, such as famine, floods and epidemics.<sup>10</sup> It was essential to develop the existing irrigation systems and to construct a series of dams on the Tigris and the Euphrates; notwithstanding the initial cost, these investments would pay for themselves in the longer term. In addition, railways should be built between Istanbul and Baghdad, Baghdad and Nadjaf, and Baghdad and Khaniqin; river navigation should be improved; and a modern agricultural school should be opened.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth issue on Abdurrahman Pasha's list was crafts and industry. He proposed to establish textile factories to compete with foreign imports, to improve the Baghdad Industrial School, to abolish the stamp tax paid by local craftsmen, and to discourage idleness by closing the coffee houses during working hours.<sup>12</sup> The fifth issue was trade and commerce, and Abdurrahman Pasha proposed that this be developed by the promotion of railways, the construction of new telegraph lines, improvements in education, and the abolition of certain taxes that were harmful to local commerce.<sup>13</sup>

Mazhar Pasha, the *mutasarrıf* of Basra, also wrote a separate report to the Palace on a reform policy for Iraq, dated 13 August 1880.<sup>14</sup> After describing the physical features of the region and comparing the potential wealth of its rivers with the Nile of Egypt, he drew attention to the insufficient development of agriculture: only one portion

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9 Ibid.

10 For these natural disasters, see J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta 1908-1905, I/1, p. 1496; Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1978, p. 15; and Charles Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914: A Documentary Economic History*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 99-101, 105.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 See BOA, YEE 14/413/126/9, "Hitta-ı İrakiye'nin imarında mevkuf-i aleyhi olan vesait hakkında Basra Mutasarrıflığından takdim olunan layihadır", dated Şevval 1297-1 Ağustos 1296. According to the information given in preface of the document, Mazhar Pasha spent forty years in the region in several administrative posts, being *mutasarrıf* for the last fifteen years. He had previously been the *mutasarrıf* of Karbala.

out of ten cultivable lands was in use, and only one in ten of the population was settled. The latter, he added, meant that only one tenth of the population was under effective governmental jurisdiction. Mazhar Pasha reasoned that since the people were religious, obedient and loyal to the Sultanate and Caliphate, and beyond the influence of foreign intrigues, it was the government's duty to reform and improve Iraq, and so compensate for the recent loss of Balkan provinces. Practically, he emphasized the need for more irrigation, in order to extend the cultivated area and raise agricultural production. He conceded that this would cost much money, that the government lacked the funds to attempt a large-scale programme all at once, and that it must proceed step by step; but he emphasized that investment in agriculture would eventually pay for itself, and even generate the revenues to finance a railway between Baghdad and Istanbul.<sup>15</sup>

In a further report, dated 13 September 1880, Mazhar Pasha put forward more detailed proposals for the improvement of agriculture in the Basra region.<sup>16</sup> He pointed to the growth in exports of dates during the preceding two decades and to the possibility of expanding rice cultivation, thanks to the natural irrigation furnished by the tides in the Shatt al-Arab. He suggested that the local tribes and Bedouin could be encouraged to settle and cultivate if they were furnished with state lands, and also offered tax exemptions. In addition, he suggested that the shores of the Shatt al-Arab be banked, as a means of bringing more land into cultivation, and of eradicating malaria. He argued that settlement of the tribes might be accomplished over a five-year period.<sup>17</sup>

Abdülhamid also sought the advice of statesmen who had served in Iraq in the past. One of them was Mehmed Namık Pasha, a former *müşir* and *vali* of Baghdad. In his brief report, dated July 1879, Namık Pasha first gave a historical summary and then described the current political problems in the region: economic poverty, insufficient agriculture and trade, an important Shi'i presence, and a potential Iranian military threat. His main proposal to resolve these problems was to unite Baghdad, Basra and Mosul as one province under one powerful *vali*, with full authority over civil, military and financial administration.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Ibid. For the miserable state of the region, Mazhar Pasha put the blame on the apathy of the local population, who did not work for the long run, but merely tried to obtain annual profits. According to him, this was caused by the uncertain state of the Empire and the experience of earlier, troubled years.

16 See BOA, YEE 14/88/10/88/12, "Basra Sancağı'nın ihtiyacât ve islahâtına dair layihadır", dated 8 Şevval 1297-Gurre-i Eylül 1296.

17 Ibid.

18 See BOA, YEE 14/88/8/88/12, dated 25 Receb 1296, "Padişah emri mucibince Namık Paşa tarafından hitta-i Irakîyeye dair bağzı malumatı hâvi kaleme aldırılan varakadır...", in Ahmet Nuri Sinaplı, *Mehmet Namık Paşa*, Yenilik Basımevi, İstanbul 1987, pp. 259-60.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Public Works, Hasan Fehmi Pasha, was conducting an extensive investigation into possible projects for road and railway construction, harbour improvements, and irrigation and drainage schemes throughout Ottoman Asia. The results of his investigations were incorporated in a detailed report, and submitted to the Prime Minister's Office in June 1880.<sup>19</sup> The report and its appendices were long and very detailed. The sections on road building and harbour improvements made no proposals concerning Iraq. However, Iraq occupied an important part in the section on railways, which examined three possible routes for a Baghdad railway, coming down in favour of an Izmit-Eskişehir-Kütahya-Konya-Adana-Alep-po-Baghdad route, with a sub-line from Anbarlı to Basra. It estimated the cost of the 2,200 km Izmit-Baghdad line at 14,885,434,78 liras.<sup>20</sup> Iraq also featured prominently in the section on marshland drainage, with particular attention paid to Mesopotamia (*Ceziretü'l-Arab*): draining the marshes of this region, which were estimated to cover 11,000,000 *dönüms*, would require repairs to the old banks (*sed*), the cleaning of old canals, and the construction of new dams (*bend*). The total cost of draining was estimated at 4,348,260,86 lira. This was followed by an irrigation project for Mesopotamia: the lands to be irrigated (*irva ve iska*) were about 66,000,000 *dönüms*, and it was estimated to cost about 521,739,13 liras.<sup>21</sup> In addition, a project to open most parts of the Tigris and the Euphrates to navigation was also included in the report.<sup>22</sup> After nearly two years of unexplained delay, Hasan Fehmi's report was approved in November 1882 by the Council of Ministers and by Abdülhamid.<sup>23</sup>

The events and the reports examined above suggest that within two years of the ending of the war with Russia, local and central government officials had reached a broad consensus with regard to the question of reforms in Iraq. The *vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra, it was agreed, had considerable potential for agricultural development. The key to unlocking this potential lay partly in irrigation and marshland drainage, partly in better river and rail communications, and partly, and most importantly, in

19 See BOA, İrade-Meclis-i Mahsus, no.3325, 17 Muharrem 1300, published in *Belgeler: Türk Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi*, cilt: V-VIII, sayı: 9-12 (1968-1971), (TTK, Ankara 1971), Celal Dinçer, "Osmanlı Vezirlerinden Hasan Fehmi Paşa'nın Anadolu'nun Bayındırlık İşlerine Dair Hazırladığı Layiha", pp. 153-233. The report was titled "Anadolu'da İmalat-ı Umumiyyeye Dair Layiha", and dated 26 Cemaziyelâhir 1297.

20 Ibid., pp.179 and 182.

21 Ibid., pp.189-190.

22 Ibid., p.190.

23 Ibid. Several reform commissions (*islahat komisyonları*) were established in 1882 by the order of the sultan. One of them was put in charge of the reforms and progress in public works, agriculture, trade and industry (*umur-ı nafta ile ziraat ve ticaret ve sanayiın esbab-ı islah ve terakkisini ta'yine memur*), and consisted of Hasan Fehmi Pasha, Raif Efendi, Mösyö Sibald, and Mösyö Galan. When the commission set to work, it was decided that although agriculture, trade, industry, forestry and mining required separate surveys, Hasan Fehmi Pasha's report of 24 Mayıs 1296 regarding public works was good enough to re-submit to the Council of Ministers, without any change. The report was examined by the Council of Ministers and approved in November 1882 (7 Muharrem 1300). When it came before Abdülhamid, he also fully approved it after ten days of consideration. See Ibid., pp. 224ff.

the settlement of the tribal population, who should be encouraged to become peaceful cultivators. The process of settlement, it was further agreed, was in part a question of stronger administrative and military control and in part a question of continuing the policy, initiated by Midhat Pasha in the 1870s, of releasing state lands to the local population. What is clear is that none of the major proposals made in the reports was implemented. In the case of the ambitious plans for railway construction and irrigation and drainage works, it may plausibly be suggested that the problem was finance: the sultan's government had no money of its own to spare for such projects, and, with memories of the 1875 bankruptcy still fresh, it was unwilling to resort to large-scale foreign loans. It also seems likely that political considerations frustrated the proposals to give *valis* powers over local garrisons or to unite the three Iraqi *vilayets*, or provinces: Abdülhamid was firmly opposed to anything which might point in the direction of administrative decentralisation and provincial autonomy. However, it also seems probable that he had political objections to a continuation of the earlier policy of distributing state lands.

Since Midhat Pasha's term as *vali*, a special Land Commission at Baghdad had been supervising the matters related to state land grants. In the face of continuous problems, in 1879, a handbook of instructions for the Land Commission was prepared by the Office of the Registry of Landed Property (*Defterhâne*).<sup>24</sup> This, however, proved unsatisfactory, and after hearing several cases of abuse, the Porte decided in May 1881 to prepare a revised and more detailed manual.<sup>25</sup> In August 1881, after a series of communications between governmental departments, Said Pasha, the prime minister, submitted some proposals on the issue, together with a copy of the new manual, to the sultan.<sup>26</sup> Abdülhamid withheld his approval from the manual,<sup>27</sup> and one year later, he issued a decree to the effect that all grants (*müzayede ve fûruhtu*) of state lands were to cease, provisionally.<sup>28</sup> Abdülhamid did not state his

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24 See BOA, Y.A.Res. 12/48, enclosure 20, dated Nisan 1295; cf. Albertine Jwadih, "Midhat Pasha and the Land System of Lower Iraq" in *St. Anthony's Papers: Middle Eastern Affairs*, No.3 (London, 1963), pp.105-136. My account differs from that of Professor Jwadih on certain points.

25 See *Ibid.*, enclosure 4, "Hitta-i Irakiye Arazi Komisyonunun Vezâifini Mübeyyin Talimatdır", dated 27 Cemaziyelâhîr 1298-7 Mayıs 1297, signed *Umur-ı Nafta Komisyonu*. It proclaimed that no state (*mîrî*) land could be granted without an specific authorisation from Istanbul.

26 BOA, Y.A.Res. 12/48, 28 Ramazan 1298-11 Ağustos 1297. Among these proposals: firstly, a new president should be appointed to the commission. Secondly, one of the members, Arif Efendi, was to be sacked for his corruption. Thirdly, two military officers of the general staff should be sent to Baghdad for inspection and observation.

27 In the meantime, Said Pasha at least twice raised the issue, saying that in practice the application came to a halt, and as a consequence, the provinces were suffering financially. See BOA, Y.A.Hus. 168/94, 25 Zilkâde 1298-7 Teşrin-i evvel 1297, and Y.A.Res. 14/33, 8 Safer 1299-17 Kanun-ı evvel 1297; and Y.A.Res. 19/37, 17 Cemaziyevvel 1300-14 Mart 1299: "Bağdad ve Musul vilayetleriyle Şehrîzor ve Müntefik sancaklarında bulunan arazi-i emiriyenin fûruhtu halinde menafi-i kesire husule geleceği..."

28 See the first paragraph of the document in *Düstur, birinci tertib*, vol.6, 1260-61; this was forwarded by the grand vizier to other departments. See the first paragraph in Y.A.Res. 19/37, enclosure 4, by *Vergi Emaneti*, no.48, 14 Safer 1300-13 Kanun-ı evvel 1298.

reservations explicitly, in spite of several requests by the financial authorities, who pointed out that the decree deprived the treasury of a useful source of income. It appears, however, that the Sultan's hesitation was due to his fear of abuses by foreigners: in the future, with their wealth, Iranians and British might easily buy these lands from the local people. When, for example, he was asked by the Administrative Council of Baghdad in 1886 to grant state lands to date cultivators, Abdülhamid accepted on condition that: "They do not in future pass, through deception and trickery, into the hands of Iranians and other foreigners."<sup>29</sup> Around 1889, the sultan revised his thinking on the subject. He was at first persuaded to resume selling state lands in Iraq and issued a decree to this effect. But, when requisite regulations and conditions were submitted to him by the Porte, Abdülhamid abandoned the idea and refused to approve the documents.<sup>30</sup> This situation continued for many more years, and with the exception of a few grants to local sheikhs and other special cases, no state land was permitted to be purchased by the local population.<sup>31</sup> As will be seen, the Sultan's decision was criticised by almost every official and statesman, whenever the topic of reform in Iraq re-appeared on the agenda. It should also be added that, while Abdülhamid, insisted on his decision, he had himself been acquiring arable state lands in Iraq for his Privy Purse (*Hazine-i Hassa*), since 1877.<sup>32</sup>

As regards the reforms, the only initiative during this period up to 1890 seems to have come from Mustafa Asım Pasha, the Vali of Baghdad, in late 1887. He first asked the Porte to maintain the *aşar* tax of Baghdad and Basra at a fixed price to ease the financial burden of the population; and then wanted 20,000 gold lira allowance per year to spent for public works and improvements in the *vilayet* of Baghdad. Though this was discussed and accepted by both in the Council of Ministers and the Council of State, it finally seems to have come to nothing.<sup>33</sup>

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- 29 BOA, Y.A.Res. 40/35, 20 Rebiyülevvel 1305-23 Teşrin-i sâni 1303: "...ilerüde te'vilat ve desayis ile Irani ve sair ecnebi uhdelerine geçmemek şartıyla..."
- 30 BOA, Y.A.Res. 49/31, 28 Safer 1307-11 Teşrin-i evvel 1305; in January 1890, Kamil Paşa once more raised the issue to the sultan on the request of local financial authorities. See Y.A.Res. 50/25, 20 Cemaziyelâhir 1307-29 Kanun-ı sâni 1305.
- 31 As an example of these exceptions: in March 1887, permission was sought to grant four parcels of miri lands at Baghdad, with no reply (Y.A.Res. 37/16, 20 Cemaziyelâhir 1304-4 Mart 1303). Only in April 1889, in response to the second application did Abdülhamid consent to give permission for the above mentioned lands, together with a special grant of state land (2,200 dönüms, 37,000 qurush) to a Naqshbandi-Khalidi sheikh of Sulaymaniyah, Osman Efendi (Y.A.Res. 47/17, 12 Şaban 1306-1 Nisan 1305).
- 32 On the Privy Purse (or Civil List), and its development under Abdülhamid in general, see Vasfi Şensözen, *Osmanoğulları'nın Varlıkları ve II. Abdülhamid'in Emlâkı*, TTK, Ankara 1982. For the application in Iraq, see A. Jwaideh, "The Sanniya Lands of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Iraq" in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, ed. G. Makdisi, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1965, pp.326-36; apart from the partial list given by Jwaideh, a complete list of Privy Purse properties and their revenues, both in Iraq and other parts of the Empire, for the year 1884, see Murat Bardakçı, *Son Osmanlılar. Osmanlı Hanedanının Sürgün ve Miras Öyküsü*, Gri Yayın, İstanbul 1991, pp. 170-186.
- 33 BOA, Y.A.Res.40/34, 15 Rebiyülevvel 1305-18 Teşrin-i sâni 1303, and *Ibid.* 41/41, 27 Cemaziyelâhir 1305-27 Şubat 1303.

## II

Not until the early 1890s did central government again turn its attention to the prospects for reform in Iraq, apparently as a by-product of a current scheme for a general reorganisation of the Empire's armed forces.<sup>34</sup> In 1890, as part of this scheme, a Committee of Military Inspection (*Heyet-i Teftişiye-i Askeriye*) was dispatched to Iraq. The committee's report has not been traced, but its principal recommendations may be inferred from detailed comments made by the Vali of Baghdad, Sırrı Pasha, by the Military Inspection Commission (*Teftiş-i Umum-u Askeri Komisyonu*) at the Yıldız Palace, and by the Council of Ministers at the Porte.<sup>35</sup> The committee's immediate concern was the need to strengthen the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, and it appears that, with this end in view, it made four major recommendations. First, the population of the Iraqi *vilayets* must be registered, as a necessary preliminary to bringing the 6<sup>th</sup> Army up to strength through conscription. Second, the gendarmerie forces should be reorganised and brought to an active state. Thirdly, the tribes of Basra should be settled and stopped from causing damage. Finally, the civil administration should employ capable and qualified officials.<sup>36</sup>

Commenting upon the committee's proposals for the registration of population, the *vali* of Baghdad conceded that the failure to date to register the tribal population had seriously limited the flow of conscripts to the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, but he warned that it was precisely the tribes' hostility to conscription that led them to resist registration. Registration would take time and would require the presence of a large armed force to prevent the tribes from escaping across the Iranian border or into Najd. Eight battalions of infantry, and two regiments of cavalry would need to be transferred to Iraq from the other armies. The *vali*'s point was endorsed by the Military Inspection Commission and also by the Council of Ministers, which both agreed that only after the 6<sup>th</sup> Army had been reinforced from without could a start be made on the registration of the population of the three *vilayets* of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul.<sup>37</sup>

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34 See A. Merwin Griffiths, *The Reorganization of the Ottoman Army under Abdülhamid II, 1880-1897* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1966), pp.118ff, 128, 154, 140-41.

35 All documents related to this subject are found in Y.A.Res. 55/9. For the Vali's report, 55/9 (15), 13 Şaban 1308-11 Mart 1307. For the Military Inspection Commission's report, 55/9 (3), 27 Ramazan 1308-24 Nisan 1307. The Sultan's decree is in 55/9 (6), 28 Ramazan 1308-25 Nisan 1307. For the Council of Ministers' report, see *ibid.* 55/9 (2), 22 Şevval 1308-19 Mayıs 1307. After having received the committee's report, Abdülhamid ordered that some items of the report regarding administrative and political affairs be executed. Receiving this order, in January 1891 (14 Kanun-ı sâni 1306), the Minister of the Interior sent a copy of the report to Sırrı Pasha, the vali of Baghdad, and asked his opinion. Afterwards, together with the report compiled by Sırrı Pasha, dated 23 March 1891 (11 Mart 1307), the committee's report was discussed first in the Military Inspection Commission, and then in the Council of Ministers.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

Inextricably bound up with the issues of registration and conscription was the question of settling the tribes. The *vali*, the Military Inspection Commission, and the Council of Ministers were all agreed that such settlement was the key to the solution of Iraq's problems in the long run, but all admitted that it would be difficult to implement. The Council of Ministers doubted that force alone would suffice and suggested that the tribes should be drawn into the "circle of civilisation" through "justice", by which they apparently meant good treatment. This in turn focused attention upon the committee's recommendations for improvements in the gendarmerie and, more generally, in the civil administration. The *vali* of Baghdad, in particular, was highly critical of the efficiency of the gendarmerie, noting in passing that it was recruited largely among Kurds, Chechens and Circassians. It was agreed that, in the civil administration as in the gendarmerie, it was essential to employ capable and qualified officials, preferably with a knowledge of local languages and conditions. It was also agreed that an honest and capable judicial inspector should be sent to the region.<sup>38</sup>

The Military Inspection Commission placed particular emphasis upon the need for united action by the authorities of the *vilayets* of Bagdad, Basra and Mosul, and also by the *vilayet* authorities and the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army. It emphasized that the 6<sup>th</sup> Army needed a capable and active commander and proposed to appoint Recep Pasha to the post. Once the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and the gendarmerie had been reorganised, the civil authorities and the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army should work together to implement a general reform policy. Discussion of the committee's proposals was concluded in May 1891, with the Council of Ministers finally endorsing all the recommendations that had emerged in the course of the consultations. The immediate practical outcome was a series of personnel changes, including the dismissal of the *valis* of Mosul and Baghdad, and the appointment of Receb Pasha as Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>39</sup>

Over the next two years, further reports on the subject of reform in Iraq were submitted, possibly at the Sultan's own request, including two from his former confidant Nusret Pasha, who had been sent into honorary domestic exile at Baghdad in 1888 as Inspector of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>40</sup> Nusret Pasha's first report, probably drawn up in 1892, struck an alarmist note:<sup>41</sup>

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38 Ibid. The *vali* admitted that some of the local officials were inclined to corruption and abuse, but he was also hopeful since this was the least of the *vilayet's* concerns. See also 55/9 (5), and 55/9 (17).

39 Ibid. One of the members of the Military Inspection Commission added to the report that although it made no difference from the political point of view whether there were one or two more battalions in some *vilayets* such as Rumelia, it was very important to have a few more battalions in regions such as Iraq and the Yemen in view of the present and future political situation. According to his statement, given the fact that Iraq was in the Hijaz region, this connection made Iraq much more important, and since the situation of 6<sup>th</sup> Army appears to have been paralysed, it was therefore vital to transfer an essential number of soldiers to Iraq from other armies.

40 For Nusret Pasha (d. 1896), see, Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani, Matbaa-i Âmire*, İstanbul 1308-1315, IV, 870-71; *Türk Ansiklopedisi*, XXV, 353-54; FO 195/1794, no.21, 22 May 1893, by Chermiside, the Military Attache; Hadduş Fazıl Dağıştanlı, *Muhammed Fazıl Paşa, Doğan Kardeş*, İstanbul 1969, p. 38.

41 BOA, YEE 14/2256/126/11, "Irak'a Dair Müşir Nusret Paşa'nın Mufassal Bir Layihası", no date [c. 1308].

The imperial territories of Iraq have gained such sensitivity and importance and are so ready to be lost that to explain the situation in detail would require several volumes. Instead of such details, I choose to present only the most important and the most urgent [points].

Specifically, Nusret Pasha emphasized the political threats posed by British ambitions in Iraq, and by the spread of Shi'ism there: "It is demonstrated by the preceding evidence that Iraq and Arabia will not be in our possession in a few years' time if they are left in their present circumstances." He also warned that Iraq's large tribal populations were effectively outside the government's control:

Neither can one call these subjects who are of no benefit to the state subjects nor can one regard the places and lands they inhabit as the state's dominion. For the Ottoman state has neither an established local government nor a barracks and outpost nor an organised administration in those places.

Nusret Pasha urged the Sultan to appoint a special commission for Iraq and the adjoining regions of Kurdistan and Arabia. The members of this commission should be selected among the most capable men available in Istanbul, and the chairman should be Küçük Said Pasha, a former Grand vizier. In addition, Nusret Pasha put forward a detailed agenda for the commission.

The first item on Nusret's agenda was the reform and reinforcement of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, which "has nothing but its name". Echoing the views which the central government itself had endorsed in 1891, he warned that the 6<sup>th</sup> Army was seriously under strength, that conscription was deficient, and that the solution lay in the registration of the population and the settlement of the tribes. He added that the 6<sup>th</sup> Army in its present state was too weak to accomplish this task, and must be reinforced by units transferred from the 4<sup>th</sup> (Erzincan) and the 5<sup>th</sup> (Damascus) Armies. He also complained of a shortage of military transport, ammunition and other facilities: barracks and outposts should be constructed where needed, and the walls of Baghdad, demolished by Midhat Pasha, must be rebuilt.<sup>42</sup>

Nusret's second item was the gendarmerie, which was in as poor a state as the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, but which was additionally plagued by corruption and abuses. The third item was the tribes. First and foremost, tribes and Bedouins needed to be settled by giving them possession of lands (*temlik-i arazi*). After distinguishing and describing the tribes of the region, nomads and settled, he mainly concentrated on the former type as it needed a special policy, and made some detailed suggestions for settling them. The fourth item was public works, whose deficiency Nusret blamed on the neglect of previous *valis*. Nusret Pasha argued that the region had the resources to sustain a public works policy. For instance, the many rich merchants who came from India and Iran might be encouraged to invest in shipping, textile, food or clothing companies. But, first of all, the sultan should strengthen the authority of *valis* and

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42 Ibid.

*mutasarrıfs*, by granting them sufficient security of tenure (*idame-i memuriyet*) and extended powers (*tevsi-i vezâif*). The fifth item was agriculture and trade. He argued that there was an immediate need to increase the volume of trade through the promotion of companies, measures of irrigation and forestry, the introduction of new products, and the setting up of a mobile official commission (*seyyar bir heyet-i resmîy'e-i muvazzafa*) to prepare and implement a ten-year programme of development. Success would increase the revenues of the treasury, and also of the sultan's Privy Purse, 'tenfold'. Here, too, Nusret touched on the sensitive topic of land tenure, openly criticising the sultan's prohibition on the granting of state lands (*temlik-i arazi*) to local people, and stressing its harmful effects upon agriculture. He insisted that the distribution of lands (*temlik-i arazi*) was essential for the progress of agriculture and would also give the feeling of security and private property to the people. He advised that a similar policy be adopted in Najd.<sup>43</sup>

The final item on Nusret's agenda was education. He described Iraq as "almost a country of ignorance" (*âdetâ bir darü'l cehl*), and threw the blame upon the government's sequestration of the funds formerly devoted to the upkeep of religious scholars:

This is due to the fact its religious monuments were reduced to nothing, the madrasas and zaviyes being in utter ruin, and the greater part -almost 90 percent- of its waqfs, which had once secured the maintenance of men of piety and learning, have been gradually annexed by the treasury of the Ministry of Waqfs.

The state of Najd in this respect was even worse, for not only did the population live in total ignorance (*cahillik*), but there was also a growth of Wahhabism and Shi'ism among them. For this, he laid the blame on the Ottoman government, and proposed a special program for "spreading knowledge" (*neşr-i maarif*) in order to "warm the people to the Ottoman government" (*halkı hükümet-i Osmaniye'ye ısındırmak*).<sup>44</sup>

It appears that Nusret's proposals provoked no response from Abdülhamid for in the following year he submitted a further report, essentially recapitulating the first one.<sup>45</sup> He again called for the appointment of a special reform commission under Küçük Said Pasha, and re-stated his previous agenda.<sup>46</sup> However, he added certain new proposals. First, Iraq and the adjoining regions of Arabia must be placed under martial law, and subjected to a military administration. Second, qualified experts must be sent to register the population and prepare statistics and maps.

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 BOA, YEE 14/211/126/7, "Irak'a Dair Nusret Paşa'nın Layihası" dated 26 Nisan 1309.

46 He stressed at the beginning that "I again swear upon oath to our beloved Majesty the Sultan that Iraq, in its present state, will not remain long in our possession..."

These general measures were to be supported by a programme of more specific initiatives: the proposed commission was to deal with unsettled tribes and bedouins. It tried to settle them by distributing lands, group by group; to register the population; to appoint travelling (*seyyar*) *muhtars*, *müdürs*, *kaymakams* and *mutasarıfs*; to establish tent primary schools; to send teachers, among whom were the educated from the region, to teach catechism (*ilmihal*) and Islamic tenets (*akaid-i İslam*); to construct canals along the Tigris and the Euphrates for irrigation; to do other irrigation works in other places such as Shamiye desert; to construct banks and dams and pools as measures against floods; to clean the basin of the rivers by boats; to construct a dockyard and a pool to build both small and large ships; to make general improvements in transport, such as building bridges; to make repairs of roads and walls and to construct outposts (*karakol*) between Heyt (next to the Euphrates) and Damascus and to establish a military road through Arabia; to establish new administrative posts in Najd and to appoint pious, religious and capable officials to this district.<sup>47</sup>

But, to carry out this program, he estimated, it would require an initial 250,000 liras as a temporary budget, and a permanent budget of 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 liras. In the long run, he argued, this investment would more than pay for itself, but he was aware that this amount of money could not be obtained at once and proposed a ten-year incremental plan.

Another statesman who compiled a report for the sultan, dated April 1892, was Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha, a well-known military officer and expert on education of the 1860s and 1870s, whose constitutionalist sympathies had resulted in 1878 in his banishment to Baghdad.<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, Süleyman Pasha gave particular attention to the issue of education.<sup>49</sup> After describing the present state of education in Iraq, he proposed the establishment of *Darü'l-Muallimin* (teacher training school for men) in Baghdad, of *Mekteb-i İdadi* (preparatory schools) in Mosul, Baghdad, Basra and Kirkuk, and of *Mekteb-i Kebir-i Rüşdi* (modern primary Schools) in every village. The results of these efforts would be as follows:

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47 Ibid. At the same time, he proposed to put both the Christian monasteries and the Sufi lodges under control of the state; to pursue a hardline policy against the tariqas and dervishes because of their intrigues; and also to pursue a similar policy against ulama families due to the misuse of their privileges and to force them to take examinations, then recruiting those who failed to the army.

48 Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha (d. August 1892), military officer and educator. Commander at Şıpa Pass (1876), director of the War Academy, involved in deposition of Abdülaziz (1876), and banished to Baghdad (1878). His best biography is in Robert Devereux, "Süleyman Paşa's 'The Feeling of the Revolution'", *Middle East Studies*, 15 (1979), 5-10.

49 BOA, YEE 14/1188/126/9, "İrak'ın İslahına Dair Bağdad'da İkamete Memur Süleyman Paşa Layihası", dated 9 Ramazan 1309.

The people who were trained through such education and upbringing could in the future assume a position of benefit to the state, it could be said that we have subjects who can distinguish between good and evil. But as long as they remain in the grip of ignorance, and religious leaders of heretic beliefs continue to spoil them, it is impossible for the state to benefit from them.

However, Süleyman Pasha did not confine his attention to education. He broadly echoed Nusret Pasha's criticisms of the state of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, and suggested that the problems of security and order might best be resolved by the establishment of a form of tribal militia, similar to the Hamidiye Regiments set up in Eastern Anatolia. He also had a great deal to say about agriculture, stressing that "The Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Diyala are each a gold mine, and conduit for treasures of wealth. It is a pity that so far we can not profit properly from these sources of favour and grace which were granted to us by God".<sup>50</sup> Like Nusret Pasha, he urged the sultan to distribute state lands to tribes and the local people in general, and blamed the notables for putting obstacles in the way of this process.<sup>51</sup> The distribution of lands (*temlik-i arazi*), he argued, was the key to solving the tribal problem:

It is a rightful duty incumbent upon the state to work to free these hundreds of thousands of people from oppression, and from being tools of the intrigue and greed of various individuals, and to gradually place them upon the high road of prosperity by making them owners of property and by establishing schools among them.

He added that agricultural development would increase the state's tax revenues and proposed the establishment of Agricultural Administrations (*Ziraat Müdürlükleri*) and of branches of the state-run Agricultural Bank (*Ziraat Bankası*) in all three *vilayets* in Iraq. In addition, Baghdad should also have a model farm (*nümune çiftliği*) and an Agricultural School (*Ziraat Mekteb-i Umumisi*).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Süleyman Pasha paid attention to the issues of trade and justice. As regard to trade, he proposed that a chamber of commerce should be established in Baghdad and that steps should be taken to improve river, road and railway communications.<sup>53</sup> With respect to justice, he criticised the court system, and in particular, the practice of recruiting members of the civil courts among local persons who had no idea of law and justice.<sup>54</sup>

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50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 He therefore proposed to revise the present legal system in accordance with local necessities and realities. He complained, by referring to Midhat Pasha's policies: "Tuna vilayeti teşkilât-ı kanuniyesinden beklenen istifadenin hayalât-ı safiyeden ibaret olduğunu vukuât bize göstermiş iken hâlâ o meslekden ayrılmıyoruz.."

He concluded his report in a "tragic" style:

If the Iraqi reforms which I have set out in 12 points... are gradually put into practice... it is certain that before long Iraq will make its presence felt as another Egypt.... However, the *valis* who are to be appointed to this region must be clever, active, capable, knowledgeable about the law and acquainted with the affairs, lovers of religion, fatherland and state, and patriotic. If it is not possible to find three *valis* who possess these qualities, the provinces of Mosul and Basra must be united [with Baghdad] and the whole entrusted to a single authority. Otherwise, with persons of inferior quality (*tabakat-ı hilkat-ı beşeriyenin mertebe-i payebendinde*), especially with the present *valis* in this region, it is an obvious fact that the proposed reforms will not take place."

Mehmed Pasha, a former *vali* of Bitlis, also prepared a report, dated August 1892, to give his opinion about reforms in Iraq.<sup>55</sup> After praising the fertility of the land in Iraq and comparing it with that of Egypt, he focused attention on three points: the problems of irrigation, arrears in taxes, and the tribes. He concentrated on the latter issue, as the key to a solution of all other problems. Specifically, he argued that it was essential to break the power of the tribal sheikhs. He argued that the tribesmen were willing to get rid of their sheikhs, but complained that local officials protected the sheikhs. If state land were distributed to the tribesmen, and if they were supervised by *muhtars* (elected village headmen) instead of sheikhs, he asserted, tribal inter-relationships, or rather, the solidarity of the tribes, would eventually dissolve. The beneficial effects of such a policy would include growth in agriculture, and new conscripts for the army. "It is obvious that if this harmful state of affairs is ended and the land is distributed to the cultivating population, in a short span of time, Iraq will be thoroughly prosperous, and the state will benefit in full from its revenues, army recruits, and other matters."<sup>56</sup>

The sultan referred Mehmed Pasha's report to Müşir Şakir Pasha, one of his chief advisers.<sup>57</sup> Şakir Pasha generally endorsed the points that Mehmed Pasha had made, and, like Mehmed Pasha, he stressed the issue of nomadism. In his opinion, the

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55 BOA, YEE 31/252/76/81, "Mehmed Paşa Layihası", dated 19 Muharrem 1310.

56 He elaborated the harmful position of shaikhs to the tribesmen and to the state. He showed the sheikh system to be the core of the problem in agriculture and discussed the share of this in the misery of the region.

57 BOA, YEE31/252/76/81, "Yâver-i Ekrem Şakir Paşa Layihası", dated 14 Eylül sene 92. For Müşir Şakir Pasha, see Ali Karaca, *Anadolu İslahatı ve Ahmet Şakir Paşa, 1838-1899*, Eren, İstanbul 1993; FO 195/1794, no.13, 21/4/1893, military biographies by Chermiside, no.15: "Mushir Shakir Pasha, ex-ambassador to Russia... He served under Midhat Pasha at Baghdad..."; cf. *Tahsin Paşa'nın Yıldız Hatıraları*, Boğaziçi, İstanbul 1990), p. 21; comparing with Mehmed Pasha, Şakir Pasha preferred a more moderate way in dealing with the tribes. He proposed to partly use force, and mainly administrative and financial arrangements, in order to encourage the tribesmen to settle and cultivate. He assured the sultan that, "there is no doubt that a province as prosperous and wealthy as Egypt will come into being..."

tribes' power should first be broken, even by using force, and they should be settled; the encouragement of agriculture should follow. He also supported the idea of forming Hamidiye Regiments in Iraq. In addition, however, he proposed the establishment of a *Firat Vilayeti* (Province of the Euphrates) in northern Iraq as an aid to dealing with the tribal problem.<sup>58</sup>

### III

Not until 1898 did the central government return to the question of reform in Iraq. In that year, complaints of alleged misconduct by the *vali* and the *defterdar* of Baghdad led to the appointment of a commission of investigation, which drew up two reports, one for Baghdad, and one for Mosul.<sup>59</sup>

In its report on the *vilayet* of Baghdad, the commission stated that it was very unfortunate that the province, despite having the most abundant rivers and lands "in the world", remained undeveloped, and that the people of the *vilayet* lived in poverty in spite of such resources. The commission added that the treasury of the state had been gaining nothing from Baghdad, and blamed all these deficiencies upon the incapacity of the local officials, which left the people of the *vilayet* deprived of proper education and agricultural means and vulnerable to the influence of Shi'i *mujtahids*. The report also stated that in spite of the previous visits of several similar commissions to the region nothing practical had resulted.<sup>60</sup>

As for Mosul, the commission indicated that although Mosul had fertile lands, no public works had been carried out, and the province still remained in its old state. It was unfortunate, it declared, that *vilayet* officials did not care about anything but their own interests; not surprisingly, bandits and usurpers had emerged in every corner of the province, and even existing public works had been demolished. The

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58 Ibid. Sultan Abdülhamid seems to have read these reports carefully. The following statement is found in *Pensees et souvenirs de l'ex-Sultan Abdul Hamid II*, dated 1899:

Baron von Oppenheim's book on Mesopotamia beautifully demonstrates the economic importance of the Tigris and Euphrates valley. This remarkable study, of which a summary was given to me, confirms the truth of my valis' reports on the future of Mesopotamia.

After stressing the importance of the construction of Baghdad railway from economic and strategic points of view, he went on to say that:

If later we can establish a sensible irrigation network, by exploiting the twin rivers of the Tigris and the Euphrates, we can transform these very desiccated places of the present into a paradise just as it was thousands of years ago.

In Sultan II. Abdülhamid, *Siyasî Hattatım*, Dergah Yayınları, İstanbul 1974, p.94.

59 See BOA, Y.A.Res. 112/54, 18 Safer 1319. In 1898, Mustafa Bey, a Lieutenant of the General Staff (*Erkân-ı Harbiye Kaymakamı*) in Baghdad, had sent a telegram to the Grand Vizier to complain about the misconduct of Namik Pasha, the *vali*, and of the *defterdar*. In response, a commission of investigation was formed by Abdülhamid and sent to Baghdad.

60 Ibid. 112/54 (26), 27 Nisan 1317.

commission stated that it was high time to stop this corruption and abuse and to execute a serious reform policy in the *vilayet*. In particular, taxes should be collected properly, and the revenues should be remitted to the state treasury.<sup>61</sup>

#### IV

If the 1890s, like the 1880s, were marked by governmental discussions of reform in Iraq, which led to little practical result, the first years of the twentieth century saw the Ottoman government give serious attention to concrete projects for action. The cause of this change was the belated taking in hand of the long-discussed plan for a Baghdad railway that would link the Ottoman capital with the Persian Gulf.<sup>62</sup> In 1888, as a first step toward the realisation of this plan, Abdülhamid had awarded to a group of German entrepreneurs a concession for an Anatolian railway to link Istanbul with Ankara and Konya. Even before the completion of this Anatolian railway in 1896, the sultan had approached the Germans on the subject of an extension of the railway to Baghdad and the Gulf.<sup>63</sup> Initially, however, the German government and German financiers were cautious, and not until May 1899, following Kaiser Wilhelm II's visit to Istanbul,<sup>64</sup> did the promoters of the Anatolian railway decide to apply for a concession. Accordingly, Abdülhamid issued a preliminary decree to award the project to the Germans in November 1899.<sup>65</sup> The following negotiations on the

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61 *Ibid.* 112/54 (25), 28 Nisan 1317.

62 At least as early as 1871, the Ottomans were interested in a railway project linking Istanbul with Baghdad. From Midhat Pasa's governor-generalship onwards, on every possible occasion, Ottoman statesmen and the advisers of the Porte advocated the merits of a such project, from a political to a financial point of view. For example, in almost all the reports dealing with reform in Iraq, in early 1880s and 1890s, from Abdurrahman Pasha to Nusret Pasha, special consideration was given to a railway between Istanbul and Basra. For a general overview, see İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Alman Nüfuzu*, Hil, Istanbul 1983, pp. 89ff. For the story of Baghdad railway in general, see J.B. Wolff, *The Diplomatic History of the Baghdad Railroad*, Octagon Books, New York 1973 and Edward Earle, *Turkey, the Great Powers and the Baghdad Railway: a Study in Imperialism*, Macmillan, New York 1923.

63 For details, see Ortaylı, *Alman Nüfuzu*, p.102; Murat Özyüksel, *Osmanlı-Alman İlişkilerinin Gelişim Sürecinde Anadolu ve Bağdat Demiryolları*, Arba, Istanbul 1988, pp.101ff; Wolff, *Baghdad Railroad*, pp.12ff.

64 For details, see Özyüksel, *Bağdat Demiryolları*, pp.120ff and 130ff; Wolf, *Baghdad Railroad*, pp.32ff.

65 Earle, *Baghdad Railway*, pp.21 and 59ff; Özyüksel, *Bağdat Demiryolları*, pp.133-34, 152-154, 172; Griffith, 'The Reorganization of the Ottoman Army', pp.81-82; Ortaylı, *Alman Nüfuzu*, pp. 113-114, 145. By then Abdülhamid appears to have been firmly convinced about the importance and future prospects of the Baghdad railway project. In 1899, most probably in the midst of fresh negotiations after the Kaiser's visit, it was noted in the *Pensees et Souvenirs de l'ex-Sultan Abdul Hamid II* that:

project, however, immediately ran into serious financial and diplomatic complications, provoked not least by the reservations of the Russian, French and British governments; and although final agreements were included with the German consortium in 1902 and 1903, only a small proportion of the project had been completed by 1908, the year of the Young Turk Revolution, which put an effective end to the Hamidian regime.<sup>66</sup> The details of these financial and diplomatic complications will not be examined here; rather, attention will be focused on the implications of the railway project for Ottoman policy towards Iraq.

From the start, Abdülhamid appears to have foreseen that the railway could open the way to substantial irrigation projects in Iraq. He discussed his ideas with the Kaiser in 1899, but in the event, German financiers proved reluctant to commit themselves.<sup>67</sup>

The first practical demonstration of interest came from a British engineer, Sir William Willcocks, who visited southern Iraq in the winter of 1904-1905, examining the districts between the Tigris and the Euphrates in the vicinity of Baghdad, with a view to ascertaining what schemes of irrigation would be practicable.<sup>68</sup> After completing his studies, Willcocks published a pamphlet, *The Irrigation of Mesopotamia*, in April 1905. In June of that year, Willcocks visited Istanbul and asked the British Ambassador, Sir Nicolas O'Conor, whether he would draw the sultan's attention to the two particular schemes outlined in his pamphlet, by which a territory of some 640,000 acres between Baghdad and Fallujah would be restored to cultivation, saying that he hoped to be able to form a company in London for the purpose. But although O'Conor

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"The time has come to give serious consideration to the construction of the Baghdad railway. In spite of the British who make every effort to hinder the application of our plans, the works must be started as soon as possible. Thanks to the Baghdad railway, the old European-Indian trade route is to become useful once again. If this railway is connected with Syria and Beirut, and Alexandria and Haifa, a new trade route would emerge. This railway will not only secure great benefit to our Empire from the economic point of view, but at the same time it will be very important from the military point of view as it will serve to strengthen our force in those parts." in *Siyasi Hatıratım*, p.94.

66 See Earle, *Baghdad Railway*, pp.67ff; Wolf, *Baghdad Railroad*, pp.32ff; Özyüksel, *Bağdat Demiryolları*, pp.134-35, 146-49, 152ff; for the text of 1903 agreement, see J.C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, I, Yale University Press, New Haven 1975, pp.495-506; see also *Düstur I*, vol.7, p.361: "Bagdad Demiryolu Mukavelenâme-i İbtidaisi, 21 Receb 1317", and, p.953: "Bagdad Demiryolu İmtiyaz Mukavelenâmesi, 20 Şubat 1318"; for a discussion on the 1903 convention, see Earle, *Baghdad Railway*, pp.82ff; for the rest of the events up to 1908, see *Ibid.*, passim, and Wolf, *Baghdad Railroad*, pp.40ff, 48ff. After 1904, only a few hundred kilometers of line were constructed; the line was stopped in Bulgurlu.

67 See *Siyasi Hatıratım*, p.94, and his conversation with the Kaiser, in Özyüksel, *Bağdat Demiryolları*, p.121.

68 See FO 424/208, no.56, O'Conor to Lansdowne, no.406 conf., Therapia, 12 June 1905; and FO 424/210, no.4, O'Conor to Lansdowne, no.36, Constantinople, 23 January 1906; see also FO 195/2164, no.1035/81, 26 December 1904; for Sir William Willcocks, see Earle, *Baghdad Railway*, p.214 n.41, and p.205; the matter first mentioned in the British sources during the Baghdad railway debate in early 1903, see 424/205, no.40, Lascelles to Lansdowne, no.110, Berlin, 8 May 1903.

presented the general features of the two schemes to Abdülhamid, the latter warned that he would be prepared to consider them only after a company had been formed and its terms made known to him.<sup>69</sup> Willcocks went to London, but was unable to obtain sufficient British capital to carry out his schemes, and for a while the matter was dropped.<sup>70</sup> It may be suspected that even if Willcocks had obtained the necessary capital, Abdülhamid would not have given the concession to him or any other British company, given his long-standing suspicion of British ambitions in Iraq.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, no foreign alternative to Willcocks' proposal presented itself, and the Porte decided around 1906 to take the initiative into its own hands, sending a French engineer, M. Cuny, to examine the possibility of damming the Euphrates at Hindiya and also to find out whether the Euphrates could be made navigable.<sup>72</sup>

At the beginning of 1907, another French Engineer, M. Cugnin, was brought in to work out the Hindiya irrigation scheme. It appears that the new *vali*, Ebubekir Hâzım Bey, had also received instructions on this project, for soon after his arrival he called a meeting of the local committee that had been reporting on it,<sup>73</sup> and later, in March 1907, he visited Hindiya, where he inspected the site of the proposed barrage.<sup>74</sup> The details of the work at the Hindiya barrage are not known, but British

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69 Details of the conversation between Abdülhamid and O'Connor on the subject is in FO 424/208, no. 56, dated 12 June 1905. The proposal given to the Sultan is in Ibid. inclosure in no.56, "Brief precis of Sir W. M. Willcocks' report on the irrigation of Mesopotamia." Upon the request of the sultan, a brief summary of these proposals in Turkish was presented to the Palace, see Ibid. enclosure 2 in no. 56, "Memorandum Laid before the Sultan on Friday, June 9", and subsequently translated into Turkish and forwarded to the Palace. For Willcocks' proceedings afterwards, see 424/208, no.73, O'Connor to Lansdowne, no. 543, Therapia, 7 August 1905.

70 FO 424/210, inclosure in no.4, "Memorandum on Sir W. Willcocks' Projects in Southern Mesopotamia", by Mark Sykes.

71 He had become convinced over the years that to give a concession to the British in Mesopotamia, whether it was a railway or irrigation project, meant, in the long run, giving the title-deed of Iraq to Britain. See, for example, his remark on a British-backed railway proposal (İskenderun-Aleppo-Baghdad) in 1903: "...İngilizlere burayı inşa ettirmek, Dicle-Firat vadisini onlara bırakmak demektir..." in *Siyasi Hatıratım*, p. 161; ironically, Willcocks concluded one of his pamphlets on the issue as follows: "...It may surely be permitted us to contemplate the dawn of a new area of peace and prosperity in this afflicted land. Thousands and tens of thousands of industrious labourers from British India, and possibly from Egypt, will soon be flocking to the Delta of the Tigris..." in *The Restoration of the Ancient Irrigation Works on the Tigris or the Re-Creation of Chaldea*, Cairo 1903, p.31.

72 The government borrowed 100,000 liras from the Ottoman Bank for this initiative. See the memorandum by Grand Vizier Rifat Pasha, dated 13 Ramazan 1324-17 Teşrin-i evvel 1322, enclosed with İrade-Dahiliye, no.12, 11 Şevval 1324; at about the same time, in January 1906, Willcocks once again resumed his activities and was willing to obtain a concession from the Privy Purse. See FO 424/210, enclosure in no.4, "Memorandum on Sir W. Willcocks' Projects in Southern Mesopotamia", by Mark Sykes.

73 FO 195/2242, Political Diary of the Baghdad Residency for the week ending 25th February 1907. In February, M. Cugnin was in the area to make soundings, in accordance with orders received from Istanbul.

74 FO 195/2242, Political Diary of the Baghdad Residency for the week ending 19th March 1907.

consular reports show that M. Cugnin was dismissed by the Porte in October 1907.<sup>75</sup> It appears, however, that the work did not stop, but was carried on by Ottoman engineers.<sup>76</sup>

A further issue related to the Baghdad railway was petroleum. The Ottoman government had realized the importance of petroleum in Iraq as early as the 1880s, when, at the suggestion of Agob Pasha, the Treasurer of the Privy Purse, Abdülhamid had issued two decrees, placing the oil properties of Mosul and Baghdad in the possession of the Privy Purse.<sup>77</sup> Around 1893-94, Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian, an Armenian petroleum engineer, was commissioned by the Privy Purse to prepare a comprehensive report on the oil prospects of Mesopotamia.<sup>78</sup> From an international point of view, this had been a delicate issue since 1888, when the Anatolian railway concession was granted, because the concessionnaires had obtained from the Ottoman government a promise of preferential treatment with regard to mining rights. In the end, these rights were confirmed in the Baghdad Railway Convention of 1903, which permitted the continuation of the railway, line from Konya to the Persian Gulf, and included specific mineral and oil exploitation rights, applicable to a twenty-kilometre strip on either side of the proposed line.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, in July 1904, the Anatolian Railway Company signed a contract with the Privy Purse authorities, giving the company a one year option to undertake preliminary soundings for oil in the Mosul and Baghdad *vilayets*, on the understanding that the petroleum concession would be determined according to the results of this preliminary investigation. In the event, however, the Germans exceeded the one-year time limit without any reasonable explanation, and negotiations on a petroleum concession remained deadlocked until the

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75 FO 424/213, no.165, O'Connor to Grey, no.746 confidential, Pera, 5 December 1907; FO 424/214, enclosure 1 in no.28, Ramsay to O'Connor, no.133 strictly confidential, Baghdad, 3 December 1907. Also includes a "Note by M.Cugnin on the Suklawiya Canal" in French; the official reason was that there might be delay in carrying out the project. See FO 424/214, enclosure in no.31, extract from confidential memorandum no.12 by Consul-General Newmarch.

76 See the article "Irrigation" by Suleiman Sirri, in *Modern Turkey* (ed. E.G. Mears), New York 1924, pp. 265-79. Süleyman Sirri Bey himself was in charge of the project; after the Young Turk Revolution, however, the project was conceded to Willcocks. For the rest of the story, see FO 424/214, no. 100, Barclay to Grey, no.141, Pera, 25 March 1908; FO 424/216, no.138, Lowther to Grey, no.583, Therapia, 17 September 1908; FO 424/213, inclosure in no.174, Memorandum by Consul-General Ramsay, no.11 Confidential, dated 25 November 1907.

77 See Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil 1900-1920*, Macmillan, London 1976 and Stephen H. Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East: its Discovery and Development*, 3rd ed., OUP, London 1968; for the texts of the decrees, see Şensözen, *Abdülhamid'in Emlâkı*; see also Uriel Dann, "Report on the Petroliferous Districts of Mesopotamia (1905)- An Annotated Document," *Asian and African Studies*, 24 (November 1990), 283-292; Captain F.R. Maunsell, "The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field", *The Geographical Journal*, 9 (1897), 528-532.

78 See, Ralph Hewins, *Mr Five Per Cent: the Biography of Calouste Gulbenkian*, Hutchison, London 1957, pp.x, xvi, 29.

79 Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p.16; cf. Hurewitz, *Middle East and North Africa*, p.501: article 22.

Young Turk Revolution.<sup>80</sup> It should be added that from 1904 onwards, other bidders, including British entrepreneurs, made approaches to the Ottoman government for Iraqi petroleum concessions, but with no positive result.<sup>81</sup>

The sultan had also begun to manifest a new interest in the question of improving navigation on the Tigris and the Euphrates. In 1898, he had broached the topic to the German Kaiser and hinted at his interest in obtaining German finance, but this and subsequent approaches to Berlin brought no positive result.<sup>82</sup> For unclear reasons, the matter was dropped for a long while. At last, in early 1904, a new administration, the Hamidiye Navigation Company, was formed under the Privy Purse, and all property and vessels of the Oman-Ottoman Administration were transferred to the new company. There were four steamers with two barges at the time of the takeover. Two new steamers, built in Scotland, were added in 1905, together with four new barges.<sup>83</sup>

In the meantime, the sensitive issue of land tenure in Iraq had also come to the fore. In April 1902, a memorandum was sent to the Council of State by the Ministry of Finance, warning that the problems in the region concerning land tenure, and therefore taxation, were coming to a head and a radical solution was needed. After nearly two years, having examined the related documents, the Reform Legislation Section of the Council of State backed the arguments put by the Ministry, and reached the conclusion that a special commission should be formed for this purpose.<sup>84</sup> Although Grand Vizier Ferid Pasha presented this proposal for the sultan's approval with an encouraging introduction, saying that "the apportionment and cultivation of the land in Iraq takes place in a variety of ways, and it is not right to leave the lands of Iraq, which have the capacity to increase the present financial strength of the state, in such a situation....",<sup>85</sup> Abdülhamid does not appear to have given his consent for this, at least in the short term.

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80 For the articles of the contract, see Kent, *Oil and Empire*, pp. 16-17. for the developments after 1904, *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20, and appendix. After the Young Turk Revolution, all properties of the Privy Purse, together with the petroleum fields, were transferred to the Ministry of Finance, to which all claims had to be re-submitted.

81 For details, see *Ibid.*, and Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East*.

82 In their conversation with the Kaiser in late 1898, beside the extension of the railway to Mesopotamia, Abdülhamid proposed another project to him concerning Iraq: to organise and improve the navigation on the Tigris and the Euphrates, with the help of German finance. For details, see Özyüksel, *Bağdat Demiryolları*, pp. 109-111.

83 J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, And Central Arabia*, Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta 1908-1915, I-1B, 1540. For many years the Ottoman commercial steamers in Iraq had been run by the Oman-Ottoman Administration, which was a branch of the Ottoman Ministry of the Navy. The property of the Administration was transferred to the Privy Purse, in consideration of a payment of 9,500 lira; cf. BOA, Y.A.Res. 147/106 (5), 7 Mayıs 1323. For the Privy Purse in Iraq, see Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, IIA, 861-68.

84 BOA, Y.A.Res. 126/26, enclosure 2, "Şura-yı Devlet Tanzimat Dairesi tezkeresi, no. 425", dated 2 Safer 1322-5 Nisan 1320. For the commission, they proposed Yanko Efendi and Nazif Beyefendi, members of the Council of State, and Zuheyrzâde Ahmed Pasha, a member of the Council of State and a notable of Basra, and Hüsnü Efendi, *Mahkeme-i Teftiş-i Evkaf Müsteşarı*, and Aram Efendi, *Ziraat Heyet-i Fenniyesi Reisi*, and Şevket Pasha, a former Chief Secretary of the Baghdad *vilayet*.

85 BOA, Y.A.Res. 126/26, enclosure 1, signed Sadrazam Ferid, dated 17 Rebiülevvel 1322-20 Mayıs 1320.

## V

The year 1905 proved to be a watershed, marking the point at which Abdülhamid's regime finally set out to consider, as well as implement a project of general reform in the Iraqi *vilayets*. This change of attitude was prompted in the first instance by concern at the state of the 6th Army, a concern heightened by a growing number of serious security problems in and around Iraq. These problems included serious tribal outbreaks in the *vilayets* of Basra and Mosul; troubles between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid in Najd; the eruption of a major border conflict with Iran; the possibility that growing political conflicts within Iran might lead to difficulties with Iraq's substantial Shi'i population; and fears of British aggression in the Gulf.

At the beginning of 1905, Abdülhamid despatched a commission of investigation, under Major-General Veli Pasha, to Iraq. The commission's report has not been traced, though it is known that it was closely examined at the Porte.<sup>86</sup> What is certain is that from this time onwards the central government grew more active in the region. The appointment in October 1905 of a new *vali* to Baghdad, Mecid Efendi,<sup>87</sup> was followed by measures concerning the 6th Army.

In March 1906, Abdülhamid appointed another commission, under Major-General Veli Pasha, to enquire into the conflict, which had broken out between Süleyman Şevki Pasha, the Commander of the 6th Army, and Muhlis Pasha, the *vali* and commander of Basra, over the implementation of policies towards the tribes of Amarah and Muntafiq, and also to enquire into the current state of the 6th Army. The commission left Istanbul in April 1906,<sup>88</sup> and evidently returned a damning initial report. Orders followed to the effect that the 6th Army should be brought to the level of perfection of the other armies (*diğer ordular gibi bir hâl-i mükemmele*),<sup>89</sup> and that salaries and allowances due to the soldiers and the officers of the 6th Army should be paid on

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86 The commission reported back to the Palace in May 1905. Abdülhamid sent their report to the grand vizier, Ferid Pasha, and asked for the establishment of a new commission, under the Minister of the Interior, to study the report. Afterwards, the conclusion reached by this later commission was to be discussed in the Council of Ministers. See BOA, İrade-Hususi, no.64, 25 Rebiyülevvel 1323-17 Mayıs 1321; the three members of the commission were Major-General Veli Pasha, the Sultan's aide-de-camp, Fehmi Bey, deputy chairman of the Office of the Domestic Press (*matbuat-ı dahiliye müdür muavinterinden*), and Colonel Mustafa Bey of the General Staff.

87 See BOA, İrade-Hususi, no.65, 23 Şaban 1323. It was reported, for example, towards the end of July 1906 by the British Consul-General at Baghdad that some of the results of the labours of the special commission under the *vali* were now becoming known. FO 195/2214, Diary to Government of India for the week ending 30th July 1906. Cf. diary dated 7th May 1906.

88 BOA, İrade-Hususi, no.105, 29 Muharrem 1324, and *Ibid.*, no.51, 10 Safer 1324. The members were Major-General Veli Pasha, Colonel Mehmed Tevfik Bey, and Adjutant Major (*Kolağası*) Süleyman Fethi Efendi of the General Staff.

89 BOA, İrade-Hususi, no.18, 4 Cemaziyelevvel 1324.

time.<sup>90</sup> Before long, a re-shuffle took place among the staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, some of whom were compulsorily retired and replaced.<sup>91</sup> Other steps followed. It was reported in July 1906 that a commission from Istanbul to inquire into the state of the tribes along the Tigris was expected at Baghdad<sup>92</sup> and that another commission was expected to examine the accounts of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army. Material improvements in the 6<sup>th</sup> Army continued: an important amount of munitions was sent to Baghdad from Mosul.<sup>93</sup>

Most important of all, in July 1906, Pertev Pasha, a young, German-educated officer, was sent to Baghdad.<sup>94</sup> As the British Military Attache, Colonel Surtees, reported:<sup>95</sup>

Pertev Pasha... has been sent to Baghdad, nominally as Chief of the Staff of the Marshal Suleiman Pasha, but, in reality, with full powers to reorganise the VIth Army corps, which for a long time has been in a lamentable condition of disorganisation- all the more unfortunate from a Turkish point of view, as this Corps should be an important factor in dealing with the rebellion in the Nejd, as well as with possible developments on the Persian frontier and in the Kuwait district. Pertev Pasha, it is understood, has received instructions to form, as soon as he has reorganised the VIth Army Corps, a flying column at Bussorah, fully equipped with the *material* necessary to a desert campaign, and with it to penetrate into the Nejd and the adjacent country, which is peopled by tribes who have never yet really submitted to Turkish authority. Pertev Pasha... has received instructions to reorganise the troops at Baghdad and at Bussorah, but the principal object of his mission is to create some sort of order amongst the tribes, soldiers, and officials, who all join in pillaging Arabs in the country between Baghdad and Bussorah.

It appears from the British consular reports that Pertev Pasha was very active. It was reported in December 1906 that twenty four officers had come to Baghdad from the 4<sup>th</sup> Army at Erzincan for the purpose of teaching the Mauser drill to the troops of the Baghdad command.<sup>96</sup> As part of Pertev Pasha's mission to the region, another

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90 BOA, İrade-Hususi, no.81, 27 Rebiyülâhîr 1324.

91 See FO 195/2214, Diary to Government of India for the week ending 30th July 1906; FO 195/2214, no. 564/53, Ramsay to O'Conor, Baghdad, 25 June 1906, gives full list of the names of those who were put on the pension list and officers who were appointed to the latter's posts; FO 195/2214, no. 564/53, Ramsay to O'Conor, Baghdad, 25 June 1906. Cf. Dağistanlı, *Muhammed Fazıl Paşa*, pp.67-68.

92 FO 195/2214, Diary to Government of India for the week ending 30th July 1906.

93 Ibid.

94 For Pertev Pasha [Demirhan], see İbrahim Alaettin Gövsa, *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi*, Yenigün, İstanbul n.d., pp.308-309. Before coming to Baghdad, he was Military Attache with the Japanese Army during the Russo-Japanese War. Cf. FO 195/2176, from Military Attache, Colonel Maunsell, to O'Conor, no.49, Therapia, 8 August 1904.

95 FO 424/210, inclosure 2 in no.71, Memorandum respecting Affairs in the Yemen and Nejd, by Colonel Surtees [Military Attache], dated Constantinople, August 9, 1906.

96 FO 195/2215, Political Diary of the Baghdad Residency for the week ending 10th December 1906.

attempt was made in Mosul to register the population in proper. Yet, as was expected, riots soon broke out and this came to nothing.<sup>97</sup> In 1907, he made long inspection tours throughout the three *vilayets*.<sup>98</sup>

Before long, however, it became apparent that a purely military reform would not suffice. In August 1906, in response to a request from the War Ministry, Süleyman Şevki Pasha, the Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, submitted a report on the measures required to bring the forces under his command to "an active state."<sup>99</sup> Süleyman Pasha put the blame for current inadequacies squarely on the civil authorities, who, being mostly incapable and corrupt, were obstructing the Army's ability to function properly. The immediate problems were, first, that the military authorities could not recruit sufficient conscripts from the three *vilayets*; second, that because of continuous tribal uprisings, troops had to be diverted to southern Iraq; and third, that the Army lacked the funds to pay regular salaries, and even to feed its soldiers. The root cause of these problems, he argued, was the incompetence and corruption of the administrative and financial officials of the three *vilayets*, and in particular their serious abuses in the field of tax-collection and their practice of farming out substantial state lands to the chiefs of the tribes, who consequently gained influence and power. He also warned that almost all tribes in the Mosul region were armed with illegal (*memnu*) modern weapons, and that this encouraged them to cause trouble in the region. He proposed that a Reform Committee (*heyet-i islahiye*) be sent to Iraq, and be given four tasks. It should investigate the administrative and financial officials, and remove the incapable and corrupt ones; it should reorganise the system of tax-collection; it should work to settle the tribes, and therefore improve agricultural and social conditions; and it should disarm the tribes, and thereby protect the inhabitants from their aggression. As a result of these measures, once conscription had been improved, the population had been registered, the army's supply needs had been met, and tax-farming had been placed on a proper footing, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army could be brought to an active state (*hâl-i faaliyet*).<sup>100</sup>

Süleyman Pasha's report was at once challenged by the Minister of the Interior, Memduh Pasha, who questioned whether the entire blame for the state of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army could be placed on the civil and financial authorities of the three *vilayets*. He

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97 FO 424/210, inclosure in no.126, Political Diary of the Baghdad Residency for the week ending October 29, 1906. See also FO 195/2215, p.258, para. 133&138.

98 See Dağistanlı, *Muhammed Fazıl Paşa*, p.217.

99 BOA, İrade-Dahiliye, no.12, 11 Şevval 1324, enclosing the *tezkere* of Serasker Rıza Paşa. After having received the last instruction of the sultan to the effect that the 6<sup>th</sup> Army should bring to an active state, the *serasker* had asked the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army to give his opinion as to the measures to be taken.

100 BOA, İrade-Dahiliye, no.12, 11 Şevval 1324, enclosing the *tezkere* of the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, dated 30 Temmuz 1322.

noted that a recent investigation by the *vali* of Baghdad had uncovered serious misconduct and irregularities within the 6<sup>th</sup> Army itself. The Minister did not deny the need for measures of reform, and in particular, for the suppression of tribal disturbances, but he questioned whether there was any point in sending a commission to the region. After all, several such commissions had been sent to Iraq over the years, at considerable expense, and their collected reports contained ample information upon which to base a policy decision.<sup>101</sup>

Memduh Pasha's objections were endorsed by Grand Vizier Ferid Pasha, who advised Abdülhamid to appoint a four-man commission at the Porte to re-examine all previous proposals for reform in Iraq. Ferid Pasha particularly stressed the damage sustained by the central treasury as a result of the inadequacies of tax-collection and the disorganisation of agriculture in Iraq; he also suggested that the commission examine the personnel records of all civil and financial officials employed in the three Iraqi *vilayets*.<sup>102</sup> After a month's consideration, Abdülhamid endorsed these proposals.<sup>103</sup> A commission was set up under Hacı Akif Pasha, the official with overall responsibility for military supplies (*Teçhizat-ı Askeriye Nâzırı*); the other members were Zühdü Pasha, a former *vali* of Mosul, Rifat Bey, a former *defterdar* of Baghdad, and Sayyid Talib Pasha, the son of the Naqib of Basra. After five months of deliberations, the commission reported in May 1907.<sup>104</sup>

The commission's report imparted an important revelation, which may help to explain the government's revived interest in Iraqi reform. It stated explicitly that the revenues of the Iraqi *vilayets* were in serious decline. It blamed this in part upon failure to control the Tigris and the Euphrates, which exposed the agriculture of the region to periodic drought and to periodic flooding. In Baghdad, floods occurred every two or three years, destroying valuable agricultural land and property; in the Basra *vilayet*, too, considerable damage had been caused in recent years by the flooding of the Tigris. The commission urged the government to construct dams and irrigation works, as the essential foundation for the steady development of Iraq's considerable agricultural resources.

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101 BOA, İrade-Dahiliye, no.12, 11 Şevval 1324, enclosing the *tezkere* of the Ministry of the Interior, dated 22 Şaban 1324-27 Eylül 1322. He therefore proposed that, instead of sending another commission to the region, all available documents and reports produced by the previous reform commissions and civil and military officials should be brought together, examined and then studied. Only then, the proper measures could be taken and implemented, in accordance with the result of this re-examination; among the previous commissions, he mentioned the Veli Pasha commission as the last one.

102 BOA, İrade-Dahiliye, no.12, 11 Şevval 1324, enclosing the *tezkere* of Sadrazam Rifat Pasha, dated 13 Ramazan 1324-17 Teşrin-i evvel 1322.

103 Ibid., the minute on the Grand Vizier's *tezkere*, dated 11 Şevval 1324-14 Teşrin-i sâni 1322.

104 All relevant documents are found in BOA, Y.A.Res. 147/106, 26 Cemaziyevvel 1325-24 Haziran 1323.

The commission was also highly critical of the existing methods of tax-collection in Iraq, which pre-dated the Tanzimat era. The present system of tax-farming gave no incentive to agricultural improvement, since short-term contracts discouraged fallowing and investment in drainage. Taxes upon livestock were another problem. Although stock-breeding in Iraq was a major activity, the tribes were adept at hiding their flocks from the tax-collectors.<sup>105</sup>

The commission expressed forthright opinions on the subject of the state lands. It noted that official records identified 1,248 parcels of such land, covering an area of 11,275,100 *dönüms*, in the three Iraqi *vilayets* and that the bulk of these lands were leased out under the supervision of local officials of the Finance Ministry. The commission raised three objections to this system: it produced poor returns to the treasury; it was wide open to corruption and abuse; and the leasees had no incentive to improve their lands. The solution was to sell the state lands to the public. With security of tenure, the new owners would develop their lands, bringing prosperity and order to Iraq. The tribes, which currently migrated from one temporary lease to another, would be permanently settled. The treasury, too, would gain. It would obtain millions of liras from the sales, and in the longer term, as agriculture prospered, tax revenues would rise "tenfold".<sup>106</sup>

The commission paid particular attention to the tribal issue, distinguishing between settled tribes who lived in huts and practised farming and stock-breeding; and unsettled tribes who lived by the sheep and camel trade and by looting. The latter were usually at war with each other, and special measures should be taken against this tribal fighting, which was destroying the population, agriculture, trade and infrastructure of Iraq. Specifically, special commissions, whose members were accustomed to the region, should be appointed to deal with tribes, in particular the chiefs; refractory tribes should have their rights to land withdrawn, at least for a while; efforts should be made to educate the children of the tribes; and lands or leases should be distributed. The report also mentioned the need for general registration of the population of Iraq.

The report recommended that the government should establish a reform commission, composed of persons who were capable, trustful, and had local knowledge, to visit Iraq and to prepare a report on a reform policy:<sup>107</sup>

If God wills, this time, under the successful auspices of His Imperial Majesty, through an initiative of the utmost seriousness and activity, a way of benefiting from the sources of wealth which Iraq's land bears is to be taken. For it is clear that His Imperial Majesty will not tolerate, but will surely remedy, the afore-explained decline of Iraq, which produced, as history proves, one hundred

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105 See *Ibid.*, 147/106 (5), 7 Rebiyülâhîr 1325-7 Mayıs 1323.

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*

million gold liras' revenue annually in ages when continents now accounted among the world's most developed regions were as yet unknown and undiscovered, and which, with its numerous fine arts, was an example of skill and civilisation to the whole world. It is true that an enormous region, which has been subjected over long ages to various disasters, and finally come to this condition, will not be brought to the level of prosperous civilised countries all at once. It is not, however, wise to leave it in its present state, which allows the increase and extension of the scope of an illegitimate way of life. To bring about the desired effect, it is enough only to secure the relation between government and country, and to apply a system of administration in which both of them, with one heart and one goal may work for the prosperity of the region. For there can be no greater proof that mankind cannot be turned away from a law of nature such as self-interest, than the fact that almost all the people of a country, which was once the birthplace of the Hanafi sect, have been converted to Shi'ism through the material seductions of the Iranians and the English. Therefore, since preaching and exhortation will scarcely suffice to save the order of the country from its chronic internal sickness, it is above all essential to pay attention to the population's material interests, and this depends upon securing benefits by stopping damage [caused by] the Iraqi rivers, and upon giving the population a right to exploit the land.

The commission went on to give a list of its preferences in this respect. First and foremost, the works at the Hindiya barrage should be continued without any interruption.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, the state lands in Iraq should be divided into three classes, and transferred (*tefviz ve ihalât*) to the public. The first class, comprising irrigated lands should be sold by auction. With the money thus obtained, the second class of lands should be irrigated, and sold off at appropriate prices (*bedelât-ı lâyike ve münâsibe*). The third class of land should be given to the people without charge, on the condition that they themselves should build irrigation canals. As a rule, nobody should be allowed to possess more than 5,000 *dönüms* of land. The commission's third preference was for the removal of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army's headquarters to Suleymaniya, since the sancaks of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniya were the most troubled areas in Iraq.<sup>109</sup> The fourth preference was that the reform in Iraq should be carried out through a single and powerful committee, in order to avoid the problems arising from the existence of three separate *vilayets*.<sup>110</sup> Speed was of the essence, given Iraq's increasing international importance:

In short, apart from the evident foreign deceptions and influences, it has seemed essential that the state manifest some sign of concern and activity in the Iraqi region, which is exposed to several [European] powers' rivalry on account of the Baghdad railway, before [those powers] commence action on their own behalf.

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108 Ibid.

109 Ibid. They added: "...hiçbir vakit kuvve-i askeriye ile mülkiye beynindeki münasebetin esası bir surette devam edememiş olduğuna kanaat hasil olmuş.."

110 Ibid.

The fifth preference stressed the fact that agricultural reform also depended on proper navigation on the Tigris and the Euphrates, an increase in the number of transport vessels, settlement of the tribes, and a forestry and a mining policy. Finally, the commission proposed that examination of personnel records (*memurların terâcim-i ahvâlî*) be left to the proposed commission. The report concluded:<sup>111</sup>

Although it may be apprehended that in the course of this reform, a small decline may occur in the present revenues, and the treasury may assume extra expenses for the reform commission, yet, in the event that the proposed thorough reform and new development are actively and materially brought to realisation, a multiple increase in the general revenues of Iraq will be achieved within a very small period of time. Indeed, the additional expenses for the sake of reform in Iraq, which cause anxiety, are the sole means of accomplishing and completing numerous administrative and political benefits, and important material, religious and sectarian virtues.

The Council of Ministers gave broad approval to the commission's report, and endorsed most of its specific recommendations, the only major exceptions being the priority accorded to the Hindiya barrage and the transfer of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army's headquarters to Sulaymaniyah, for financial reasons.<sup>112</sup> As candidates for the proposed reform commission, the Council of Ministers nominated Mustafa Nâzım Pasha, a former *vali* of Mosul, Kemal Efendi, a former *Defterdar* of Aydın, Avni Efendi, a former *naib* of Manastir, and General Pertev Pasha, the chief of staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>113</sup>

These proposals of the Council of Ministers, dated July 1907, were fully approved by the sultan, and, accordingly, a reform commission chaired by Mustafa Nâzım Pasha made its way to Iraq in September 1907.<sup>114</sup> The reform commission's instructions were more or less identical with those proposed by Akif Pasha's commission, and it was given extensive authority over the local administration, including all the civil, financial, and gendarme affairs in the three *vilayets*. In each *vilayet* centre, a consultative committee was to be formed from the local civil and military officials, and

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111 Ibid.

112 BOA, Y.A.Res. 147/106 (2), 26 Cemaziyelevvel 1325-24 Haziran 1323. The Council of Ministers in its comment on the commission's report also gave preference to the local people and backed the idea put forward by the commission to the effect that first and foremost the well-being of the inhabitants of the region should be concerned with: "for the purpose of strengthening the bonds of loyalty and submission, and of attracting the peoples' hearts and minds, the first point which must be taken into consideration is especially to secure the benefit of the population. This depends upon ending the damage caused by the rivers which flow through Iraq and placing them in useful condition and upon giving the people the right to exploit the state lands."

113 Ibid. For Mustafa Nâzım Pasha (1862-1909), see Ali Çankaya, *Yeni Mülkiye Tarihi ve Mülkiyeliler*, Mars Matbaası, Ankara 1969-1971, II, 1054-56.

114 See FO 424/213, no.110, O'Connor to Grey, no.617, Therapia, September 25, 1907. See also FO 424/213, inclosure in no.174, "Memorandum by Consul-General Ramsay", no.11 Confidential, dated 25 November 1907.

notables. The valis and all civil officials of the three *vilayets* were to be under the commission's authority in all matters, including finance, public works, land and agriculture, though in case of a conflict, they had a right to consult the Porte.<sup>115</sup>

Soon after the reform commission's arrival in Baghdad, the British Consul-General, Major Ramsay, called on Nâzım Pasha, and reported their conversation as follows:<sup>116</sup>

When I called on Nazim Pasha, I told him that I had served for some years in a tribal country, and had also seen something of a country which had been changed from a desert to a rich province by means of irrigation. I offered to give him, or obtain for him, any information in my power. He asked many intelligent questions about the Indian frontier system of Government, the method of administering the country with the help of the tribal leaders, and the system of taking revenue, and seemed much interested in the answers I gave. I said that he could easily go to India and see things for himself, and that I was sure that the Government of India would be glad to assist him. He said that he could not do so without sanction from Constantinople, and that he would think about asking for this. He may be really thinking of this, as he has mentioned during the conversations in subsequent meetings of the Commission. He does not seem to be inclined to do anything in a hurry, and is first giving his intention to the measures required to increase the security in the country. One of the chief aims of the Commission is, I understand, to sell the Government lands and induce private individuals to improve them, but this he finds he cannot do unless he can assure would-be buyers that they can safely visit and cultivate the lands they buy; this, I think, is the chief reason why he lays so much stress on pacifying the country. When he returned my call, the only point of Indian administration to which he referred was the maintenance of law and order.

In practice, however, the reform commission soon ran into difficulties. A fresh outbreak of tribal disturbances in Basra took up much of the commission's time and energy, and diverted its attention from the larger issues of reform. Nâzım Pasha soon clashed with the *vali* of Baghdad, Hâzım Bey, over the demarcation of their respective authorities, leading to the *vali*'s resignation in May 1908.<sup>117</sup> Nâzım Pasha succeeded him, combining the tasks of *vali* and reform commissioner until the Young Turk Revolution two months later.

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115 For full details, see BOA, YA.Res. 147/106 (6), "Hitta-i Irakiye'ce İcra Olunacak İslâhât ve İlmârâta Me'mur Heyet'in Vezâifini Mübeyyin Talimât Lâyihasıdır", dated 7 Rebiyülâhîr 1325-7 Mayıs 1323.

116 FO 424/213, enclosure in no.174, "Memorandum by Consul-General Ramsay", no.11 confidential, dated 25 November 1907. Ramsay added that "the Commission has been reinforced by the addition of a number of local members, and these seem to be fairly well chosen. Most people seem convinced that the Commission has no authority to sell Government lands to foreigners. To ascertain the views of the Commission on this subject a British merchant here is going to ask whether he can buy any of the State land."

117 See, for example, BOA, Y.A.Res. 156/83, dated 23 Rebiyülâhîr 1326-11 Mayıs 1324: "Hitta-i Irakiye Müfettişi Nâzım Paşa ile Bağdad Valisi Hâzım Bey arasındaki sürtüşmenin izale edilmesi ve bu mıntıkadaki islâhâtın elbirliğiyle icrâ edilmesine dâir mazbata."

## VI

Ottoman officials, whether at the centre or in the Iraqi provinces, had reached a broad consensus with regard to the question of reform in Iraq. The *vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra, it was agreed, had considerable potential for agricultural development. The key to unlocking this potential lay partly in irrigation and marshland drainage, partly in better river and rail communications, and partly, and most importantly, in the settlement of the tribal population, who should be encouraged to become peaceful cultivators. The process of settlement, it was further agreed, was in part a question of stronger administrative and military control, and in part a question of continuing the policy, initiated in the 1870s, of releasing state lands to the local population. More controversially, some officials argued that the success of these reform and development proposals would be enhanced by a fundamental administrative re-structuring, with much greater powers devolved to *valis*, and with the whole of Iraq established as a single *vilayet*.

Yet, for most of the period under study, except the last decade, the sultan and his government failed to adopt these proposals. In the case of the ambitious plans for railway construction and irrigation, it may plausibly be suggested that the problem was finance: the sultan's government had no money of its own to spare for such projects, and with memories of the 1875 bankruptcy still fresh, it was unwilling to resort to large-scale foreign loans. It also seems likely that political considerations frustrated the proposals to give *valis* powers over local garrisons, or to unite the three Iraqi *vilayets*: Abdülhamid was firmly opposed to anything which might point in the direction of administrative decentralisation and provincial autonomy. However, it also seems probable that he had political objections to a continuation of the earlier policy of distributing state lands. These objections, as he explicitly expressed them, turned on a fear that the distributed lands might end up in the hands of foreigners, and specifically, of Iranian or British subjects.

Not until about early 1900s onwards did Abdülhamid begin to change his policies in Iraq. This change appears to have been prompted partly by a concern at the serious decline in the revenues of the Iraqi *vilayets*, and partly by concern at the state of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, a concern heightened by a growing number of serious security problems in and around Iraq. These problems included serious tribal outbreaks in the *vilayets* of Basra and Mosul; troubles between Ibn Rashid and Ibn Saud in Najd; the eruption of a major border conflict with Iran; the possibility that growing political conflicts within Iraq might lead to difficulties with Iraq's substantial Shi'i population; and fears of British aggression in the Gulf. All these appear to have led the central government to give serious attention to concrete projects for action, from railways to irrigation,

as well as to a project of general reform in the Iraqi *vilayets*. The new policy encompassed the following changes: from strict centralisation to a partial decentralisation in civil and financial administration, at least in the sense that he delegated substantial powers to the Reform Commission sent to Iraq in late 1907; from efforts to explore the natural sources and increase public revenues to attempts to improve the well-being of the inhabitants and gain their sympathy and confidence; and from a strict ban on the distribution of state lands to its encouragement.

## ÖZET

### II. Abdülhamid Döneminde (1878-1908) Irak'ta Reform Siyaseti

Bu makale Osmanlı merkezî hükümetinin II. Abdülhamid döneminde Irak vilayetlerinde karşılaştığı problemleri ve uyguladığı politikaları incelemektedir. Bu amaçla esas olarak Osmanlı ve İngiliz arşiv kaynaklarını kullanmakta, merkezde ve Irak'ta görevli Osmanlı yöneticilerinin hazırladıkları reform projelerini ve bunların uygulanmasındaki engelleri tartışmakta ve şu sorulara cevap aramaktadır: Merkez'in Irak'a bakışı nedir? Irak vilayetlerinin durumu ve problemleri nasıl algılanmaktadır? Temel amaçlar ve çözümler nelerdir? Ulaşılan sonuçlar ise şu şekilde özetlenebilir: Irak'ın diğer bölgelerle kıyaslandığında ortaya çıkan nisbî 'geri kalmışlığı' Osmanlı yöneticilerinin ilgisizliğinden ya da bilgisizliğinden kaynaklanmamaktadır. İster merkezde ister Irak'ta görevli olsunlar Osmanlı yöneticileri Irak'taki reform ihtiyacının ve kalkınma potansiyelinin farkındadırlar ve ne yapılması gerektiği konusunda mutabıktırlar. Bu amaçla Abdülhamid dönemi boyunca Irak vilayetlerinde bir dizi reform projesi uygulanmaya çalışılmıştır. Makale aynı zamanda bu reform projelerinin niçin başarısız kaldığı sorusuna da cevap aramaktadır.