The Paradox of Reform: Sultan Abdulmejid I and the Ottoman Empire (1839–1861)

Part I: The Sultan – A Portrait of Abdulmejid I, the Man and the Monarch

The 22-year reign of Sultan Abdulmejid I (1839–1861) represents one of the most consequential and contradictory periods in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Ascending to the throne at the age of 17 [1], at a moment of profound existential crisis, he presided over the *Tanzimat* (Reorganization), a sweeping program of modernization intended to save a collapsing state. To understand the trajectory of the Empire during these two decades, one must first analyze the unique and complex character of the monarch himself. Abdulmejid was a man whose personality—a synthesis of Western liberalism and Eastern tradition, of profound kindness and debilitating weakness—was a microcosm of the very reforms he promulgated. He was not merely the political head of the Tanzimat; he was its first, and perhaps most tragic, cultural product.

Section 1: The Making of a Western Sultan

Sultan Abdulmejid I was, by design, unlike any sultan who had come before him. Born on April 25, 1823, in Istanbul [2], he was the son of Sultan Mahmud II, the "Peter the Great of Turkey," who had initiated the first wave of radical, Westernizing reforms and violently dismantled the Janissary corps.[3] Mahmud II, acutely aware that the Empire's future depended on a new kind of leadership, "paid great attention to the education of his sons".[4] Abdulmejid was the product of this vision, receiving a deliberately bifurcated education that was both deeply traditional and radically modern.

This education was foundational to his worldview and future policies. On the one hand, he was trained in the classical arts expected of an Ottoman ruler. He was fluent in Arabic and Persian [4] and became a "master calligrapher" (*hattat*), a deeply respected Islamic art form for which he received his ratification (*icazet*) only after ascending the throne.[4] He wrote calligraphic panels for several mosques, including those bearing his name, a testament to his personal

piety and mastery of traditional culture.[5]
On the other hand, Abdulmejid received a comprehensive "European education".[2] He was the very first Ottoman sultan to speak fluent French [2], the language of diplomacy and high culture in 19th-century Europe. He was "raised like a European prince" [1], with a keen interest in Western literature and classical music.[2] This dual education was not a trivial biographical detail; it was a living embodiment of the Tanzimat's central, and perhaps contradictory, ideological goal. The Tanzimat itself was a project to "synthesize" European concepts of law and administration "with Ottoman Islamic traditions".[7] Abdulmejid's mind was the first to be formally molded by this synthesis. His ability to be both a master *hattat* [5] and a fluent Francophone [2] perfectly symbolized the complex, hybrid identity that the reforms sought to forge for the entire state.

Section 2: The Character of the Reformer: A Contradictory Portrait

Abdulmejid's personality was defined by a profound and ultimately debilitating contradiction. His Western education had instilled in him a "liberal minded" [6] and gentle temperament that was celebrated by reformers but exploited by all.

The "Angel-Natured" Sultan

Sources, both Turkish and Western, are unanimous in their description of his gentle nature. He is described as "angel-natured" (melek-haslet), kind, compassionate, and "supremely merciful".4 This was not a mere royal affectation but a core component of his character. This compassion was famously demonstrated in the Kuleli Incident of 1859, a conspiracy by conservative figures to assassinate him. Upon their capture, he stunned his court by forgiving the perpetrators.4 His mercy was also evident in smaller acts; he ordered the establishment of a kosher kitchen at the Imperial Military School of Medicine for its Jewish students and made Saturday a holiday for them, demonstrating a personal concern for his non-Muslim subjects.4
This liberal-mindedness extended to his very concept of the monarchy. He broke with the centuries-old tradition of imperial seclusion. He "ended the tradition of the sultans remaining secluded in the palace" and "occasionally joined the people," making trips within the country to see their needs firsthand and listen to their complaints.[1] This desire to be a visible, accessible, and merciful sovereign was a radical departure from the autocratic, fortress-like monarchy of his ancestors.

The "Sensitive and Touchy" Monarch

This same benevolence, however, was also the source of his greatest weakness. His kindness and compassion were described as his "only weaknesses".4 Turkish sources are more direct, labeling him hissî ve alıngan—"emotional/sensitive and touchy".5 This emotional vulnerability had significant political consequences. It rendered him incapable of tolerating strong, influential, and often abrasive statesmen around him, even when he needed their expertise.5
This sensitivity made him dangerously susceptible to manipulation. He was "easily influenced," and the sources of this influence were clear: "especially... the women [in his life] and Western consuls".[5] The French and English ambassadors in Istanbul, recognizing his nature, "began to

mentor the sultan".[1] His entire reign was a difficult balancing act. He struggled to navigate between the "conceited snobs who were fans of Europe on the one hand, and bigots who wanted to return to the deserts of Asia on the other," ultimately "fail[ing] to gain any side's favor".[4]

This contradiction—a liberal-minded reformer who was also a weak-willed and "sensitive" monarch—is the central key to his reign. These traits were not mutually exclusive; the latter *enabled* the former in the specific context of the Tanzimat. A stronger, more traditionally autocratic sultan might have resisted the seismic shift in power demanded by the reforms. But Abdulmejid's "angelic" [5] and passive nature, combined with his accession as a "young and inexperienced" boy of 17 [1], created a power vacuum at the top of the state. This vacuum was *essential* for the ascendancy of the Sublime Porte (Bâb-ı Âli) and the bureaucratic supremacy of his powerful ministers. His personal liberalism meant he approved of the *goal* of reform, while his personal weakness meant he ceded control of the *process*, thus providing the "context in which the Tanzimat bureaucrats could and did proceed at their work".[8]

Section 3: The Sultan's Agency: The Will of the Monarch vs. the Power of the Porte

This brings to the forefront the critical question of Abdulmejid's personal agency. Was he the driving force behind the Tanzimat, or was he merely a figurehead for a class of powerful, Westernized bureaucrats? The evidence reveals a complex dynamic, a monarchy whose power was no longer absolute but was instead negotiated between the Sultan, his bureaucracy, and the foreign embassies.

On paper, the Sultan's agency was paramount. He "resolved to continue the reforms initiated by his predecessor".[9] The reforms were constitutionally his acts alone. He personally "issued" and "proclaimed" the two foundational edicts of the era: the *Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane* in 1839 [6] and the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* in 1856.[6] Furthermore, he actively promoted specific reforms that reflected his personal interests, such as the creation of a Ministry of Education and the establishment of an Ottoman school in Paris.[6]

However, this formal power was heavily mediated by the powerful ministers who were the true architects of the reform era. When the "young and inexperienced" [8] Sultan ascended the throne, he immediately fell under the influence of established statesmen like Mehmet Husrev Paşa.[8] The 1839 Edict of Gülhane, his first and most important act, was "prepared by his then Foreign Minister Mustafa Reshid Pasha" [2], a man widely acknowledged as the "chief architect" of the Tanzimat.[11] Throughout his reign, Abdulmejid was "strongly assisted" by the great triumvirate of Tanzimat statesmen: Mustafa Reşid Paşa, Mehmed Emin Âli Paşa, and Fuad Paşa.[6]

These men were not just servants; they were partners who, at times, actively worked to circumscribe the Sultan's power. The diplomatic successes of Âli Paşa and Fuad Paşa, particularly at the Congress of Paris in 1856, were used as leverage to "strengthen the Bâb-ı

Âli against the palace".[12] This marked a deliberate, structural transfer of power from the person of the Sultan to the bureaucratic apparatus of the state.

Case Study: The 1841 Dismissal of Mustafa Reşid Paşa

The most vivid illustration of the Sultan's negotiated agency is the career of Mustafa Reşid Paşa. Reşid, the "author of the Tanzimat Edict" 13, was a committed reformer and a known Anglophile, having served as ambassador to London.11 His reforms, particularly the 1839 Edict, generated "keen opposition from the Mussulman governing classes and the ulema".15 This "anti-reformist conservative faction," led by figures like Husrev Pasha, plotted against him.13

As long as the Empire was in the midst of the Egyptian crisis of 1840, Reşid was untouchable; the Sultan needed his "close proximity to the British" to ensure their military support.[13] But as soon as the London Treaty was signed and the crisis resolved, the conservative faction "reckoned with" Reşid, "put[ting] the following reforms in jeopardy".[13] In a moment of desperation, Reşid Paşa sent "numerous help messages to the British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston," begging *England* to intervene on his behalf against the *conservatives in his own government*.[13] This episode reveals the true power map: the Sultan was not an absolute autocrat but a central, "sensitive" [5] pivot point, pushed and pulled by internal conservative factions on one side and Western-backed reformers and ambassadors on the other.

Mustafa Reşid Paşa was appointed and dismissed as Grand Vizier *six times* during Abdulmejid's 22-year reign.[11] This "revolving door" was not a sign of simple political instability; it was a barometer of the competing pressures on the Sultan. When foreign pressure was high and European support was needed (as in 1840 or during the Crimean War [16]), the "sensitive" Sultan [5] would appoint the pro-Western Reşid. When that pressure eased, the "keen opposition" [15] from internal traditionalist factions would rise, and the Sultan, bowing to *this* pressure, would dismiss him. The Sultan's true "agency" was this constant, exhausting mediation.

Section 4: A New Monarchy: Patronage, Palace, and Personal Decline

The most visible and enduring symbol of Abdulmejid's reign—and his commitment to a new, Westernized vision of the monarchy—is the Dolmabahçe Palace.[4] One of his first symbolic acts was to abandon the Topkapı Palace, the dynastic seat for 400 years.[4] He viewed the sprawling, labyrinthine old palace as "obsolete," "damp," "useless," and "not... suitable for 19th century life and royal responsibilities".[4] Given that his father had died of tuberculosis and he also had the disease, he reportedly saw the damp Topkapı as a dynastic tomb.[4]

His response was to commission the Dolmabahçe Palace, a magnificent, opulent, and conspicuously European-style palace built directly on the Bosphorus.[4] This move was a profound political statement. It was the architectural equivalent of the Tanzimat edicts. It physically moved the monarchy from its traditional, secluded, inward-looking fortress—a symbol of the old, isolated state—to an open, visible, Baroque- and Neoclassical-inspired

residence on the water, facing Europe.[4]
This patronage, however, came at a ruinous cost. The construction of Dolmabahçe and other palaces contributed to the "excessive extravagance, especially towards the end of his life," that defined his personal spending.[15] This extravagance, coupled with the costs of war, was a major factor in the "reckless system of foreign loans" that began under his rule and would eventually bankrupt the state.[15]
His personal life was marked by this extravagance and by his declining health. He had a large family with many consorts, and in a rare and historically significant event, four of his sons would eventually ascend the throne: Murad V, Abdul Hamid II, Mehmed V, and Mehmed VI.[3] He allowed his brother and heir, Abdülaziz, to live "comfortably and freely," a significant break from the older, crueler tradition of fratricide or palace imprisonment.[4] But he was never healthy. He suffered from tuberculosis, the disease that killed his father, for most of his life.[4] On June 25, 1861, Sultan Abdulmejid I died at the age of just 38, his body broken by illness and the immense pressures of his contradictory reign.[2]

Part II: The Empire – The Apogee and Agony of the Tanzimat (1839-1861)

The Ottoman Empire during the reign of Abdulmejid I (1839–1861) underwent a period of modernization so intense and rapid that it simultaneously strengthened the foundations of the central state while fatally undermining the political and financial sovereignty that held the Empire together. His 22-year rule was a high-stakes gamble to preserve the state through centralization and liberalization. This gamble resulted in a temporary diplomatic victory at the cost of permanent foreign dependency and the acceleration of the very nationalist-separatist movements the reforms were designed to quell.

Section 5: The Edict of Gülhane: Reform from the Precipice

Sultan Abdulmejid I inherited a state in the midst of a complete and total collapse. The "affairs of Turkey were in an extremely critical state".[15] Just days after his accession in July 1839, news arrived that the Ottoman army had been "signally defeated at Nezib" (Nizip) by the forces of his own rebellious vassal, Mehmed Ali, the Viceroy of Egypt.[6] As if this were not catastrophic enough, the entire Ottoman fleet, sent to fight Mehmed Ali, was instead sailed to Alexandria and "handed over by its commander, Ahmed Pasha, to the same enemy".[15] The new Sultan had no army and no navy. The road to Constantinople was open, and the Empire's existence was over.
It was "only" the intervention of an alliance of European Powers (Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia) that saved the Empire.[6] This alliance, which excluded France (Mehmed Ali's

supporter), imposed the Treaty of London in July 1840, forcing Mehmed Ali to withdraw and return the Ottoman fleet.[1]

It was from this position of absolute desperation—a state on life support, entirely dependent on European goodwill—that the *Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane* (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber) was proclaimed on November 3, 1839.[16] This document, whose content was "unprecedented in Ottoman history" [20], was the formal beginning of the Tanzimat era. Its stated purpose, driven by reformers like Mustafa Reşid Paşa, was the "preservation of the Ottoman state" [6] by providing the "benefit of a good administration".[21]

The Edict's provisions were revolutionary and were structured under three main heads [21]:

1. **Security of Life, Honor, and Property:** The Edict promised "guarantees insuring to our subjects perfect security for life, honor, and fortune".[21] Crucially, this guarantee applied to "all subjects of the empire regardless of their religion or race".[18] This included public trials and the right to possess and dispose of property.[22]
2. **A Regular System of Taxation:** It called for a "regular system of assessing and levying taxes".[21] This was a direct assault on the "harmful practice of tax-farming" (*iltizam*), a corrupt system where tax collection rights were sold to the highest bidder, leading to "force and oppression".[23] The Edict proposed to abolish *iltizam* and replace it with a fixed, regular tax based on one's "fortune and means".[21]
3. **A Regular System of Conscription:** It mandated an "equally regular system for the levying of troops and the duration of their service".[21] This was designed to end the ruinous practice of indefinite conscription, which depopulated the countryside, and replace it with a fairer, regulated system with a fixed service term of four or five years.[19]

The timing of this Edict is critical. The military collapse was in June/July 1839; the Edict was proclaimed in November 1839.[6] As historical analysis makes clear, "the 1839 edict came when the Ottomans needed European help against Muḥammad ʿAlī".[16] The Gülhane Edict was not, therefore, merely an internal reform document. It was a *diplomatic signal* and a *profound bargain* offered to Europe. By guaranteeing the life and property of all subjects—which the European powers primarily interpreted as new rights and protections for the Empire's *Christian* populations [16]—the Sublime Porte was signaling that the Ottoman Empire was a modern, "civilized" state worthy of being saved from dismemberment. The Edict must be analyzed not just as the start of the Tanzimat, but as the *price of survival*, paid in the currency of liberal reform to secure the military backing of the European powers.

Section 6: The Crimean War and the Concert of Europe

The second great crisis of Abdulmejid's reign, the Crimean War (1853–1856), further entangled the Empire in the web of European power politics. The war's proximate cause was a seemingly trivial dispute between France (as the protector of Catholics) and Russia (as the protector of Orthodox) over the "privileges" and control of the "Holy Places" in Ottoman-controlled Palestine.[25]

This, however, was merely a pretext for the much larger geopolitical conflict known as the "Eastern Question".[26] Russia, under Tsar Nicholas I, saw an opportunity to act on its long-held "demands to exercise protection over the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman sultan" [25], a move that would effectively annex large parts of the Empire. Britain and France, conversely, saw Russian expansionism as a direct threat to the balance of power and their own Mediterranean interests.[26] They therefore adopted a policy of "prop[ping] up the ailing Ottoman Empire" to act as a "bulwark against the expansion of Russian power".[26]

When Russia used the dispute as a pretext to occupy the Danubian Principalities, the Ottoman Empire, with the backing of Britain and France, declared war in October 1853.[1] The conflict soon escalated, with Britain, France, and later the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont joining the Ottomans in an alliance against Russia.[26] The war, which involved trench warfare and new technologies like the telegraph [30], ended in an Allied victory [26] following the death of Tsar Nicholas I and the fall of Sevastopol.[26]

The war was formally concluded by the Treaty of Paris on March 30, 1856.[28] On paper, the treaty was a spectacular success for the Ottoman Empire:

- It "reinforced the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire".[32]
- Russia was forced to return territory (Kars) and cede Southern Bessarabia.[26]
- The Black Sea was neutralized, prohibiting Russia from maintaining a naval presence, thus ending the immediate Russian threat.[32]
- Most importantly, the Ottoman Empire was "officially included among the Concert of Europe".[2]

This victory, however, was a profound paradox. It was a victory won *for* the Ottomans, not *by* them. It "exposed the empire's military and administrative weaknesses" [33] to the entire world. The Empire had only survived because the great powers of Western Europe had fought on its behalf.[30] This "victory" did not end foreign intervention; it institutionalized it, leading to "increased foreign intervention and influence".[33] The "inclusion in the Concert of Europe" [2] was not an invitation as an equal, but an absorption as a *ward*. The Empire's sovereignty was no longer absolute; it was now *guaranteed*, and therefore *mediated*, by the European powers. The most potent and immediate evidence for this loss of sovereignty was the *Hatt-ı Hümayun*, a new reform edict forced upon the Sultan by his allies just weeks before the peace treaty was signed.

Section 7: The Edict of 1856 and the Crisis of Ottomanism

If the 1839 Edict was a *plea* for European help, the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* (Imperial Rescript) of February 18, 1856, was the *payment* for it.[16] As the Crimean War concluded, the "Western powers pressured Turkey to undertake further reforms".[16] The explicit goal was to "deprive the Russians... of any further pretense for intervention in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire" [22]—that is, to remove Russia's *casus belli* of "protecting" Orthodox Christians by granting those Christians full equality. The Edict was a "trump card" [12] rushed out by Âli Paşa

to prove the Empire's "modern" credentials just before the Paris negotiations began.[12]
This Edict went much further than the 1839 Gülhane decree, which had been phrased in general terms. The 1856 Edict was explicit, focusing almost entirely on the "rights of Christians" [16] and the principle of "equality of Muslims and non-Muslims".[35] Its key provisions included:

- Granting non-Muslims the right to serve in the military [35], or to pay a new tax for exemption.[16]
- Reforming the *millet* system, the traditional autonomous religious communities. This reorganized their councils to include lay members and reduced the "arbitrary fees" and total power of patriarchs and priests.[37]
- Granting non-Muslims the right to own property [39] and to be admitted to newly established state courts and administrative councils.[19]

This Edict, conceived under foreign pressure, was a political disaster. The promises "were never fully implemented".[22] The military service clause was "unpopular among non-Muslims" [38], who had no desire to serve in the Ottoman army and preferred to pay the poll tax. In response, the government simply "replaced [the old tax] by a new exemption tax levied at a higher rate".[16] The Edict was deeply resented by "Muslim populations" [22], who saw the new equality as an "implied loss of superiority".[40] Simultaneously, some non-Muslim leaders, like the Armenian Patriarch, saw the *millet* reforms not as liberation but as an "erosion of its community" and its traditional, state-protected privileges.[38]
Case Study: The 1860 Mount Lebanon and Damascus Civil War
The catastrophic failure of this policy of forced "Ottomanism" 3 exploded just four years later in the 1860 civil conflict in Mount Lebanon and Damascus.40 This was not a random sectarian outburst; it was a direct consequence of the Tanzimat. The "bitter conflicts" between the Druze and the Maronite Christians were "mostly centred on the firmans of 1839 and, more decisively, of 1856, which equalised the status of Muslim and non-Muslim subjects".40
The violence was horrific, resulting in the massacre of thousands of Christians by Druze and Muslim militias.[40] The conflict "precipitated a French-led international military intervention".[40] The result was the *exact opposite* of the Tanzimat's goal of a centralized, unified state. The European powers forced the Sublime Porte to separate Mount Lebanon from Ottoman Syria, placing it under the authority of a "non-Lebanese Christian governor" nominated by the Sultan but approved by Europe, creating an autonomous, sectarian protectorate.[40]
This crisis exposes the central paradox of the Tanzimat. The *entire purpose* of the reforms was "to unite everyone under the idea of 'Ottomanism'" [3] and "preserve the Ottoman state" [6] by stopping the "rising tide of nationalism".[3] But the 1860 war proves this policy was a catastrophic failure. The reforms, by highlighting and "equalizing" status, were seen by Muslims as an attack on their traditional position.[40] For non-Muslims, it did not create loyalty; it *encouraged* nationalism by granting them new, modernized power structures (like the reformed *millet* assemblies [37]) and proving that sectarian violence would be rewarded with the direct military intervention of their European patrons.[40] The 1856 Edict, intended to erase sectarian lines, instead *crystallized* them, intensifying the very nationalist movements it was

designed to alleviate.[43]

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the Tanzimat Edicts	
Feature	**Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane (1839)**
Primary Driver	Internal state collapse; Need for European support against Egypt.[15]
Stated Goal	"Good administration" and "preservation of the state".[6]
Key Audience	Primarily internal (the bureaucracy and notables).
Core Provisions	1. Security of life/property for *all*. 2. Abolition of tax-farming (*iltizam*). 3. Regular military conscription.[21]
Backlash	"Keen opposition from the Mussulman governing classes and the ulema".[15]

Section 8: The New Economy: Modernization, Paper Money, and Foreign Debt

To finance these sweeping military and bureaucratic reforms, Abdulmejid's reign fundamentally, and fatally, altered the Ottoman economy. The Tanzimat called for a modern financial system [18], and the first steps were taken under his rule.

In 1840, the state issued the first Ottoman paper banknotes, the *Kaime-i Nakdiye-i Mutebere* ("Respected Paper Money").[18] These were not, however, true banknotes in the modern sense. They were "in a sense, debt certificates or Treasury bonds bearing interest".[44] This new paper money was "handmade and stamped with the official seal," which meant it was "easily forged".[44] Forgery and over-issue quickly led to a "fall in people's confidence," and the *kaime* depreciated, forcing a move to printed notes in 1842.[44]

Alongside paper money, the Empire saw the creation of its first modern banks. The first "Osmanlı Bankası" (Ottoman Bank) was established in 1847 and became operational in 1850.[47] This was a precursor to the far more powerful *Bank-ı Osmanî-i Şâhâne* (Imperial Ottoman Bank), a Franco-British institution founded in 1863 that would come to dominate the Empire's finances.[47]

The most significant economic development of the era, however, was the beginning of foreign debt. For centuries, the Empire had "resisted the allure of an external loan".[48] The Crimean War (1853-56) "emerged as a pivotal juncture".[49] Unable to finance the costly war against

Russia, the Ottoman government, "for the first time in its history, used foreign credits".[50]
The first loans were contracted in 1854 (for £3 million) and 1855 (for £5 million).[48] The terms of these first loans, provided by British and French banks (like Dent, Palmers & Co. and the Rothschilds), were "exceptionally favorable".[53] The 1855 loan, for example, was issued at an interest rate of only 4% and was *jointly guaranteed by the British and French governments*.[51]
This easy, guaranteed money created a moral hazard. The "attractive prospect" of cheap European capital "incentivised them borrow even more".[51] This began a "snowballing" [53] process of reckless indebtedness. More loans followed in 1858, 1860, 1862, and nearly every year thereafter.[48] This system, which began under Abdulmejid to finance the Crimean War and his own "excessive extravagance" [15], led directly to the state's sovereign default in 1875 [54] and the 1881 creation of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA).[52] This foreign-run institution took direct control of the Empire's most valuable revenue streams, marking a total surrender of Ottoman financial sovereignty—a process that began with the "favorable" loan of 1854.

Table 2: The Genesis of Ottoman Foreign Debt (1854-1855)	
Loan	**First Loan (1854)**
Amount	£3,000,000 [53]
Organizers	Dent, Palmers & Co.; Rothschilds (London) [53]
Context	To finance the Crimean War.[51]
Terms	"Exceptionally favorable." Issued at 80% with 6% interest.[53]
Guarantees	Backed by Egyptian taxes; British political support.[53]

Section 9: The Contested Legacy of Reform (1861)

When Sultan Abdulmejid I died in 1861 [2], he left behind an Empire that was profoundly, and paradoxically, transformed. His reign, the first and most "auspicious" phase of the Tanzimat [8], had simultaneously provided the *tools for survival* and sown the *seeds of dissolution*.
The successes of the first Tanzimat phase were tangible and structural. The "central state was significantly strengthened" and "rationalized".[43] Abdulmejid and his ministers had built the *infrastructure* of a modern state. This included:

- **Education:** A new Ministry of Education [6] and a secular school system, including military preparatory schools and secondary schools.[6]
- **Military:** A reorganized army based on the Prussian conscript system.[6]
- **Law:** New penal and commercial codes largely modeled on those of France.[1]
- **Administration:** New provincial assemblies and a new system of state courts

independent of the *ulama* (Islamic religious council).[19]

These were the "successes" of the Tanzimat.[8] They laid the groundwork for a modern bureaucracy and legal system that would ultimately provide the framework for the future Turkish Republic.

However, these successes were overshadowed by profound and immediate failures. The reforms were only "partially put in force".[15] The "keen opposition from the Mussulman governing classes and the ulema" [15] was relentless, leading to conspiracies against the Sultan's life.[15] Key promises, like the abolition of "ruinous" tax-farming (*iltizam*), "failed".[56]

The greatest failure was political. The central goal of "Ottomanism" [3]—to create a unified imperial identity and "stem the rising tide of nationalism" [43]—was a disaster. The reforms "failed to resolve many of the internal tensions".[55] Worse, in the Balkans and Lebanon, the new administrative and infrastructural reforms "often intensified local tensions and nationalist movements rather than alleviating them".[43]

This is the dual-track legacy Abdulmejid left in 1861. **Track 1** was the creation of the *tools of modernity* [6], the structural successes that strengthened the central state. **Track 2** was the creation of the *seeds of dissolution*. The very same policies that comprised this "success" had catastrophic side effects. The *Hatt-ı Hümayun* [16], by highlighting and exacerbating sectarian divides, "intensified" nationalism.[43] The "foreign loans" [53] he took on to finance the reforms began the irreversible spiral into bankruptcy and foreign control.[54] The "Concert of Europe" [2] he joined to save the Empire turned it into a *de facto* European protectorate.

The reign of Abdulmejid I, therefore, represents the central paradox of 19th-century Ottoman history. He saved the Empire from a sudden death in 1839, only to, through the very same reforms, subject it to a slower, more certain, and more agonizing dissolution.

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