

History of Islam

An encyclopedia of Islamic history

The Tanzeemat of the Ottoman Empire

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Tanzeemat (Turkish, plural of *tanzeem*, organization, discipline) is a term used for the processes, institutions and administrative changes initiated between 1839 and 1878 by the grand viziers Mustafa Rashid Pasha, Mohammed Amin Ali Pasha and Mustafa Fuad Pasha and implemented during the reigns of Sultan Abdul Majid (1839-1861) and Sultan Abdul Aziz (1861-1876). With some modifications, the *tanzeemat* continued during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) and lasted until 1908. The over-arching goal of the *tanzeemat* was to save the empire by reforming its legislative, administrative and judiciary institutions and processes. They sought to improve administrative efficiency, streamline tax collection, modernize education and make the government more responsive to the people by giving them a voice in its operation. In the process, the architects of the *tanzeemat* experimented with centralization and decentralization, Ottomanism and secularism, pan Islamism and pan Turkism. They were successful in modifying the structure of Ottoman institutions. In so doing, they changed the character of Ottoman society and set in motion secular forces that ended with the emergence of the Young Turks (1908) and the destruction of the Sultanate itself (1913-1924).

In 1800, the Ottoman Empire was still the largest land empire in the interconnecting landmass of Afro-Eurasia. Extending from Algeria in the Maghrib, it embraced all of the lands of the southern Mediterranean. From Egypt it branched out to include portions of the Sudan and the coastal lands of the Red Sea, jetting into the Sinai and including the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Iraq, Anatolia and northern Azerbaijan. In Europe it had lost Hungary, Transylvania and Crimea, but it still controlled the Balkans including Romania, Bosnia, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania and Rumelia. It had a population of 20 million, about three fourths Muslim and the rest divided between Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian and Coptic Christians as well as a prosperous Jewish community. This vast empire was self-sufficient in food, with the fertile lands of Egypt, Iraq and Rumelia producing enough grain to sustain the population.

The Ottoman Empire was multi-ethnic, multi-national and multi-religious. While the Muslims were more numerous in West Asia and North Africa, the Orthodox Church had a major presence in the Balkans. Further north, in the border areas of Bosnia, as well as in Lebanon, the Catholics had a strong position. The Armenians were primarily resident in the area around Lake Van, while the Coptic presence was noticeable in Egypt and Syria. Each of the major religious groups was itself divided into a plethora of nationalities. The Turks, Arabs, Egyptians, Berbers, Albanians, Bosnians and Circassians were the major ethnic groups among the Muslims. The Eastern Orthodox included the Greeks, Bulgars, Serbs and the Romanians. These nationalities competed for turf and privilege and were often at loggerheads with

each other. The presence of religious shrines in Palestine, considered holy by Muslims, Christians and Jews alike, added to the religious tensions in the empire and on more than one occasion, kindled the flames of war.

This multi-religious, multi-ethnic state was organized in accordance with the dictates of the *Shariah*. Each religious group was called a *millet*, which meant that the state accepted it as the follower of a prophet, with a revealed book and a code of ethics. In numerical terms, there were three major millets in the empire: the Muslims, the Orthodox Christians and the Catholics. In addition, the Jews, Armenians, Copts and Druze were also accorded the status of millets. The Armenians, with about 6% of the population, were dispersed in eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan and the southern Caucasus. The Copts, with about 3% of the population were mainly in the Cairo-Alexandria belt. The Jews, constituting about 2% of the population, had a notable presence in Istanbul, Solonika and Sarajevo. In accordance with the *Shariah*, each *millet* was accorded full autonomy in the observance of its personal laws and in matters relating to its religious observances. Where a judicial matter involved the followers of more than one religious group, it was taken up by mixed courts, or resolved in a higher court, presided over by a kadi (judge).

Military service was obligatory for Muslims. A Muslim young man, when called upon to do so, had to serve up to four years in the army followed by six years in the reserves and ten years in the home guard, although wealthy Muslims could buy an excuse at a price fixed by the state and send a substitute instead. The non-Muslims were exempt from military service in payment of the *jizya*. This was a tax levied only on able-bodied men; the old, the infirm, women and children were exempt from it. In return, the state provided them military protection and an opportunity to further their civilian careers while the Muslim young men served in the army. In monetary terms, the *jizya* was less than the sum a Muslim man had to pay to buy an excuse from military service. As we shall see, this system of administration, while it accorded autonomy and dignity to persons of all faiths, was used by interested European powers, acting presumably as protectors of one religious group or another, to exert pressures and demand concessions from the Ottomans.

Five major institutions held the empire together: the army, the civilian bureaucracy, the *Vizierate* or the Porte, the Grand Mufti or Shaykh ul Islam and the office of the Sultan-Caliph. In addition, the harem exerted significant influence on the decision making process through the Chief Eunuch, who acted as a conduit of communication between the Queen Mother, the ladies of the palace and the state functionaries. The standing army varied in strength from time to time. In 1800, it stood at 120,000 men, supplemented by about an equal number of sipahis, auxiliary troops and Tatar cavalrymen. Morale and discipline were high but the armed forces were at a measurable disadvantage with respect to their European counterparts in armaments, techniques and organization. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing, and European rapid firing muskets and long-range cannons had far outstripped the gunnery then in use by the Ottomans. Napoleon Bonaparte had given a stunning demonstration of the superiority of European arms and battle formations during his invasion of Egypt and Syria (1799).

A vast bureaucracy administered the empire in collaboration with the local fiefs, landlords and village notables. Tax collection was inefficient and at the mercy of the tax farmers (local landlords and chiefs delegated with the responsibility of tax collection) who pocketed a portion of the collections in return for their services. The system was stable, albeit at the expense of the cultivators, whose only interface with the ruling elite was through the taxman. The executive branch was headed by the sublime Porte, (or the *Vizierate*) presided over by a grand vizier appointed by the Sultan. It was the grand vizier who carried out the *fermans*, or edicts, of the Sultan. Assisted by a Council of Ministers, he acted as the interface with foreign powers and often led the armed forces in war. The judiciary was nominally independent and

under the overall supervision of the Shaykh ul Islam, who was also appointed by the Sultan. The shaykh was the custodian of the Shariah and his person carried enormous prestige with the ulema. His consent was sought prior to a declaration of war, or on occasions, before the dethronement of a Sultan. The power of the various functionaries flowed from the authority of the Sultan-caliph; they served with his consent and at his pleasure. He appointed or fired any of the executives or judges in his realm, including the grand vizier and the Shaykh ul Islam. In addition, as the Caliph of all Sunni Muslims in the world, he had the responsibility to protect the ummah against the “infidels” and to discharge the functions of the guardian of faith and the Shariah. Only the Shaykh ul Islam could make a pronouncement about a specific act of the Sultan and that too at great risk to his own person. The ladies of the court wielded significant power in the affairs of the realm and this they exercised by influencing the Sultan in his appointment of senior executives and through the chief eunuch who conveyed their wishes to the principal functionaries.

The structure of the empire was pyramidal with the Sultan-caliph at its apex. To their credit, the Ottomans were well served by a series of capable monarchs and grand viziers, who held the empire together for 600 years. In this grand undertaking, they proved themselves to be extremely resourceful in utilizing the injunctions of the Shariah to construct political institutions and evolve social systems that stood the test of time. The *millet* structure, which provided judicial and legal autonomy to each religious group, was a major anchor of this system. It was sanctioned by the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and proved as capable of ensuring social and political stability in the 17th century as it had in the 7th century. It provided a framework in which a heterogeneous society composed of different religious groups, could work as a unit towards the creation of a civilization. But in the 19th century, this grand vision of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious empire came up against the competing European idea of nation states. Religion became secondary to nationalism and a mere vehicle for an expression of national aspirations. The powerful states of Russia, Austria-Hungary, France and Britain were able to use religion as a mechanism to incite the various nationalities within the Ottoman Empire against it and further their own interests.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was like an old oak tree that had decayed from within. A patent weakness in military technology, coupled with the inefficiency of an age-old bureaucracy, had sapped its vitality. Gone were the days when Europe trembled at the prospect of Sulaiman the Magnificent marching into Central Europe and knocking at the gates of Vienna.

Now it was the turn of Europe to counterattack, dismember the empire and benefit from its demise. The Ottoman Empire was able to survive another hundred years, not so much because of its military prowess, but because of the rivalries among the principal European powers as to who would pick up the pieces once the empire dissolved. The resulting balance of power did provide the Ottomans a respite in which to reform their institutions, catch up with Europe in technology and perhaps even save the empire from an inevitable demise.

In the latter part of the 18th century, the triumph of European arms over the more traditional arms then in use in Asia and Africa motivated emirs and Sultans alike to seek the technology and techniques of the West. The first to make a move in this direction was Tippu Sultan of Mysore, India. Starting in the year 1760, he and his father Hyder Ali, sought out French assistance in military organization and weapons technology. They were successful in creating the finest fighting machine in India, armed with long-range rifles, rockets and cannon, which held the British Empire at bay for forty years. Tippu fell in battle in the year 1799, a victim of schisms among Indian princes and of British scheming. The next to seek modernization of his armed forces was Mohammed Ali Pasha of Egypt. As Napoleon withdrew from the

Nile delta (1799), Mohammed Ali reorganized the Turkish-Egyptian garrison in Cairo, supplied it with French muskets, brought in French instructors and built it into a fine fighting machine. In 1805, when the British tried to take Alexandria by force of arms, Mohammed Ali was able to beat them back.

In the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) initiated a series of reforms against the opposition of the Janissaries and the entrenched conservatives. A military wakeup call came in 1820 when a rebellion broke out in Greece. Small bands of Greeks, armed and trained by the European powers, were able to inflict severe damage upon the Ottoman garrisons. Sultan Mahmud II was able to use the Ottoman reverses to dismantle the Janissaries (1826) and start the modernization of the army.

The Greek rebellion must be looked at in the broader context of the increasing military power of Russia and its long-range ambition to reach the Mediterranean. The Ottoman Empire, extending in an arc from the Adriatic to the Caspian Sea, was like a solid wall preventing this access. Indeed, the strategic location of the Ottoman Empire to the south of the Russian Empire was the single most important factor in the Balkan wars that raged throughout the 19th century and spilled over into the 20th century. In 1769, the Russians took the important base of Azov on the Don River and broke through to the Black Sea. In 1789 they captured the Crimea, denying the Ottomans the manpower of the Crimean Tatars and the use of the seaports on the northern shores of the Black Sea. Russia could now dream of reaching the Mediterranean through the Dardanelles. In the succeeding decades, Russian pressure on the Ottomans continued. The toll on Ottoman manpower and resources was enormous. As the vulnerability of the Ottomans became apparent, Britain, France and Austria-Hungary saw in an expansionist Russia a threat to their own interests. France had her eyes on North Africa; Britain coveted Egypt, while Austria-Hungary had her designs on the Balkans. Hence, the western powers sought to prop up the Ottoman Empire against Russia, even while they chipped away at it from the south and the west.

One military debacle after another faced the Ottomans in the decades of the 1820s and 1830s. The Greek revolt gathered momentum and by 1827, the Greek national forces had taken control of Morea. France, Britain and Russia demanded Ottoman acceptance of Greek independence, but when the Porte refused and called in naval reinforcements from Egypt, a joint European naval attack force destroyed the Ottoman and Egyptian navies at the Battle of Navarino (1827). This event marked an important milestone in the history of the Mediterranean.

Stripped of their navy, the Ottomans could not supply and defend their distant provinces in North Africa. Algiers fell to a determined French assault in 1830. Algeria became a French colony and remained so until the Algerian War of Independence in 1960. Meanwhile, the Russians, declaring themselves to be champions of their fellow Orthodox Greeks, invaded the empire and in a two-pronged drive around the Black Sea, moved through Romania and Bulgaria to within thirty miles of Istanbul. In the east, they occupied Erzurum and Trebizond and threatened complete occupation of Anatolia. The Ottomans were saved by the diplomatic intervention of Britain and France. This was a convincing demonstration of a Russian military capability to reach Istanbul. Ottoman preoccupation with this threat was a primary driver of their foreign policy through the rest of the century. By the Treaty of Edirne (1828), the Ottomans ceded to the Russians the region of the southern Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and accepted Russian intervention in the provinces of Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. The independence of Greece was formally ratified in 1830.

Further military reverses were awaiting the Ottomans. In 1830, Mohammed Ali Pasha, Governor of Egypt, demanded compensation from the Porte for his assistance during the Greek insurrection, as well as the hereditary title of *Khedive*. When the Porte refused, Mohammed Ali sent an expeditionary force into Syria under his son Ibrahim Pasha to compel the Sultan to agree to his demands. In a series of

engagements, Ibrahim overcame Ottoman resistance, advanced through Gaza, Haifa, Damascus and Beirut to take Konya (1833). The Egyptians could have taken Istanbul, but European intervention forced Mohammed Ali to call off his troops in return for recognition of his demands by the Sultan. The triumph of the Egyptian forces, supplied with European arms, spurred the modernization of the Ottoman forces. Sultan Mahmud ordered an acceleration of the reforms he had started twenty years earlier, instituting training for army officers, sending them to Europe for instruction, starting technical institutes, reforming education and overhauling the administrative apparatus. He brought in Russian officers to train the infantry, British engineers to build forts, and Prussians to supply and train artillerymen. The initiatives taken by Sultan Mahmud provided the momentum for the reforms that were to follow after his reign.

The *tanzeemat* were led by Mustafa Rashid Pasha, who started life as the son of a clerk and became one of the most powerful grand viziers in Ottoman history. He started his career as a scribe, and while on assignment to Morea in the 1820s, witnessed first hand the debacle of Ottoman forces at the hands of the Greek nationalists. He saw first hand the inefficiency of the administration while employed in the Ottoman bureaucracy. During the Russian-Turkish war of 1826-1828, he was a seal bearer to the grand vizier. He impressed his superiors with his dispatches from the theaters of war and was given increasing responsibilities. In 1833, he was a member of the team that negotiated with Mohammed Ali Pasha of Egypt. As foreign minister (1837-1840) and ambassador to France (1840-1845) he traveled through Europe and had an opportunity to study its institutions. He became grand vizier in 1846 and served in that capacity for six terms of various durations until his death in 1858. It was largely through his initiative that Sultan Abdul Majid I issued the imperial proclamation of 1839, which guaranteed equality before the law to all citizens of the empire and set in motion the reform processes.

The *tanzeemat* centralized power in the Porte at the expense of the palace and the provincial governors. Sultan Abdul Majid and Sultan Abdul Aziz supported the Tanzeemat even while attempting to control them through their own appointments. The mechanism for legislative reform was the establishment in 1838 of the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances, consisting of senior members from the various ministries and the bureaucracy. It became the principal body for formulating legislation. Suggestions for possible legislative action were submitted to the Council by the various departments and ministers. The Council discussed, debated, modified and prepared the legislation, which was then submitted to the Sultan for his approval. An attempt was made to evolve a consensus in the Council, but disagreement was tolerated, and where there was no meeting of the minds, the majority opinion was submitted to the Sultan with the minority dissenting opinion included as an appendix, so that the Sultan could make up his own mind as to the pros and cons of a proposal. This was a major shift from the old Ottoman system wherein legislation originated from the Imperial Council attached to the palace. As time went on, the Supreme Council was also given the authority to initiate its own legislation and submit it to the Sultan. The volume of legislative work was enormous and as the burden increased, the process of reform slowed.

The second generation of *Tanzeemat* reformers, led by Grand Viziers Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha, were impatient with the pace of change. In 1858, they supplemented the Supreme Council with another legislative body, the High Council of the Tanzeemat to speed up the process. There was some confusion between the two bodies due to overlapping responsibilities. Therefore, in 1861, the two Councils were merged into a single legislative body, the new Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances, with separate departments for legislative, administrative and judiciary matters and clearly defined areas of responsibility. Overall coordination of the legislative functions was performed by the Council of Ministers, whose members were appointed by the Sultan. The ministers could change the proposed legislation before its submittal to the Sultan. Since the ministers were appointed directly by the Sultan, the grand vizier, who had the overall executive responsibility in the empire, had only limited authority

over his own ministers. This dissociation of responsibility from authority had its own inherent inefficiencies and the grand vizier had to get results more through goodwill than through sheer brawn. Although the *tanzeemat* allowed for inputs from the bureaucrats and the Sultans themselves were supportive of most of the initiatives, the legislative structure remained pyramidal; the process was directed from the top, creating a measure of tension between the palace, the Porte and the legislative councils.

The most pressing issue before the Ottomans was defense of the empire. The Ottoman dam contained the Russian flood. A vigorous program of modernizing the armed forces began in 1841. The army was divided into seven corps, one based in each of the major provinces. A *mushir* or field marshal, reporting to the grand marshal or *sereskar* in Istanbul, headed each corps, which was further divided into regiments and platoons with a specific number of cavalry, infantry and artillerymen as required for the defense of each district. The total strength of the army was increased to 185,500 with each corps containing 26,500 men. This standing army was supplemented, in times of war, with an additional 60,000 *sipahis*, or irregulars. Rapid firing muskets and large cannons were bought from Prussia. Prussian officers were hired to train the Ottomans in the use of these weapons. An efficient system of storage and supply was set up at each of the principal army bases. All eligible Muslim males were required to serve in the army for a period of four years, starting at age seventeen, followed by seven years in the reserves and twelve years in the home guard. The navy received added attention too; however, after the disastrous Battle of Navarino (1827), the Ottoman and Egyptian navies did not recover their former stature and their role in subsequent military developments was marginal at best.

The superiority of European naval technology was obvious as early as the Battle of Lepanto (1571). After the Battle of St. Gotthard (1680), this superiority had shown itself in the land forces as well. The Ottomans managed to hold the line for much of the 18th century because the European powers were pre-occupied with their own internal rivalries over control of the Americas and the Indian Ocean. As these rivalries were sorted out, with the British emerging as the victors, the pressures on the Ottomans increased. Even the Russians, who were mired in a feudal society, learned from the west Europeans during the reign of Peter and forged ahead of the Ottomans. By the 1830s, the technology gap between Europe and Asia had become a wide chasm and the *tanzeemat* sought to redress this imbalance.

Modernization of the armed forces required a cadre of men trained in technical disciplines as well as in mathematics, physics and medicine. The need to revamp the educational system became acute as the technology gap between Europe and Asia widened. The old system of education in the Ottoman Empire was based on the *maktabs*. These were religious schools run by the local *ulema* and they were focused on imparting the children a basic knowledge of the Qur'an, the hadith, rituals of religious obligations and Ottoman history. Most of the students were boys. The few girls who did attend school dropped out after the first four years. Secondary schools or *madrasahs* offered more instruction in the traditional disciplines as well as optional courses geared towards preparing the students for service in the vast Ottoman bureaucracy. Higher education was designed to train a few *alims*, men versed in various schools of *Fiqh*, who could serve as local *kadis* in the courts of *Shariah*. Artisans and architects learned their trades through apprenticeship in the guilds attached to the local Sufi *zawiyas*.

This education was a caricature of the comprehensive system of education in the classical Islamic era. When the Fatimids founded the first university at Al Azhar in Cairo in 969 and the Abbasids established the Nizamiya College in Baghdad soon thereafter, the syllabus included not just Arabic grammar, Qur'an and *Fiqh*; it embraced philosophy, mathematics, logic and medicine. The education was integrative,

holistic and it produced the hakims of the classical era, men like Al Ghazzali and Ibn Sina, who made profound contributions to the reservoir of human knowledge and provided the intellectual energy for a renovation of Islamic civilization.

In the intervening thousand years, the classical system of education had been demolished, the rational sciences were removed from the curriculum, Muslims turned their backs on philosophy and empirical science and Muslim society itself had been transformed. It did not produce the trained men and women who could maintain a competitive edge in the increasingly brutal confrontations with Europe. Frustrated, the army moved ahead with the establishment of a military academy in Istanbul wherein military sciences, physics, mathematics and medicine were taught but there was a dearth of qualified applicants with the pre-requisite education in mathematics and the natural sciences. The traditional system of *maktabs* had failed to keep up with the advances being made in science and technology. It did not even impart the rudimentary training in mathematics and physics that are pre-requisites to a career in science, engineering and medicine.

The *tanzeemat* sought to redress within a single generation the neglect of a thousand years. With a technologically advanced Europe breathing down their necks, they set out to reform the education system, its orientation, its content and its output. The initial momentum was provided by the initiatives taken earlier by Sultan Mahmud II (d. 1839), who had established a system of middle schools, called the Rushdiye schools, wherein arithmetic and physics were taught along with the traditional disciplines. Such schools had been established in the principal cities of the empire including Istanbul, Solonika, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, Sarajevo and Erzurum. In 1846, a Council of Public Education was established within the Department of Trade but it would take another 20 years before a Ministry of Public Education was set up. Instruction in the public schools was enlarged to include science and mathematics in addition to Ottoman history, geography and the traditional religious subjects. Non-Muslim students received instruction in their own religious disciplines. To coordinate the work of various directorates in education, a Council of Education was set up by the Public Education Act of 1869. Each province also had an education director whose responsibilities included the supervision of schools, buildings, books, syllabus, examinations and teachers' salaries.

Secular education received a major boost as a result of the Crimean War (1853-1856). Education was made compulsory for all children up to the age of twelve. In 1869, French specialists were brought in as advisors to the Ministry of Public Education. Following their recommendations, a three-tier system of education involving primary, middle and secondary schools was set up wherein mathematics, physics, natural sciences, history, Turkish, Farsi and Arabic languages as well as the local language were taught. At the higher levels, technical institutes were established. These included the War College, Civil Service College, Army and Navy engineering schools, the School of Medicine and the Military Academy. In each institute, besides specialized instruction in a specific field, the humanities and social sciences were also taught.

The evolution of an educational system more responsive to the needs of the empire was slow, in part because of the opposition of the religious establishment. Some of the *ulema* looked askance at the new education because it meant a decrease in their power. To mollify them, the old madrasahs were continued in parallel with the Rushdiye schools. In addition, there was a lack of trained teachers and textbooks as well as persistent difficulties with the non-Muslim minorities who remained recalcitrant and preferred to stay in their own *millet* schools. Acceptance of the new education was slow among the Muslims who associated a secular education with the West. As late as 1895, there were far more students in the traditional madrasahs than in the Rushdiye schools. Women's education lagged far behind that of men. In 1895, whereas 90% of the men had received some schooling, only 30% of the women had done

so. To redress this imbalance, a separate higher school for women was founded in Istanbul (1870) but admission remained low. In addition, the *tanzeemat* established schools for orphans and an industrial institute for poor children where they could receive training in a useful trade. There were also a number of foreign schools set up by missionaries, such as the American Robert College (1863). Their orientation was decidedly anti-Ottoman and anti-Muslim and their presence exacerbated the religious tensions in the empire. It was not until the reign of Sultan Abdul Hameed (1876-1909) that the foreign institutions were brought under the supervision of the state. The funding for the educational reforms came partly from the local communities and partly from the government. The local communities paid for buildings and books for the primary schools; the state helped with guidance on syllabus, oversight and examinations. At the secondary school and higher levels, the provinces and the central government shared the expenditures.

To further higher learning, Grand Vizier Mustafa Rashid Pasha established a Council of Knowledge in 1851. The Council arranged public lectures by eminent scholars and encouraged the translation of books from French, German and English into Turkish. In 1862, Grand Vizier Ali Pasha set up the Ottoman Society of Science, which published a Journal of Science and worked on conceptual issues relating to the development of a civil code to replace the Shariah. The University of Istanbul was established in 1870 with faculties of engineering, science, medicine, philosophy, law and religious studies. But it was closed in 1872 because of a lack of funding and was not reopened until 1900. It was during the same period that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan initiated the Aligarh movement in India and established Aligarh College (1875).

Thus it was a thousand years after Muslims established the first university at Al Azhar (969), the university system returned to Muslim lands via Europe. Those who had learned from the Muslims now had become their teachers and Islamic civilization, which had lit the torch of learning in Europe, was now borrowing back that light.

The establishment of a secular university increased the cleavage between the secularists and the *ulema*. Grand Viziers Ali and Fuad, as well as some Ottoman intellectuals in the empire, were keenly aware of the dangers in the developing antagonisms and worked to reduce them. Fuad established the Society for Islamic Studies in 1870, which offered extension courses in Islamic sciences as well as lectures on Shariah and *Fiqh*. Writers such as Ahmed Cevdat who had received their earlier training in a madrasah and had a keen respect for traditional education, attempted to bridge the gap. But such attempts were unsuccessful; the traditionalists lost the race, and the secularists co-opted the future of the empire.

Lack of sufficient funding precluded a far-reaching overhaul of the educational system. The empire was hard pressed for cash during much of the period of the *tanzeemat*, a situation that became acute as the Ottomans contracted huge debts to international bankers as a result of the Crimean War. In addition to the funds required for educational and administrative reforms, the modernizing of the armed forces and the huge bureaucracy required to administer the *tanzeemat* consumed additional resources.

The tax collection system, as a result, had to be streamlined and new sources of revenue had to be found. Taxes on land and sheep, *jizya*, payments from tributary states and commercial levies were the principal sources of tax revenue in the old system. A tenth of the agricultural produce was collected as tax. Tax on sheep was proportional to the number of animals. *Jizya* was an obligatory tax on non-Muslim able-bodied men between the ages of 17 and 40, in return for which they were excused from serving in the armed forces. The residents of Istanbul and the principal cities were exempt from the agricultural tax and paid only the sales tax on consumer items so that the principal burden of taxation fell on the farmers. There were import and export duties; however, through the Capitulatory Agreements with the

European powers, many of the items imported by foreign merchants were taxed at a preferential rate or not taxed at all. The Capitulations put the Ottoman merchants at a disadvantage and prevented the emergence of local industry that could compete with that of Europe.

Tax collection was inefficient. Local fiefs administered the agricultural and sheep taxes and pocketed some of the proceeds before forwarding the balance to the treasury. Many of the villages were no more than serfdoms where one or two families owned all the land. Tax collection in the cities was supervised by the trade guilds. Religious foundations, mosques and churches were exempt from taxation in return for which they were required to run the *maktabs* and maintain local roads and bridges. There were no checks and balances; responsibility and accountability were ill defined and the indirect tax collection system was abused at various levels.

The *tanzeemat* sought to replace indirect tax collection with a centralized, direct tax collection system. By the Tax Act of 1840, taxes were no longer collected by the tax farmers but by professional tax collectors appointed from Istanbul and made responsible to the treasury department. Extensive surveys of land, property, farm animals, rental income and salaries were undertaken to determine the tax basis for each. The property surveys were supplemented with an accurate census so that recruitment to the army and *jizya* from non-Muslim males of military age could be assessed fairly. Documentation of each item was thorough. A documentation fee was initiated on all documents and became a major source of revenue. In addition to direct taxation, every able bodied man between the ages of 16 and 60 was required to work on roads, bridges and public works for four days a week. Merchants and artisans in the cities were assessed a profits tax. Goods moving from one city to another were subject to a road tax and those consumed locally were taxed at the point of origin. Exports were taxed at the point of loading and imports at the point of off-loading. The Capitulatory Powers, however, resisted attempts to increase tariffs on certain imported goods, so that foreigners continued to enjoy unfair advantages in trade and commerce.

The reforms increased the tax revenues. But the increasing burdens of defense, centralized bureaucracy and foreign debt more than offset the increased revenue so that the budget deficit of the empire continued to increase. There were not enough trained tax collectors and the few available men were spread thin over large territories. The local fiefs and landlords took advantage of the relative inexperience of the new bureaucrats so that after an initial increase, tax revenues started to decline again. Consequently, the empire reinstated the tax farms and tried auctioning them off to the highest bidder. This only increased the burden on the farmers because the fiefs were interested in recovering their investment and enriching themselves, at the expense of the farmers, as rapidly as possible. The period of an auctioned tax farm was therefore increased to five years, with the stipulation that the tax collector was to help the farmers with seeds and crop cultivation. This was only partially successful; the farmers remained at the mercy of the local fiefs.

To increase the efficiency of administration and to assist in tax collection, the empire was divided into seven provinces or *banats* of approximately equal population and tax revenue. Districts within each province were divided into *sanjaks*. Each sanjak was administered by a muhassil whose authority and responsibility was clearly defined. Each sanjak was further divided into kazas. Such a division would correspond to the modern day division of provinces, districts and counties. To increase the participation of people in local self-government, each sanjak and kaza had an elected advisory council, consisting of Muslims and non-Muslims as well as the local kadi, police chief and tax collector. At the village level, a council of elders represented each *millet*. The representation was indirect. Only the local notables had any chance of getting elected; the poor had very little representation.

Since there were not enough bureaucrats to administer the *tanzeemat*, the role of the army in the administration was therefore increased. The provinces were put under the direct control of the field marshals or the *mushirs*. The *mushirs* functioned with the help of local notables who assisted with tax collection in cooperation with the appointed tax collectors and scribes. The powers of the sanjak councils were increased. They could ask for information from the *mushirs*, send complaints to the grand vizier, review court decisions, discuss local problems and offer solutions. In addition, some public funds were channeled to the provincial councils and they were given the responsibility for repairing and maintaining roads, bridges and canals.

Funding dried up after the Crimean War of 1853-1856 and the Councils lost their effectiveness. As a result, in 1864, the powers of the provincial governors were increased. Each governor was made responsible for all administrative, judicial, fiscal, social and security issues. He supervised the tax collectors, gathered information and provided oversight for education. Tax collection was centralized. All revenues were shipped to Istanbul from where specific amounts were returned to each district for administrative expenses. Departments of taxation, accounting, documentation, administration, education and public affairs were set up to assist the governors. The directors of these departments were appointed from Istanbul and were responsible directly to the center. An elected council of six members, three Muslims and three non-Muslims, was assigned to each department. Increased local representation protected the people from undue taxation, fostered local initiative and improved education, roads, transportation and the security of the people.

Even the Sultan was not untouched by the *tanzeemat*. The Sultans curtailed the growth of their expenses and their expenses as a percentage of the overall budget decreased. They made themselves more accessible to the public, traveled abroad on diplomatic missions and went for Friday prayers at the Aya Sophia Mosque in an open carriage.

The *tanzeemat* transformed Istanbul into one of the finest cosmopolitan cities on the Eurasian landmass by 1865. In 1858, following a detailed study, a municipal commission was set up for the European section of the city. In 1864, the municipal administration was extended to the whole city. The city was divided into 14 districts, each district managed by a council of 8 to 12 members. The municipal administration had responsibility for buildings, sanitation, market place, communication, lighting, building codes, layout, public facilities, commercial and tourist places, public health, orphanage and police functions. A budget was prepared for each district and accountability was assigned. These reforms came at the expense of the guilds and of the entrenched *millet* hierarchies. Despite the interference of European powers who were always ready to support the non-Muslim millets, the reforms were highly successful. In 1870, the same system of administration was extended to the other cities in the empire.

The *tanzeemat* brought in increasing secularization to the judicial process. The old judicial system was based on Hanafi Fiqh in which each religious group was given the privilege of maintaining its own *millet* courts. The *tanzeemat* sought to restrict the jurisdiction of the Shariah courts to civil disputes between Muslims and of *millet* courts to civil disputes among members of that *millet*, while creating mixed tribunals consisting of Muslims and non-Muslims when a dispute involved members of different religious groups. A uniform commercial code, along the lines of the French Commercial Code, was decreed. It established mixed tribunals consisting of Muslim and non-Muslim Ottomans and included representatives of European merchants. Court procedures were borrowed from the French and Italian penal systems.

By a decree of the Sultan, the life and property of all subjects was guaranteed. As confidence in the secular judicial processes increased, so did private and foreign investment in the empire. In 1856, the secular court system was expanded to the provincial and local levels. A court of appeals was set up to provide oversight of the lower courts. The promulgation of a uniform commercial code enabled the Ottomans to renegotiate certain provisions of the Capitulatory Agreements signed with France, Britain, Austria-Hungary and Russia and for the first time, foreign citizens were brought under the Ottoman judicial system.

Communications and industry benefited from the *tanzeemat*. The major cities were connected by a telegraph system making it possible for a centralized bureaucracy to maintain efficient control over the provinces. Improvements in the roads and the introduction of steam ship service between the principal ports speeded up postal deliveries. Railroads were opened up for foreign investment and over 3,000 miles of railroads were completed by 1876. New production facilities for the manufacture of army gear, including guns, ammunition, clothes and headgear were started with state capital. Ottoman as well as foreign capital was invested in cloth manufacture, mining, oil extraction, rug manufacture and silk production.

Technology changes society. The printing press facilitated the growth of a vigorous media and the introduction of European ideas into the empire. Increased industrial employment coupled with a secular system of higher education produced a consumer-oriented middle class. The emerging secular elite challenged the traditional power structure of the *ulema* and the landed aristocracy. The *ulema* had long benefited from their monopoly of the educational and judicial systems. The introduction of secular education and a uniform commercial code after the pattern of the French commercial code eroded this monopoly. The power structure of the non-Muslim millets was similarly transformed. The Armenian Patriarch as well as the chief rabbi in Istanbul had to accept the oversight of elected councils dominated by laymen. The functions of the patriarchs and rabbis were confined to religious matters. The elected councils decided all other issues, such as taxation, education and community welfare. The religious establishment, both Muslim and non-Muslim, resented the reduction in their former power and privileges and their cooperation with the reforms was at best lukewarm.

The power of the Sultan, the religious establishment and the landed elite was reduced while the increasing power of the bureaucrats went unchecked. The increasing centralization of power produced a cadre of arrogant bureaucrats, cocky and self-assured that the direction they had charted for the empire was the correct one. This generated an intellectual backlash that sought to redress the erosion of the old institutions and to impose checks and balances on the bureaucrats. The men who led this movement were called the Young Ottomans who sought to restrain the *tanzeemat* bureaucrats through parliamentary democracy and a constitution. On the one hand they were impatient with the pace of the reforms; on the other, they wanted to transform yet retain the old institutions. They felt that the *millet* system had outlived its usefulness and they campaigned for equality of all Ottoman citizens under a single constitution, irrespective of their religion or nationality. Their efforts led to an indirectly elected parliament in 1876, but as we shall see, it was soon bogged down in procedural issues and was abandoned by Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1879.

The reforms were taking place under the shadow of aggression from Russia, which had not given up its dream of capturing the Dardanelles, thus providing an outlet for its navy to the Mediterranean. Russia had shown in the war of 1828 that it had the military capability to penetrate the Turkish heartland and reach Istanbul. The military weakness of the Ottomans brought it into the vortex of European colonial politics. Austria and Russia both coveted the Balkans. The French had their eyes on Algeria and North

Africa. The British desired to control Egypt as a passageway to their Indian Empire. All of these powers agreed on a dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire but each had its own ideas about who would pick up the pieces.

The presence of a large number of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire provided the European powers ample opportunities to interfere in Ottoman affairs. In the 1850s, their conflicting interests led to a general war involving Russia, Britain, France and the Ottomans. The wrangling of the Christian minorities for privileges in Palestine provided the trigger. Since their conquest of Jerusalem in 1517, the Ottomans had tried to keep the peace between the various sects by a juggling act of balancing competing claims. Following the war of 1828-1829, the Russian Czar obtained the permission of the Sultan to repair some of the Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Jerusalem. The Patriarch of Jerusalem declared his autonomy from the Patriarch of Istanbul and placed himself under Russian protection. The growing Russian influence whetted the appetite of the French, who were accepted as protectors of the Catholic minority in Syria and Palestine by the Capitulatory Agreements. Emperor Napoleon III of France, trying to improve his standing with his subjects following his abrogation of the French Republic (1851), demanded from the Sultan similar privileges for the Catholics. The Sultan, trying to maintain a neutral position between the claims of the Russians and the French, acceded to the French requests. In turn, the Russians demanded greater privileges for themselves including an acceptance by Istanbul that Russia was the protector of all Eastern Orthodox subjects in the Ottoman Empire. These demands irked the Porte. Ottoman public opinion was outraged at what it considered was Russian infringement of Ottoman sovereignty.

The British, at first inclined to side with the Russians against France, saw that Russian ascendancy would jeopardize their interests in the Ottoman Empire. Thanks to the Capitulatory Agreements, the Ottoman Empire was a ready source of raw materials for British factories, as well as a good market for their products. British diplomacy now tilted against Russia. Encouraged by Britain and by popular resentment at home against Russian demands, the Porte at first agreed to the Czar's demands and then rejected them. Enraged, the Czar threatened war unless Istanbul immediately capitulated. A conference in Vienna failed to produce a mutually acceptable solution; war ensued in July 1854 with an Ottoman advance into Romania and into the southern Caucasus. The Russians soon gained the upper hand on both fronts. A Turkish naval squadron sent into the Black Sea to destroy the Russian fleet fared no better. Alarmed that a Russian victory would leave the Czar in possession of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France declared war on Russia.

This was the beginning of the Crimean War in which Britain and France sought to contain the Russians by propping up the Ottomans against the Czar's war machine. British and French naval squadrons advanced through the Dardanelles and bombarded Russian fortifications in the Crimea. The port of Sevastopol soon became the focus of a major trial of strength between the Russians on the one hand and a British-French expeditionary force on the other. Meanwhile, to avoid having to fight a war on two fronts, the Russians handed over the territories of Romania to the Austrians. The siege of Sevastopol continued for more than a year (1854-1855). The Russians surrendered the port city only after a long and bitter fight. To the east, however, the Russian armies advanced through the Caucasus into eastern Anatolia, capturing Kars, Van and Erzurum and threatening Central Anatolia. A brutal war of attrition went on even as the contestants wrangled over terms of a ceasefire. Finally, by the Treaty of Paris (1856), the forces disengaged. The warring parties agreed to relinquish each other's territories. The autonomy of Romania and Serbia under Ottoman sovereignty was reaffirmed and the European powers declared themselves guarantors of the rights of the Christian inhabitants in the Balkans. The Czar obtained a concession as protector of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem.

Although the Crimean War ended with the Ottomans nominally retaining their territories, in the long term it proved to be the beginning of the end of the empire. The war effort was enormously expensive in men and material. To meet the heavy war expenditures, the Ottomans took their first loan from European bankers in 1854. The terms of the loan were harsh; they carried discounts of up to 40%, plus exorbitant rates of interest. Each year, to balance their budget, the Porte had to borrow additional funds from the Europeans. Despite the reforms of the *tanzeemat* to increase revenues and the efforts of successive grand viziers to cut expenditures, the empire could not dig itself out of debt. It was about the same time that Egypt, the most important Muslim province of the empire, also contracted international debts to construct the Suez Canal. By 1875, both Cairo and Istanbul were up to their necks in debt.

The proportion of the budget earmarked for debt servicing continued to increase, so that by 1878, it consumed over 80% of all revenues! The Ottomans tried different methods to balance the budget, including printing paper money and borrowing internally from their own citizens. Such efforts generated inflation, further eroding the value of the Ottoman currency and making international debt payments more expensive. Most of the loans originated from bankers based in London. Britain had successfully put a noose around the Ottoman Empire without declaring war on it. The noose tightened every year. It was this bankrupt empire that Abdul Hamid II, the last of the great Sultans in Islamic history, inherited when he became the Sultan/Caliph in 1878.

The Ottoman Empire of the 19th century faced most of the issues that confront the world of Islam today: centralization versus decentralization, nationalism versus pan-Islamism, tradition versus modernism, Sultanate versus democracy, pluralism, education, organization, technological development, foreign domination and international debt. The Ottoman Empire made a valiant attempt to transform itself and meet these challenges. While honoring the autonomy of its Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and Armenian subjects within the *millet* system, it sought to modernize its armed forces, administration, education, economy and legislative processes.

The reforms failed to prevent a collapse of the empire for five principal reasons. First, the need to defend themselves against military aggression forced the Ottomans into international debt from which they never recovered. Second, the reforms were imported from Europe and were forced from the top. Third, the *ulema* failed to provide intellectual leadership, reform education and evolve institutions that would lead the Muslims from the medieval to the modern age. Fourth, Russian aggression from the north and British and French political machinations from the south, worked like a hammer and anvil to crush the empire. And fifth, the *millet* system, however benevolent it was from a Muslim perspective, was unacceptable to the large Christian minorities in the Balkans and Armenia. They resorted to increasing terrorism against Muslims and aided and abetted by the principal European powers, used every opportunity to destroy the empire.

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