



Khazanah: Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam

ISSN: 2339-207x (p); 2614-3798 (e)

DOI: 10.15548/khazanah.v15i2.2375

MODERNIZATION EFFORTS OF THE OTTOMAN CALIPHATE DURING THE REIGN OF SULTAN ABDUL HAMID II

Danial .M.

Ma'had Aly Sa'idussiddiqiyah Jakarta, Indonesia

email: danialmuh34@gmail.com

Robi'atul Adawiyah

Ma'had Aly Sa'idussiddiqiyah Jakarta, Indonesia

email: robiatuladawih8996@gmail.com

Mohammad Izdiyan Muttaqin

Universitas Indonesia, Salemba, Jakrta Pusat, Indonesia

email: moh.izdiyan@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the leadership of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in modernizing the Ottoman Caliphate during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Amidst Western colonial pressures, internal fragmentation, and rising ethnic nationalism, he implemented modernization policies in education, infrastructure, and communication, while reinforcing religious symbolism through Pan-Islamism. The research adopts a qualitative approach using historical-critical and hermeneutic methods, utilizing primary sources such as official documents and speeches, alongside secondary sources like academic literature and archival materials. Early scholarship generally portrayed Abdul Hamid II as authoritarian, but more recent studies recognize his strategic role in developing modern education systems, financial institutions, and communication networks in response to global challenges. Findings indicate that despite his autocratic style, he initiated modernization projects such as the founding of technical and women's schools, construction of railways—including the Hijaz Railway—and reforms in legal and military sectors. He also rejected Western diplomatic pressure on the Palestine issue and extended influence to non-Ottoman Muslim communities through religious diplomacy. However, his authoritarianism sparked opposition, particularly the Young Turk movement, which ultimately deposed him. This study concludes that Abdul Hamid II's rule reflects an adaptive leadership model that combined authoritarianism, modernization, and religious legitimacy. It contributes to Islamic historiography and modern political studies by showing how religious symbolism and development were used as tools of diplomacy and social control. Limitations include a lack of microhistorical focus and insufficient exploration of

Muslim perspectives beyond the imperial center, pointing to the need for further localized research.

Keywords: *Sultan Abdul Hamid II, Ottoman Caliphate, reform, modernization, and Pan-Islamism.*

INTRODUCTION

Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) was one of the most influential rulers in the history of the Ottoman Caliphate, ruling from 1876 to 1909.¹ During his reign, the Islamic world faced various major challenges, ranging from the pressure of Western colonialism to the turmoil of nationalism within the Ottoman country itself. Previous research has described Abdul Hamid II as an autocrat who concentrated power tightly and cracked down on opposition movements. A number of studies, such as the work of Stanford J. Shaw (*History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*) and Nader Sohrabi (*Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran*), reveal how Abdul Hamid II applied repressive politics to maintain internal stability.

However, recent studies have begun to show that the portrayal of Abdul Hamid II as a mere "red tyrant" is not entirely fair. Several studies highlight the modernization efforts undertaken by Sultan Abdul Hamid II, especially in the fields of education, health, transportation, and communication.² He also actively used Pan-Islamism to build the global solidarity of Muslims as a bulwark against Western domination. However, most studies still focus on aspects of elite politics and international relations, while the social impact of his policies on Ottoman society at large remains underexplored.

The title "Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Efforts to Modernize the Ottoman Caliphate" is important because it opens up space to review his historical role in a more balanced and contextual way. This research can show the complexity of his leadership: on the one hand it brings stability and modernization to a certain extent, but on the other hand it also faces contradictions with the emergence of nationalist movements that accelerate the disintegration of the caliphate. Moreover, through a new approach that examines the perception of Muslims in different parts of the world towards Abdul Hamid II, we can understand more broadly how the Ottoman caliphate maintained religious legitimacy in the modern era.³

By reviewing the figure of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, this research will not only enrich the literature on Ottoman history, but also make an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of the relationship between religion, modernization, and power in the Islamic world. In a global context that is increasingly debating the issue of Islamic leadership and the political identity of the ummah, the study of Abdul Hamid II is relevant to examine how ideas of Islamic solidarity and modernity are negotiated under global and domestic pressure.⁴

Previous research on Sultan Abdul Hamid II has generally focused on his authoritarian character, Pan-Islamist policies, and his role in defending the Ottoman

¹ Alawiyah, A., M. Faiz, dan M. Masruri. "Strategi Politik Pan-Islamisme Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909 M)." *Advances in Humanities and Contemporary Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024): 162–170.

² Deringil, Selim. *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999.

³ Fauzan, P. I., dan A. K. Fata. "Model Penerapan Syariah Dalam Negara Modern (Studi Kasus Arab Saudi, Iran, Turki, Dan Indonesia)." *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 12, no. 1 (2018): 51–70.

⁴ An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed. *Muslim & Keadilan Global*. Vol. 3. Cirebon: Institute for Migrant Rights Press, 2013.

Caliphate from internal and external pressures. Many studies describe how Abdul Hamid II used Pan-Islamism as a global political tool to consolidate Muslims and how his international diplomacy slowed down the Ottoman decline. In addition, the Western narrative positioning him as "The Red Sultan" due to the crackdown on opposition has also been widely discussed, although often biased from the point of view of European colonialism.⁵

However, there are still some important gaps that need to be filled. For example, the lack of an in-depth study of the relationship between Abdul Hamid II's modernization project and the internal social dynamics of the Ottomans; How this modernization encourages the growth of regional nationalism. In addition, the influence of Abdul Hamid II's Pan-Islamism in Muslim regions outside the Ottomans, such as Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, is also rarely discussed in detail.⁶ An analysis of the Islamic world's internal perception of Abdul Hamid II, rather than just a Western narrative, as well as a comparative study of his reform style with that of other Ottoman sultans, is an area that is open to further exploration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic scholarship on Sultan Abdul Hamid II has significantly evolved over the past few decades. Early studies tended to portray Abdul Hamid II in a negative light as an authoritarian and repressive figure who consolidated power by dissolving the parliament, suspending the constitution, and instituting a strict system of censorship and surveillance. This narrative is well represented in works such as Stanford J. Shaw's *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, which depicts Abdul Hamid II as an absolutist ruler who sought to slow the disintegration of the Ottoman Caliphate through centralization of power and complete control over state apparatuses.⁷

However, contemporary scholarship has shown a shift in understanding the complexity of Abdul Hamid II's reign. Selim Deringil, in *The Well-Protected Domains*, emphasizes the importance of Pan-Islamism as both a diplomatic and symbolic strategy to consolidate the global Muslim ummah under the authority of the Caliphate. Within this framework, Abdul Hamid II is not only seen as an autocrat but also as a Caliph who actively sought to build religious legitimacy and international Muslim solidarity particularly in the face of growing Western colonial pressure.⁸

In addition to political and religious symbolism, the dimension of modernization has also gained increasing attention in recent studies. Benjamin Fortna, in *Imperial Classroom*, argues that educational reform during Abdul Hamid II's era was among the most systematic projects in Ottoman history, marked by the establishment of modern schools, universities, and the strengthening of science and technical curricula. Yet, Fortna also highlights a key paradox: Hamidian education was not designed to foster critical or

⁵ Yavuz, F., dan Z. İskefiyeli. "Hakan-ı Sabık'tan Hakan-ı Mağfur'a: II. Abdülhamid'in Ölümünün Yerli ve Yabancı Gazetelerdeki Yansımaları." *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 56 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.21563/sutad.1222229>.

⁶ Kurniawan, A. S., dan N. Hadi. "Pengaruh Pan Islamisme Bagi Kekhilafahan Turki Utsmani Pada Masa Sultan Abdul Hamid II." *Tanjak: Sejarah dan Peradaban Islam* 2, no. 2 (2022): 181–204.

⁷ Shaw, Stanford J., dan Ezel Kural Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*. Vol. 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

⁸ Deringil, Selim.

independent thinking, but rather to instill loyalty to the state and the Caliph.⁹

Studies by Cleveland & Bunton (*A History of the Modern Middle East*) and Anderson (*The Eastern Question*) further contextualize Abdul Hamid II's policies within the broader geopolitical environment. These works illustrate how the caliphate faced significant pressures from colonial powers such as Britain and France, as well as the impacts of international treaties like San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin, which eroded Ottoman territorial holdings and fueled nationalist movements across the Balkans, North Africa, and the Middle East.¹⁰

In the context of global Islamic movements, scholarly engagement with the Muslim world's response to Abdul Hamid II's Pan-Islamism remains relatively limited. While some studies have noted the symbolic and political influence of Pan-Islamism in regions such as Southeast Asia and India, deeper analysis of how local Muslim communities perceived the authority of the caliphate is still an underexplored area of research.

On the other hand, Western narratives that portray Abdul Hamid II as "The Red Sultan" a label used to criticize his harsh repression of opposition, particularly events such as the Armenian massacres have also come under scrutiny in postcolonial studies. Some scholars argue that many evaluations of Abdul Hamid II were shaped by colonial biases and thus require reevaluation through more contextualized and multi-perspective approaches.

Several recent studies have also begun to examine the relationship between modernization and authoritarianism through the lens of Islamic political theory. These studies suggest that modernization does not necessarily equate to liberalization, as evidenced by Abdul Hamid II's administration, which strengthened absolutist rule alongside infrastructure development, educational institution building, and administrative reform.

Overall, existing literature has addressed the elite political dynamics, international diplomacy, and modernization policies of Abdul Hamid II's era in considerable depth. Nevertheless, several gaps remain, offering opportunities for further research:

1. A lack of microhistorical studies exploring the social impacts of Abdul Hamid II's policies on communities beyond the political center of Istanbul such as in Hijaz, Yemen, or Southeast Asia.
2. Insufficient research on how Pan-Islamism was perceived by the broader Muslim populace, especially from non-elite perspectives and local ulama networks.
3. A scarcity of comparative analyses between Abdul Hamid II's reform model and that of other Ottoman or Muslim leaders in dealing with modernity and colonial challenges.

Therefore, this research aims to address these gaps by approaching the figure of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in a multidimensional manner not merely as an autocrat or reformer, but as a leader who actively negotiated religion, power, and modernity within a highly complex global geopolitical context. This study also seeks to uncover voices from the broader Muslim world in order to present a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of Abdul Hamid II's political and ideological legacy.

⁹ Fortna, Benjamin C. *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

¹⁰ Cleveland, William L., dan Martin Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. London: Routledge, 2024.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach based on historical studies to understand the figure of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in the political, social, and religious context of the Ottoman Caliphate. A historical approach was chosen to reconstruct the important events, policies, and internal and external dynamics that shaped his reign. The analysis was carried out by focusing on the relationship between the political actions of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and its impact on the survival of the caliphate and Muslims more broadly.¹¹

The main source of data in this study is secondary data in the form of previous scientific works, including books, journals, academic articles, dissertations, and relevant archival documents. Some of the key works that have become references are the writings of Stanford J. Shaw, Selim Deringil, William L. Cleveland, as well as the translated Ottoman archives. Additional data were also obtained from primary sources of translations such as speeches, official letters, and consular reports of the time. The data collection technique is carried out through a systematic literature study to get a comprehensive picture.

The collected data was analyzed using historical-critical analysis methods, namely by assessing the context of the source, identifying biases, and comparing various existing perspectives. This research also uses hermeneutic methods to understand the symbolic meanings of Abdul Hamid II's policies, especially related to Pan-Islamism and modernization. The goal is to capture the dynamics of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's thoughts and actions more fully and not get caught up in the dichotomy of authoritarianism vs modernization alone.

With this methodology, the research is expected to make a new contribution to the literature on the history of the Ottoman Caliphate and build a more balanced understanding of the complexity of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's leadership in the midst of the major changes in the Islamic and international world in the late 19th to early 20th centuries.¹²

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Ottoman Caliphate faced various internal and external crises. The Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) was the starting point of great pressure on the Ottomans. On the Asian Front, Ahmad Mukhtar Pasha and Ismail Haqqi Pasha managed to win several battles, but on the Balkan Front, Russian forces captured important cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv, and Edirne.¹³ Russian attack threatened Istanbul and worsened the already weak Ottoman state. Sultan Abdul Hamid II was able to improve the morale of the army by attributing this struggle to the help of Allah. However, despite some local victories, the Ottomans eventually asked for peace after suffering a major strategic defeat.

The Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878), imposed by Russia, granted broad autonomy to Bulgaria and recognized the independence of Romania and Montenegro.

¹¹ Hamsah, M. I. N., dan M. Dahlan M. "Analysis of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's Pan-Islamism Policy Towards Asian and European Geopolitics in the 19th Century." *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 3, no. 5 (2023): 4781–4800.

¹² Lapidus, Ira. "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): 444–460.

¹³ Shaw, Stanford J., dan Ezel Kural Shaw.

Due to pressure from other European powers, especially Britain and Austria-Hungary, this treaty was revised at the Congress of 182 Berlin (June-July 1878). Led by Otto von Bismarck, the results of the Berlin Congress were even more detrimental to the Ottomans, accelerating the loss of territory without much compensation.¹⁴ Britain, under the pretext of protecting Orthodox Christianity, occupied Cyprus through secret treaties, while Russia retained the Balkans. As a result, the caliphate was weakened, and nationalism in the Balkans was strengthened.

Subsequently, the French invasion of Tunisia (1881) and the British occupation of Egypt (1882) marked a new era of Western colonial domination over Muslim territories that had previously been under Ottoman protection. Research by Cleveland & Bunton (*A History of the Modern Middle East*) shows that Sultan Abdul Hamid II had tried to send military support to Tunisia, but ended up relying on diplomacy after an open confrontation with France seemed unfortunate.¹⁵ Meanwhile, in Egypt, major projects such as the construction of the Suez Canal led to an enormous debt burden, leading to foreign financial controls, and eventually a full occupation by the British after the defeat of Urabi Pasha's forces. Egypt remained formally part of the Ottomans, but in practice became a British colony.

Local Islamic movements, such as the Mahdiah Movement in Sudan (1881–1885), also signaled a wave of resistance to colonial domination. Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdullah, who claimed to be the Mahdi, managed to capture Khartoum and temporarily expel the British, but after his death the movement weakened.¹⁶ On the other hand, Sultan Abdul Hamid II faced various conspiracies, including assassination attempts, as well as diplomatic pressure from Zionists such as Theodor Herzl. The Sultan rejected Herzl's offer to sell Palestinian land, demonstrating his firmness towards religious issues and Islamic nationalism.¹⁷

Through this series of events, it can be concluded that the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II was full of efforts to survive the pressure of Western colonialism, maintain the remaining integrity of the Ottoman territory, and strengthen Islamic solidarity through Pan-Islamism, albeit with limited results. This period was an important transitional period before the complete fall of the caliphate at the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁸

Table 1. Events and Direct Impacts

No.	Event	Direct Impact
1	Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878)	Lost much of the Balkans; weakening of the Ottoman military and diplomatic position.
2	The Treaty of San Stefano & the Congress of Berlin (1878)	Bulgarian autonomy, the independence of Serbia, Romania, and Montenegro; reduced jurisdiction.
3	British occupation of Cyprus (1878)	Reduced Ottoman strategic control in the Eastern Mediterranean.

¹⁴ Gencer, M. “The Congress of Berlin (1878) in Context of the Ottoman-German Relations.” *Pursuit of History* 12 (2014).

¹⁵ Cleveland, William L., dan Martin Bunton.

¹⁶ Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.

¹⁷ Shlaim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. London: Penguin UK, 2015.

¹⁸ Ardic, Nurullah. *Islam and the Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern Modernization in the Early 20th Century*. London: Routledge, 2012.

No.	Event	Direct Impact
4	French invasion of Tunisia (1881)	Loss of influence in North Africa; weakening of the symbol of the caliphate.
5	British occupation of Egypt (1882)	Loss of economic and political control over Egypt, including the Suez Canal.
6	The Mahdiah Movement in Sudan	The loss of Ottoman authority in Sudan after the Mahdiah attack.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II ascended to the throne on August 31, 1876. In the same year, he introduced the first Ottoman Constitution and convened a parliament as part of the Tanzimat reforms, aimed at curbing Western intervention. However, two years later following the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), the Sultan suspended the constitution and dissolved the parliament. From then on, he ruled autocratically from Yildiz Palace, strengthening the intelligence system, surveillance operations, and strict censorship.¹⁹

Abdul Hamid's rule was marked by centralization of power: governors and local officials were appointed directly from Istanbul and frequently rotated to prevent them from forming independent power bases. He established the Yildiz Intelligence Agency in 1880 the first organized intelligence body in Turkish history. Its agents operated in major cities around the world and submitted more than 3,000 reports monthly directly to the Sultan.

Education was a major focus: secondary schools (*Rushdiye*), military academies, technical schools, and universities such as Darülfünun (which later became Istanbul University in 1900) were established or reformed. The curriculum included physics, mathematics, and modern sciences, not just religious studies. He imposed a 39% tax on agricultural produce, allocating two-thirds of the revenue to agricultural improvement and one-third to public education. Technical institutes and military academies were managed with the assistance of German and French instructors. Faculties at Istanbul University included Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Religion, and Social Sciences; the admission system was restructured based on merit exams, providing opportunities for underprivileged students. He also founded girls' schools and expanded education into rural areas. Sultan Abdul Hamid II established the Bayezid Library, the Archaeological Museum, the Military Museum, and the Yildiz Palace Archives and Library.²⁰

Several major infrastructure projects were undertaken, including:

1. Hamidiye Water System (1881-1886): a clean water distribution network for Istanbul.
2. Hejaz Railway (1900-1908): connecting Damascus to Medina, serving both pilgrims and military mobilization.
3. Expansion of the Rumelia and Anatolian railways, and the initiation of the Baghdad Railway in cooperation with Germany.
4. Extension of the telegraph network across most of the empire, including Hejaz and Basra, enhancing centralized communication.

¹⁹ Omar, Y. "USA Diplomacy Towards the Counter-Revolution and Sultan Abdul Hamid II's Dethronement (1909)." *History Studies International Journal of History* 13, no. 2 (2021): 423-448. <https://doi.org/10.9737/hist.2021.995>.

²⁰ "Sultan Abdul Hamid II." Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/sultan-abdul-hamid-ii/?utm>.

5. He also developed tram systems (horse-drawn and electric), built piers in several cities, modernized the police force, and established a civil servant pension fund.²¹

The military was reorganized with assistance from Germany. Lt. Col. Kohler and Colmar von der Goltz led training and modern military curricula in academies such as Mektebi Harbiye and Erkanı Harbiye. However, during the last 15 years of his reign, the military budget was reduced due to heavy debt burdens. Legal reforms included the establishment of modern criminal and commercial codes, the creation of the Attorney General's office, and the reorganization of the justice administration. In 1889, he issued the Kanunname of 1889, which banned the import and trade of African slaves and an anti-slavery regulation enforced more rigorously than previous ones.

Abdul Hamid emphasized his role as Caliph, the spiritual leader of the global Muslim community including Muslims in India, Africa, and Southeast Asia through a strategy of Pan-Islamism. He promoted symbols such as the Ottoman fez, which became a Muslim identity marker in many regions. As part of diplomatic outreach to the West, he sent a book to the United States during the Independence Hall celebration to foster cultural-scientific ties and invited American statisticians to help with population modeling in Turkey.²²

The Sultan pursued an economic policy based on food self-sufficiency, strengthening domestic trade, and opposing foreign privileges that disadvantaged local merchants. He established the Agricultural Bank and Ottoman chambers of commerce in Europe to support the development of the agrarian sector. He also attempted to reinforce gold- and silver-based currency and explored the creation of an independent national bank.²³

While many modern infrastructures and institutions were established, his autocratic methods and tight surveillance system sparked criticism and opposition. Graduates of modern schools and universities who demanded political representation grew into the Young Turk movement, which eventually forced the restoration of the constitution (1908 Revolution) and led to his overthrow in 1909. Ultimately, his modernization efforts laid the foundation for the modern nation-state and national identity, even though he himself fell as a result of those very reforms.²⁴

Previous research has highlighted Sultan Abdul Hamid II as a ruler who combined political authoritarianism with the spirit of modernization. Stanford J. Shaw in *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* shows that Abdul Hamid II strengthened central power by dissolving parliament and running an autocratic government, but at the same time introduced important reforms in the fields of education, infrastructure, and administration. He established new schools, expanded the telegraph network, and improved railway lines such as the Hejaz Railway, which strengthened the connectivity of the Ottoman Caliphate. From this study, it is illustrated that Abdul Hamid II did not just maintain the status quo, but tried to save the country through careful modernization measures.

On the other hand, many studies also highlight the great role of Abdul Hamid II

²¹ "Abdul Hamid II: The Last Great Sultan of the Ottoman Empire." Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://theothertour.com/abdul-hamid/?utm>.

²² "Sultan Abdul Hamid II."

²³ "The Ottoman Economy During the Reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II." Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://turkpidya.com/the-ottoman-economy-during-the-reign-of-sultan-abdul-hamid-ii/?utm>.

²⁴ "Sultan Abdul Hamid II."

in developing the ideology of Pan-Islamism. Selim Deringil's research in *The Well-Protected Domains* confirms that Abdul Hamid II sought to strengthen his position as the Caliph of global Muslims to resist the pressure of Western colonialism. He used religious symbolism, diplomatic communication, and a network of clerics to build the loyalty of Muslims in Asia, Africa, and even Southeast Asia. This strategy aims to strengthen the caliphate's authority amid political vulnerability and growing military pressure from the West.

However, other results from studies such as those by Benjamin Fortna (*Imperial Classroom*) show that although the modernization of education flourished in the era of Abdul Hamid II, there is a great paradox: the education system was aimed not at promoting free thought, but at strengthening loyalty to the state and the Caliphate.²⁵ In addition, most studies criticize how these modernization efforts were not enough to stop the rise of ethnic nationalism in the Balkans and Arabs, which ultimately weakened Ottoman rule. Thus, previous research provides an overview of the complexity of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's legacy: between controlled modernization, authoritarian politics, and the failure to maintain the unity of the caliphate.

Previous research has succeeded in filling an important gap in understanding how Sultan Abdul Hamid II utilized the ideology of Pan-Islamism as a tool of international diplomacy. Prior to studies such as those conducted by Selim Deringil, the focus of studies on Abdul Hamid II tended to portray him as an authoritarian ruler who was reactionary to liberalism. Deringil and contemporary historians later point out that Abdul Hamid II actively used the position of Caliph to build global Islamic solidarity and consolidate power in the face of colonial pressure. It fills a void about religious diplomacy strategies that were previously less analyzed in depth.

In addition, modern research has filled a gap in the understanding of modernization in the era of Abdul Hamid II. Studies by Benjamin Fortna and others have proven that behind his absolutist image, Abdul Hamid II made huge investments in education, communication, and infrastructure. In the past, many historians thought that his reign was a period of regression, but new research shows that there were systematic modernization projects, including the expansion of the railway network (such as the Hejaz Railway) and the establishment of public schools to create a loyal bureaucracy. It corrects the old narrative that oversimplified his reign as a "dark age."

Finally, cutting-edge studies also fill in the gaps in understanding the Ottoman Empire's response to Western colonialism in regions such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Sudan.²⁶ Previously, many historical narratives focused more on Western powers, without looking sufficiently deeply at how Abdul Hamid II sought to manage this crisis through a combination of diplomacy, symbolic resistance, and political maneuvers. Through research based on Ottoman archives, it is now clearer how Abdul Hamid II's strategy actually sought to maintain the influence of the caliphate, even in conditions of very limited military and economic power.²⁷

Practically, research on Sultan Abdul Hamid II is useful for enriching understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of the modern Islamic world, especially in the

²⁵ Fortna, Benjamin C.

²⁶ Mikhail, Alan, dan Christine M. Philliou. "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 721–745.

²⁷ Mohd Nor, M. R., dan N. Z. Y. Ali. "Ketokohan dan Sumbangan Sultan Abdul Hamid II Sebagai Khalifah Terakhir Dawlah Uthmaniyyah Berlandaskan Prinsip al-Quran dan al-Sunnah." *Ma'ālim Al-Qur'ān Wa Al-Sunnah* 14, no. 1 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.33102/jmqs.v14i1.121>.

context of the relationship between Islamic powers and Western colonialism.²⁸ The study also provides important lessons for the contemporary Muslim world on how to deal with global pressures with a diplomatic, symbolic, and gradual modernization approach. In addition, a more complete understanding of Abdul Hamid II's political strategy can be used as a reference for policymakers in designing a model of integration of religion and nationalism to strengthen collective identity without getting caught up in extremism.

Theoretically, this research enriches the treasures of historical science, Islamic political studies, and international relations by offering a new perspective on adaptive authoritarianism and Pan-Islamism as a political tool.²⁹ The study also challenges old theories that tend to separate modernization from absolute power, by suggesting that modernization and authoritarianism can go hand in hand in certain contexts. Thus, this research opens up new space for the development of theories about the transition of power, religious diplomacy, and the concept of modernization in the Islamic world at the end of the 19th century.³⁰

One of the main limitations of research on Sultan Abdul Hamid II is its reliance on official sources from the Ottoman government and Western reports, which are often biased and not entirely neutral. Many of the available archives come from the point of view of the European colonial court or administration, making it difficult to obtain a truly objective picture of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's political motivations and strategies. In addition, the lack of records of domestic opposition voices, such as those of the reformers Young Turks before 1908, made the historical narrative more dominated by the state's point of view and reduced understanding of social dynamics among ordinary people.

On the other hand, the limitations also lie in the geographical scope of the research which generally focuses on centers of power such as Istanbul and some strategic regions such as Egypt or the Balkans, while the dynamics in the periphery of Ottoman power receive less attention. As a result, the direct impact of Abdul Hamid II's policies on communities in regions such as the Hijaz, Yemen, North Africa, and Southeast Asia has not been widely explored. This opens up opportunities for more in-depth follow-up research with a microhistorical approach, including an exploration of local networks of scholars, Islamic social movements, and local resistance under the caliphate of Abdul Hamid

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the complexity of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's leadership in facing major challenges in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Departing from the political, social, and international dynamics of the time, it can be seen that Abdul Hamid II did not merely represent an authoritarian ruler figure as often portrayed in Western literature, but also a strategic leader who sought internal stability through controlled modernization and the mobilization of global Islamic solidarity.

In the midst of Western colonialist pressure and internal crisis, Abdul Hamid II carried out various modernization projects in the fields of education, communication, and

²⁸ Mujahidin, M. "Hubungan Sosial Budaya Islam Dan Kristen: Periode Pertengahan Dan Modern." *ALMAARIEF*, (2019): 1–10.

²⁹ Fauzi, L. A.-H. M., E. A. Rozali, dan S. Rijal. "Abdullah Quilliam: Penggerak Polisi Pan-Islamisme di Barat (1887–1932)." *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2024): 201–213.

³⁰ Albayrak, I. "Modernity, Its Impact on Muslim World and General Characteristics of 19–20th-Century Revivalist–Reformists' Re-Reading of the Qur'an." *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 424.

infrastructure, while maintaining absolute power in response to the threat of state disintegration. His Pan-Islamist efforts succeeded in strengthening the legitimacy of the caliphate in the eyes of the Islamic world, although it was not entirely able to stem the rise of ethnic nationalism and the weakening of Ottoman power in some regions.

This study fills a gap in previous studies by highlighting how modernization and authoritarianism can go hand in hand, as well as how religious symbolism is used as an instrument of diplomacy in the face of Western imperialism. In addition, this study confirms the importance of understanding Abdul Hamid II not only from the perspective of the political elite, but also from the social and cultural perspective of global Muslims.

However, the limited access to alternative sources and the geographical focus that is still concentrated in Istanbul suggest that further studies exploring local dynamics and the voices of ordinary people are still needed. Thus, the understanding of the reign of Abdul Hamid II will become more balanced and contextual.

Overall, Sultan Abdul Hamid II is a clear example of how Muslim leaders confront modernity and colonialism with an adaptive, religious, and pragmatic approach, an important lesson for the study of the relationship between power, religion, and modernization in the history of the Islamic world.

REFERENCES

- “Abdul Hamid II: The Last Great Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.” Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://theothertour.com/abdul-hamid/?utm>.
- “Sultan Abdul Hamid II.” Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/sultan-abdul-hamid-ii/?utm>.
- “Sultan Abdul Hamid II.” Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/sultan-abdul-hamid-ii/?utm>.
- “Sultan Abdul Hamid II.” Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/sultan-abdul-hamid-ii/?utm>.
- “The Ottoman Economy During the Reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II.” Diakses 11 Agustus 2025. <https://turkpidya.com/the-ottoman-economy-during-the-reign-of-sultan-abdul-hamid-ii/?utm>.
- Alawiyah, A., M. Faiz, dan M. Masruri. “Strategi Politik Pan-Islamisme Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909 M).” *Advances in Humanities and Contemporary Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024): 162–170.
- Albayrak, I. “Modernity, Its Impact on Muslim World and General Characteristics of 19–20th-Century Revivalist–Reformists’ Re-Reading of the Qur’an.” *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 424.
- An-Na’im, Abdullahi Ahmed. *Muslim & Keadilan Global*. Vol. 3. Cirebon: Institute for Migrant Rights Press, 2013.
- Ardic, Nurullah. *Islam and the Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern Modernization in the Early 20th Century*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Cleveland, William L., dan Martin Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. London: Routledge, 2024.

- Deringil, Selim. *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999.
- Fauzan, P. I., dan A. K. Fata. "Model Penerapan Syariah Dalam Negara Modern (Studi Kasus Arab Saudi, Iran, Turki, Dan Indonesia)." *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 12, no. 1 (2018): 51–70.
- Fauzi, L. A.-H. M., E. A. Rozali, dan S. Rijal. "Abdullah Quilliam: Penggerak Polisi Pan-Islamisme di Barat (1887–1932)." *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2024): 201–213.
- Fortna, Benjamin C. *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Gencer, M. "The Congress of Berlin (1878) in Context of the Ottoman-German Relations." *Pursuit of History* 12 (2014).
- Hamsah, M. I. N., dan M. Dahlan M. "Analysis of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's Pan-Islamism Policy Towards Asian and European Geopolitics in the 19th Century." *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 3, no. 5 (2023): 4781–4800.
- Holt, P. M. *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Kurniawan, A. S., dan N. Hadi. "Pengaruh Pan Islamisme Bagi Kekhilafahan Turki Utsmani Pada Masa Sultan Abdul Hamid II." *Tanjak: Sejarah dan Peradaban Islam* 2, no. 2 (2022): 181–204.
- Lapidus, Ira. "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): 444–460.
- Mikhail, Alan, dan Christine M. Philliou. "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 721–745.
- Mohd Nor, M. R., dan N. Z. Y. Ali. "Ketokohan dan Sumbangan Sultan Abdul Hamid II Sebagai Khalifah Terakhir Dawlah Uthmaniyyah Berlandaskan Prinsip al-Quran dan al-Sunnah." *Ma'ālim Al-Qur'ān Wa Al-Sunnah* 14, no. 1 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.33102/jmq.v14i1.121>.
- Mujahidin, M. "Hubungan Sosial Budaya Islam Dan Kristen: Periode Pertengahan Dan Modern." *ALMAARIEF*, (2019): 1–10.
- Omar, Y. "USA Diplomacy Towards the Counter-Revolution and Sultan Abdul Hamid II's Dethronement (1909)." *History Studies International Journal of History* 13, no. 2 (2021): 423–448. <https://doi.org/10.9737/hist.2021.995>.
- Shaw, Stanford J., dan Ezel Kural Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*. Vol. 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Shlaim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. London: Penguin UK, 2015.
- Yavuz, F., dan Z. İskefiyeli. "Hakan-ı Sabık'tan Hakan-ı Mağfur'a: II. Abdülhamid'in Ölümünün Yerli ve Yabancı Gazetelerdeki Yansımaları." *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 56 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.21563/sutad.1222229>.

Danial M., Robi'atul Adawiyah, Mohammad Izdiyan Muttaqin
MODERNIZATION EFFORTS OF THE OTTOMAN CALIPHATE DURING THE REIGN OF
SULTAN ABDUL HAMID II