The Ninety-Three Days of the Shadow Sultan: A Comprehensive Analysis of Murad V and the Ottoman Collapse of 1876

Part I: The Intellectual Prince and the Burden of the Throne

1. Introduction: The Year of Three Sultans

The year 1876 represents a singular fracture in the timeline of the Ottoman Empire, a *fin de siècle* moment occurring a quarter-century before the century turned. It was the "Year of Three Sultans," a chaotic interregnum where the imperial center in Istanbul oscillated between autocracy, liberal constitutionalism, and reactionary despotism. At the heart of this vortex stood Sultan Murad V, a figure whose tragic reign—lasting a mere ninety-three days—serves as the perfect prism through which to view the empire's existential crisis. To understand the trajectory of the modern Middle East and the Balkans, one must dissect the turbulent period from May 30 to August 31, 1876, not merely as a sequence of political events, but as a psychological and geopolitical catastrophe. This report provides an exhaustive analysis of this era, divided into two distinct but interlocking spheres: the personal tragedy of the liberal, Freemason Sultan Murad V, whose mental collapse mirrored the state's political paralysis; and the broader geopolitical convulsion of the Ottoman Empire itself, grappling with financial default, the "Great Eastern Crisis," and the violent birth of constitutionalism.

2. The Formation of a Liberal Prince

Born on September 21, 1840, at the Çırağan Palace, Şehzade Mehmed Murad (later Murad V) was the eldest son of Sultan Abdulmejid I and Şevkefza Sultan, an ethnic Georgian.[1] His birth occurred during the nascent stages of the *Tanzimat*, the reorganization period initiated by his father, which sought to modernize the empire through Western-style reforms. Unlike the

sequestered existences of princes in previous centuries, Murad's upbringing was a synthesis of traditional Islamic scholarship and European humanism, designed to produce a ruler capable of navigating a rapidly changing world order.

2.1 Pedagogical Foundations and Western Orientation

The education of Şehzade Murad was rigorously structured to bridge the East-West divide that characterized the 19th-century Ottoman identity crisis. His tutors included Toprik Süleyman Efendi, who instructed him in the Quran, and Sheikh Hafız Efendi, who grounded him in the *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet).[1] Simultaneously, Ferrik Efendi oversaw his mastery of the Ottoman Turkish language, ensuring he possessed the rhetorical skills necessary for the court.[1]

However, it was the Western component of his education that shaped his political and aesthetic sensibilities. He was tutored in French by Monsieur Gardet, a language that was the *lingua franca* of diplomacy and the medium through which liberal political ideas entered the empire.[1] His artistic education was equally cosmopolitan; he studied piano under the guidance of Callisto Guatelli and the Italian Lombardi.[1] This was not a superficial hobby; Murad became an accomplished pianist and composer, demonstrating a sensitivity that detractors would later weaponize as "weak nerves" but supporters viewed as the mark of a refined, modern soul capable of empathy and cultural diplomacy.[1]

During the reign of his uncle, Sultan Abdulaziz (r. 1861–1876), Murad occupied the precarious position of *Veliahd* (Crown Prince). In a significant break with tradition, he accompanied Abdulaziz on his famous European tour in 1867. The Ottoman entourage visited the courts of London, Paris, and Vienna.[1] A photograph taken at Balmoral Castle on July 13, 1867, captures the Crown Prince in the company of European royalty, symbolizing his acceptance into the "family of kings".[1] This exposure solidified Murad's reputation as a Francophile and an Anglophile. To the European diplomatic corps and the rising Ottoman intelligentsia, he was the "hope of the liberals," the antidote to his uncle's perceived capriciousness and the vessel for future constitutional reforms.[2]

2.2 The Masonic Connection: The Lodge of Progress

A pivotal and controversial element of Murad's pre-sultanate life was his initiation into Freemasonry. This was not merely a social affiliation but a political statement, aligning the heir apparent with a transnational network of liberal thought and reformist agitation. Murad was the first member of the Ottoman dynasty to become a Freemason, a fact that terrified conservatives and emboldened the reformist "Young Ottomans".[1]

Table 1: Murad V's Masonic Timeline

Date	Event	Key Figures/Sponsors	Significance
1872 (Pre-Oct)	Recruitment	Seyyid Bey	Initial contact

		(Chamberlain), Cleanthi Scalieri	established through trusted palace aides.
Oct 20, 1872	Initiation	Cleanthi Scalieri (Grand Master)	Initiated into the *Proodos* (Progress) Lodge; first Ottoman royal to join.
Dec 1872	Elevation	*Proodos* Lodge Council	Promoted to the rank of Master Mason.
1872-1876	Proposal	Murad V, Scalieri	Proposal to found *Envar-ı Şarkiye* (Eastern Lights) Lodge with Turkish rituals.

The initiation took place on October 20, 1872, within the *Proodos* (Progress) Lodge in the Pera district of Constantinople.[1] The lodge was predominantly Greek, led by the banker and broker Cleanthi Scalieri, who would become one of the most significant figures in Murad's life.[2] The induction was sponsored by Murad's chamberlain, Seyyid Bey, indicating that the prince's household was already permeated by Masonic influence.[1]

There is evidence suggesting the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), a high-ranking Freemason himself, encouraged this affiliation during his interactions with Murad, viewing it as a means to bind the Ottoman future to British interests.[2] For Murad, the lodge offered a sanctuary from the suffocating atmosphere of the palace and a forum for political discourse. He was reportedly so committed to the craft that he proposed establishing an independent Ottoman lodge named *Envar-ı Şarkiye* ("Eastern Lights"), which would conduct its rituals in Turkish rather than the French or Greek common in Pera lodges.[1] Although this plan was never realized, it underscores his desire to indigenize Western liberal institutions.

This Masonic network provided a clandestine channel to the "Young Ottomans," a group of intellectual dissidents including Namık Kemal, Ziya Pasha, and Sadullah Pasha.[2] These intellectuals frequented Murad's estate in Kurbağalıdere, a district Namık Kemal dubbed *Fikirtepe* (Idea Hill), to discuss political theory, the necessity of a constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*), and the deposition of the autocratic Abdulaziz.[2] It was here, amidst intellectual disputes and, reportedly, heavy drinking, that the ideological foundations of his future reign were laid—and perhaps where the seeds of his psychological fragility were watered by alcoholism.[2]

3. The Coup of May 30: The Ascension of Anxiety

The path to the throne for Murad V was paved not by natural succession but by a military coup d'état, an event that carried the trauma of illegitimacy and violence. By the spring of 1876, the reign of Sultan Abdulaziz had become untenable. The empire was bankrupt, the provinces were in revolt, and the capital was paralyzed by student protests known as the

"Softa Riots".[5]

3.1 The Conspiracy of the Four Pillars

A coalition of high-ranking bureaucrats and military officers, known to history as the *erkan-ı erbaa* (the four pillars), conspired to depose Abdulaziz. These were:

1. **Midhat Pasha:** The ideological leader and champion of constitutionalism.[6]
2. **Hüseyin Avni Pasha:** The *Serasker* (War Minister), a ruthless military strongman who controlled the army.[5]
3. **Mehmed Rüşdi Pasha:** The Grand Vizier, providing bureaucratic legitimacy.[5]
4. **Hayrullah Efendi:** The *Sheikh-ul-Islam*, who provided the religious sanction (*fatwa*) for the deposition.[5]

On May 29, 1876, the conspirators finalized their plans. They secured a *fatwa* from Hayrullah Efendi authorizing the removal of the Sultan on grounds of incompetence and political failure.[5] The physical operation was entrusted to Süleyman Pasha, the Director of the Military Academy, and Refik Pasha, commander of the Istanbul garrison.[5]

3.2 The Night of Fear

In the early hours of May 30, 1876, military academy students and troops from the Taşkışla and Gümüşsuyu barracks surrounded the Dolmabahçe Palace.[2] Inside, Murad was waiting, but his reaction was not one of triumph. Historical accounts suggest he was seized by a paralyzing fear that the soldiers had come not to enthrone him but to assassinate him on his uncle's orders.[7] When the conspirators approached him, he was reportedly hesitant, requiring physical encouragement to leave his apartments.

He was transported by boat under the cover of darkness to the Seraskeriat (War Ministry). There, in the pouring rain, he received the homage (*biat*) of the ministers and military commanders, officially becoming Sultan Murad V.[2] However, the trauma of the night—the fear of death, the betrayal of his uncle, the menacing presence of the soldiers—inflicted immediate psychological damage. He ascended the throne as a man already breaking under the strain.

4. The Ninety-Three Days: A Psychological Disintegration

Murad V's reign is less a history of governance than a clinical case study in psychological disintegration under the pressure of absolute power. While he entered the sultanate with the goodwill of the liberal elite and the hope of Europe, his mental health began to unravel almost immediately, catalyzed by a series of violent shocks.

4.1 The Suicide of Abdulaziz

The first and perhaps mortal blow to Murad's stability occurred just five days into his reign. The deposed Sultan Abdulaziz, who had been confined to the Feriye Palace, was found dead on June 4, 1876.[5] The official cause of death was suicide; Abdulaziz had reportedly asked for a pair of scissors to trim his beard and subsequently slashed his wrists.[8]
However, in the hyper-politicized atmosphere of Istanbul, rumors of assassination circulated instantly. The coup leaders, particularly Hüseyin Avni Pasha and Midhat Pasha, were accused of ordering the murder to prevent a counter-coup.[8] Murad V was devastated. He had reportedly hoped to allow his uncle to retire quietly to a life of seclusion. The violent death triggered a profound guilt complex in the new Sultan. He became consumed by the paranoid belief that the world would view him as a patricide, a usurper who had sanctioned the murder of his own kin.[1] This event marked the onset of severe melancholia and the rapid deterioration of his "weak nerves".[1]

4.2 The Incident of Çerkes Hasan

If the death of Abdulaziz cracked Murad's psyche, the events of June 15, 1876, shattered it completely. Neşerek Kadın Efendi, one of Abdulaziz's favorite wives, died on June 11, reportedly from the shock and grief of her husband's deposition and death.[5] Her brother, a volatile army officer named Çerkes (Circassian) Hasan, sought revenge against the men he held responsible.
On the night of June 15, Hasan infiltrated a cabinet meeting taking place at the mansion of Midhat Pasha in Beyazıt. Heavily armed, he burst into the council chamber and unleashed a frenzy of violence.

- He shot and killed **Hüseyin Avni Pasha**, the War Minister and the "strongman" of the new regime.[5]
- He killed **Mehmed Raşid Pasha**, the Foreign Minister.[5]
- He wounded the Minister of Marine, Kayserili Ahmed Pasha, and chased Midhat Pasha, who escaped into an adjacent room.[5]
- In the ensuing chaos, Hasan killed a total of five people and wounded several others before being subdued and later executed.[5]

For Sultan Murad, the news of the massacre was catastrophic. The loss of Hüseyin Avni was particularly destabilizing; although Avni was an autocrat whom the liberals distrusted, he was also the military guarantor of the coup. Without him, Murad felt exposed and defenseless. The violence confirmed his worst paranoid fears: that the throne was a death sentence. He lapsed into a state of manic terror, exhibiting bizarre behavior, hallucinations, and an inability to focus on state affairs. He refused to see ministers, could not sleep, and retreated into alcoholism to numb his anxiety.[1]

4.3 The Medical Battle: Leidesdorf vs. Capoleone

The Ottoman cabinet found itself in a nightmare scenario: they had deposed a sane but unpopular autocrat only to replace him with a liberal monarch who was clinically insane. The attempt to treat Murad became a matter of state security, involving foreign specialists and international intrigue.

To diagnose the Sultan, the government summoned **Dr. Max Leidesdorf**, a renowned Viennese specialist in psychiatric disorders.[1] Leidesdorf arrived in Istanbul and conducted an examination of the Sultan. His diagnosis was relatively optimistic; he concluded that Murad was suffering from a nervous breakdown exacerbated by "weak nerves," alcoholism, and the acute shock of recent events.[1] He prescribed a regimen of strict rest, isolation from political duties, and hydrotherapy, predicting a full recovery within three months if treated in a quiet clinic.[1]

However, this medical opinion was fiercely contested by **Dr. Capoleone**, an Italian physician already attached to the palace medical staff. Capoleone provided a much bleaker, and arguably politically motivated, assessment.

- He contended that there was "never any change for the better, but rather for the worse" in the Sultan's condition.[7]
- He diagnosed the Sultan with "acute inflammation of the brain," implying an organic and irreversible degeneration (possibly hinting at general paresis of the insane, a late stage of syphilis, though not explicitly confirmed).[7]
- He described Murad's periods of calm not as recovery but as "nullity" caused by the softening of the brain.[7]
- Capoleone actively undermined Leidesdorf, asking the ministers, "Has he cured him? Has he brought about anything but a very superficial improvement?".[7]

The conflict between the doctors played into the hands of the political elite. Midhat Pasha, desperate to legitimize the constitutional regime, needed a functional sovereign immediately. The empire was at war with Serbia and Montenegro, and financial negotiations were at a standstill. A regent was not a viable long-term solution in the Ottoman system, which required the Sultan to be the active Commander of the Faithful. Leidesdorf's prescription of a three-month recovery period was politically impossible. Thus, the cabinet began to lean towards Capoleone's diagnosis of "incurability" to justify a second deposition.[2]

5. The Deposition and the Long Silence

By late August 1876, the charade could no longer be maintained. Public rumors were rampant; the government had initially claimed the Sultan was suffering from a "boil" on his back to explain his absence from Friday prayers, but few believed it.[2] Murad was unable to perform the *Kılıç Alayı* (Procession of the Sword), the Ottoman equivalent of a coronation, rendering his rule technically incomplete.

On August 31, 1876, the cabinet secured a new *fatwa* from the Sheikh-ul-Islam. The legal ruling authorized the deposition of the Sultan on the grounds of *cünun-ı mutbik* (continuous insanity) which rendered him incapable of fulfilling the duties of the Caliphate.[3]

- **Deposed:** Sultan Murad V.
- **Enthroned:** His younger brother, Abdulhamid II.

Murad V's reign had lasted exactly ninety-three days. He was removed from Dolmabahçe and confined to the Çırağan Palace, where he would remain a prisoner of state for the next twenty-eight years until his death in 1904.[1]

5.1 The Attempted Restoration: The Ali Suavi Incident

Murad's story did not end with his deposition. He remained a potent symbol for the opposition against Abdulhamid II's growing autocracy. On May 20, 1878, a radical journalist and "Young Ottoman" named **Ali Suavi** staged a desperate coup attempt to restore Murad to the throne. Known as the "Turbaned Revolutionary" due to his religious attire, Suavi gathered a band of roughly 150 to 250 rebels, mostly Muslim refugees from the Balkans (specifically Plovdiv) who had fled the Russian advance.[2] They stormed the Çırağan Palace, overwhelming the guards and reaching the ex-Sultan's apartments. Suavi intended to bring Murad out and proclaim him Sultan to the cheering crowds he hoped would gather.

The attempt ended in blood. The Beşiktaş Police Chief, **Yedisekiz Hasan Pasha**, a loyalist to Abdulhamid known for his immense physical strength and lack of education (his nickname "Yedisekiz" allegedly came from his signature, which was simply the numbers 7 and 8 in Arabic script), rushed to the scene. In a brutal encounter, Hasan Pasha killed Ali Suavi instantly with a heavy stick or cudgel.[2] The rebels were dispersed by gunfire, with many killed or driven into the Bosphorus. Murad, terrified by the violence and believing his execution was imminent, retreated into the harem.[12] The incident resulted in a severe tightening of his confinement and the exile of many surviving conspirators. Suavi's wife, Marie, burned his papers and fled to London the same night.[10]

5.2 The Scalieri Correspondence

Throughout his imprisonment, Murad maintained a secret correspondence with his Masonic mentor, Cleanthi Scalieri. Scalieri, who had fled to Athens to avoid arrest, bombarded European courts with pamphlets claiming Murad was sane and the rightful Sultan.[4] He devised fantastical plans to rescue Murad, including smuggling him onto a boat or curing his mental affliction using "magnetizers" and spiritualist mediums.[4]

Remarkably, Prince Selahaddin Efendi, Murad's son, acted as his father's secretary, dutifully copying these letters into notebooks found by historians a century later.[4] The correspondence reveals that Murad eventually regained his mental faculties around 1877. However, by then, Abdulhamid II had consolidated power, and Murad resigned himself to his fate, living out his

days playing the piano and composing music in the gilded cage of Çırağan.[1]

Part II: The Empire on the Precipice

While Murad V struggled with his personal demons in the palace, the Ottoman Empire was fighting for its very existence. The summer of 1876 was the apex of the "Great Eastern Crisis," a convergence of financial default, nationalist insurrection, and Great Power maneuvering that threatened to dismember the state.

6. The Financial Abyss: Bankruptcy and the Galata Bankers

The political instability of 1876 cannot be understood without reference to the economic catastrophe of 1875-1876. For decades, the Ottoman state had funded its modernization, military reforms, and the extravagant spending of the palace through high-interest loans from European banks and local financiers.

6.1 The Sovereign Default of 1875

On October 6, 1875, the Ottoman government, unable to service its debt, issued the *Ramazan Kararnamesi* (Decree of Ramadan).[13] This decree declared a partial sovereign default:

- The state would pay only 50% of the interest due on its loans in cash.
- The remaining 50% would be paid in new bonds bearing 5% interest.
- By 1876, even these partial payments ceased, leading to a full default.[14]

Table 2: The Scale of Ottoman Debt (c. 1875)

Metric	Figure (Approx.)	Context
Nominal Public Debt	£200 - £214.5 Million	Accumulated since the first loan in 1854 (Crimean War).
Annual Debt Service	£12 - £14 Million	Required for interest and amortization.
Total State Revenue	£21.7 Million	More than half of all revenue was consumed by debt service.
Comparison	~10x Revenue	A debt-to-income ratio that made solvency impossible.

This default had immediate and devastating political consequences. It alienated the Empire's traditional allies, Britain and France. Thousands of British bondholders, who had invested in "Turkish Consols," saw their savings vanish.[15] This loss of financial credibility meant the Porte

could not borrow money to pay the salaries of the army or the bureaucracy, creating a reservoir of discontent that Midhat Pasha tapped into to execute the coup against Abdulaziz.

6.2 The Role of the Galata Bankers

The crisis also highlighted the power and vulnerability of the Galata bankers—prominent Levantine, Greek, Jewish, and Armenian financial families who operated out of the Galata district in Istanbul. Families such as the **Baltazzi**, **Camondo**, **Zarifi**, **Coronio**, and **Tubini** acted as intermediaries between the Ottoman state and European capital.[16]

- **Function:** They provided short-term, high-interest loans (*avances*) to the treasury to bridge the gap between tax collection and expenditure.
- **Impact of Default:** When the state defaulted, the Galata bankers were left holding worthless paper. Their loss of confidence in the regime of Abdulaziz was a critical factor in the elite consensus that a regime change was necessary. The bankruptcy of the state became the bankruptcy of the Galata financial ecosystem.[18]

The financial crisis of 1876 was not solved until 1881 with the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA) under the *Muharrem Kararnamesi*, which handed over control of key imperial revenues directly to European creditors.[19] But in the summer of 1876, the empire was simply broke, fighting wars on empty coffers.

7. The Fire in the Balkans: Insurrection and War

During Murad V's brief reign, the Ottoman dominance in the Balkans faced its most severe challenge since the Greek War of Independence. The "Eastern Question" had reignited with ferocity, driven by agrarian discontent, rising nationalism, and Russian intrigue.

7.1 The April Uprising and the "Bulgarian Horrors"

The trouble began in Herzegovina in 1875 but metastasized in Bulgaria in April 1876. The "April Uprising" was a nationalist rebellion organized by the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee. centered in towns like Panagyurishte and Koprivshtitsa.[20]

- **Rebel Tactics:** The rebels, led by figures like Georgi Benkovski, attacked Ottoman police stations and Muslim villages. Lacking heavy artillery, they famously fashioned cannons out of hollowed cherry wood logs.[20]
- **Ottoman Response:** The regular army was stretched thin watching the Serbian border. The local authorities responded by mobilizing irregular troops (*Bashi-bazouks*) and Circassian militias. These forces suppressed the revolt with indiscriminate brutality.

The massacre at **Batak**, where thousands of civilians were killed in a church, became the focal point of international outrage.[21] Reports of these events reached the European press during

Murad V's reign, dubbed the "Bulgarian Horrors".[22]

- **The Daily News:** The American journalist Januarius MacGahan, writing for the British *Daily News*, published graphic, firsthand accounts of the aftermath.
- **Gladstone's Pamphlet:** William Gladstone, the British Liberal leader, published *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, a pamphlet that sold 200,000 copies within a month.[22]

The political impact was seismic. The Disraeli government, traditionally pro-Ottoman to check Russian expansion, was paralyzed by public fury. For Murad V's government, this was a diplomatic catastrophe. They had hoped the accession of a liberal, Freemason Sultan would charm Europe. Instead, they found themselves pariahs.

7.2 The Serbian and Montenegrin Wars (June-August 1876)

Sensing the Empire's weakness, the semi-autonomous principalities of Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire on June 30 and July 2, 1876, respectively.[2] This effectively opened a multi-front war in the Balkans.

The Serbian Front:

- **Command:** The Serbian army was commanded not by a Serb, but by the Russian general **Mikhail Chernyayev**, a Pan-Slavist hero who brought thousands of Russian volunteers with him.[24]
- **Structure:** The Serbian forces were divided into four armies: the Morava Army (main thrust toward Niš), the Timok Army (east), the Drina Army (west), and the Ibar Army.[24]
- **Campaign:** The Serbs hoped to incite a general uprising in Bosnia. However, the Ottoman army, commanded by experienced generals like Ahmed Eyüb Pasha, proved resilient. They utilized their superiority in modern rifles (Peabody-Martini) and artillery (Krupp guns) effectively.
- **Outcome:** The Ottoman forces halted the Serbian advance and launched a counter-offensive. By late August, during the final days of Murad's reign, the Ottomans won a significant defensive victory at the **Battle of Aleksinac**, stopping the Serbian drive toward the interior.[26]

The Montenegrin Front:

- In contrast to the Serbian front, the Montenegrins, led by Prince Nicholas, utilized the mountainous terrain to great effect. At the **Battle of Vučji Do** on July 18, 1876, Montenegrin forces inflicted a severe defeat on the Ottoman army, capturing high-ranking officers and boosting the morale of the Slavic insurgents.[27]

Murad V, in his mental stupor at Dolmabahçe, was completely detached from these military operations. Decisions were made by the cabinet and the *Serasker*, often without the Sultan's signature, creating a constitutional crisis where the head of state was effectively absent during a major war.[2]

8. The Birth of Constitutionalism: Midhat Pasha's Struggle

The chaos of 1876 accelerated the demand for structural change. The "Young Ottomans" and reformist bureaucrats believed that the only way to save the empire was to limit the Sultan's power and establish a parliament.

8.1 The Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*)

Midhat Pasha was the architect of this movement. During Murad's reign, Midhat served as a leading minister without portfolio and later Grand Vizier (under Abdulhamid). His goal was to promulgate the *Kanun-i Esasi* (Basic Law), the first Ottoman constitution.[6]

- **Ideology:** The Young Ottomans argued that the Tanzimat reforms had failed because they were imposed by an autocratic bureaucracy. They believed a parliament would represent the diverse *millets* (religious communities) of the empire, creating a unified "Ottoman" patriotism that would neutralize Balkan nationalism.[29]
- **Stalling:** The constitutional project stalled during Murad's rule. The Sultan's incapacity prevented the signing of necessary decrees. Furthermore, the cabinet was divided. While Midhat pushed for immediate constitutionalism to placate Europe, others argued that war required a strong executive and that a parliament would only lead to separatism.[30]

The "First Constitutional Era" would eventually be inaugurated in December 1876, but only after Murad had been removed and Abdulhamid II installed—a bitter irony, as Abdulhamid would later suspend the very constitution he promised to uphold.[3]

9. Conclusion: The Legacy of the Ninety-Three Days

The brief reign of Sultan Murad V stands as a haunting "what if" in Ottoman history. He represented the "liberal option"—a Freemason, Western-oriented, culturally sophisticated monarch who might have integrated the empire into the European concert and transitioned it peacefully into a constitutional monarchy. His mental collapse was not just a personal tragedy but a political catastrophe for the reformist movement.

The vacuum of leadership during his ninety-three days allowed the Balkan crisis to spiral into a major war, destroyed the empire's financial standing, and discredited the liberal elite who had engineered the coup. The "insanity" of the Sultan became a metaphor for the perceived insanity of attempting liberal reforms in a state under mortal siege.

Ultimately, the chaos of Murad's summer paved the way for the reaction. The Ottoman bureaucracy and military, traumatized by the anarchy, coups, and assassinations of 1876, turned to the "strong hand" of Abdulhamid II. The subsequent thirty-three years of Hamidian absolutism—characterized by centralization, censorship, and the suspension of

parliament—were a direct response to the failure of the Murad experiment. Murad V, the "Spiritist Sultan," remained in his gilded prison at Çırağan, a ghost of the liberal future that never came to pass, while the empire marched slowly toward its final dissolution.

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