A SURVEY OF FACTORS LEADING TO THE 1882 BRITISH INVASION OF EGYPT

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A senior thesis,
submitted to the History and Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Departments of Brandeis University, in partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of Arts degree.

April 26, 2012

Table of Contents

Introduction

The 1882 British invasion of Egypt was an important milestone in Egyptian history, resulting in British control over the country until 1954. This military venture was not a spontaneous act of imperialism, however. Great Britain was slowly drawn into Egypt over the course of the nineteenth century due to a number of strategic, economic, and political factors.

British interests in Egypt initially developed due to the declining Ottoman Empire. In the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire's decline appeared to threaten stability on the European continent. There was a widespread concern that the Turkish Empire's demise would offset the balance of power that had been struck between the European powers after the Napoleonic Wars. Concurrently, through reforms and modernization efforts, Muhammad Ali had established Egypt as a rising new power in the Mediterranean. Great Britain recognized the potential to use Egypt to support the Ottoman Empire and therefore prevent further decay. From the early 1800's until 1840, the relationship between Great Britain and Egypt developed from this notion.

During this period, British foreign policy evolved into a strategy known as intermeddling. This approach took the form of interference without intervention. In Egypt, Great Britain began to assert its interests through diplomatic and economic channels. By the middle of the century, the British had come to dictate the scope of Egyptian territorial expansion and championed economic policies that served British interests. The British prevented Muhammad Ali from extending his borders into Syria and opposed the French-supported construction of the Suez Canal. Instead, they emphasized the creation of an overland rail route across Egypt. Furthermore,

British and French citizens invested heavily in Egypt, hoping to profit from the country's continued growth.

By the 1870's, financial disarray in Egypt prompted the next stage of its relationship with Great Britain. A huge debt to European creditors forced Great Britain and France to intervene in the management of the Egyptian budget to guarantee their investments. Indirect intermeddling had become direct interference.

Due to the change in the countries' interests in Egypt, Great Britain and France developed stake in Egypt's politics as well. In order to maintain the finances, the European representatives had to work closely with the Egyptian Government. Problems arose when a joint Anglo-French effort encountered waning support from the leadership in Egypt. Faced with potential Egyptian default, the European powers orchestrated the removal of the troublesome ruler and arranged for more compliant management instead. With this action, Great Britain and France had become permanently committed to the restoration of Egyptian financial stability.

This coup proved to be the catalyst for the British invasion. Nationalist sentiment in Egypt was stirred up by the augmented European involvement, which brought about a movement to restore Egypt to self-government. As the faction gained popularity, they also gained power in the Egyptian Government. By 1882, the Egyptian Government was altogether averse to continued European interference. The British and French, however, remained dedicated to the repayment of the debt. Ultimately, a riot in Alexandria aimed specifically toward foreigners prompted action. The French Government resisted military intervention, but the British were resolute that all other actions would be ineffective. As a result, the British military was sent to restore order in Egypt.

Chapter 1: The Eastern Question

British economic interests in Egypt originated in the early nineteenth century after Muhammad Ali took control of Egypt. Under his guidance, Egypt developed from a forgotten corner of the Ottoman Empire into an important factor in Europe politics. His infrastructural, governmental, and economic reforms precipitated Egypt's rapid modernization and subsequent ascent to a position perhaps more powerful than its Ottoman suzerains.

In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Egypt's emergence attracted the attention of the great European powers that were attempting to reconstruct Europe. With Napoleon's 1815 downfall, the declining Ottoman Empire became the new focal point of European diplomacy. The ensuing debate over the future of the Ottoman Empire was popularly referred to as the Eastern Question. The Great Powers recognized that the Ottoman Empire was slowly disintegrating, and its deterioration could lead to a disruption in the newly established peace. The debate centered over the general concern that the destabilization of the Turkish Empire could result in a chaotic land grab for territory that had formerly fallen under the authority of the Sublime Porte.[1]

To maintain peace initially, the European powers attempted to cooperate with one another to sustain the Ottoman Empire. However, each recognized that the collapse would soon occur and thus they covertly jockeyed to obtain the most advantageous position. With its newly acquired strength and strategic position, Egypt played a critical role in this clandestine war. The British in particular saw the potential to use Egypt to achieve their objectives related to the so-

[1] A term used to refer to the Sultan. Literally a reference to the building where his foreign ministry sat. Dominic Green, *Three Empires on the Nile: The Victorian Jihad, 1869-1899*, (New York: Free Press, 2007), 6.

called “Eastern Question.” A simultaneous surge of interventionist foreign policy in the British Government first prompted Great Britain to take interest in the growth and development of Egypt.

The Rise of Muhammad Ali

The Egyptian Khedivate, as the ruling dynasty became known, assumed power in Egypt through the intelligence and cunning of one man, Muhammad Ali. Born in 1769 of Albanian heritage in the Ottoman port of Kavala, a coastal town in what is now Greece, Muhammad Ali first rose to prominence in local government. In 1799, he answered the Ottoman Sultan’s call for soldiers to unite with their Muslim brethren to expel the French from Egypt. By 1807, through craft and guile, he had taken control of the state.

The war in Egypt had begun in 1798, when the French army under Napoleon Bonaparte landed at Alexandria. Always suspicious of the French, the British had put immense political pressure on the Ottoman Sultan, Selim III, to take action against the invaders. The Porte acquiesced by sending troops from around the Empire, including Muhammad Ali’s contingent, to assist in the resistance against the French. Although the joint British and Turkish armies quickly defeated the French, their victory led to a power vacuum in Egypt. In the chaos that followed, the former rulers of Egypt, the Mamelukes, as well as other factions including the British and Circassians, fought to establish authority.

The power struggle resulted in a state of anarchy that lasted until in 1807. During the confusion, Muhammad Ali dispatched his rivals through diplomacy and treachery. Hearing of Muhammad Ali’s success, the Sultan put his support behind the Albanian and to quiet the unrest and maintain Ottoman control. Muhammad Ali was then able to consolidate control of Egypt and

handily restore order. After establishing himself as the unopposed leader, he proclaimed himself Khedive[2], or viceroy, of Egypt, and thus began a century of rule by him and his descendents.

The growth of European influence in Egypt in the nineteenth century directly relates to Muhammad Ali's ascension to power. Like his successors, Muhammad Ali was fascinated by the European system and made it a priority to modernize Egypt on the European model. Inspired by Napoleon's endeavors in empire-building, he aimed to make Egypt "practically independent of the Porte under a nominal suzerainty."[3] He foresaw the end of the Ottoman Empire, and was determined to build an Egyptian Empire on its remains. Soon after consolidating power, Muhammad Ali followed Ottoman precedent and abolished all personal ownership of land, declaring all private *wafks*, or plots of land, to be property of the Khedive. He then established a bureaucracy to cultivate the land while maintaining personal control over all profits.

In an ultimately misguided effort to turn agrarian Egypt into a manufacturing center, large quantities of scarce resources and expensive machinery were imported for the construction and operation of factories and mills. Using forced labor by an ancient system called the *corvée*[4], Muhammad Ali also built numerous canals and waterways to expedite trade between major cities. Despite his exploitation of the *fellahin*, or peasantry, his attempt to establish native

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[2] The title Khedive was not officially granted to the rulers of Egypt until 1867. It is unclear whether or not the early leaders of Egypt used this term to describe their position, although the late nineteenth and twentieth century sources referenced in the bibliography often use the word to describe the earlier Egyptian rules. Late eighteenth century British history Donald Andreas Cameron claims that the word first came into use in 1867 when the Ottoman Sultan "chose an obscure Persian word, 'Khideev,' or prince" to bestow upon Ismail. Thus, this would appear to be the first incarnation of the title Khedive as applied to the Egyptian rulers.
Donald Andreas Cameron, *Egypt in the nineteenth century: or, Mehemet Ali and his successors until the British occupation in 1882*, (Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), 251.

[3] *ibid*., 121.

[4] The *corvée* was a system of forced labor that had been used in Egypt since the age of the Pharaohs. In his account of the British occupation of Egypt, Elbert Farman, an American Consul-General in Cairo, explains the system as "a '*levée en masse.*' All the people (men, women, and children) were taken from the rural villages, often to a considerable distance, and kept without pay…according to the requirements of the service."
Elbert E. Farman, LL.D, *Egypt and Its Betrayal: An Account of the Country During the Periods of Ismail and Tewfik Pashas, and of How England Acquired a New Empire* (New York: The Grafton Press, 1906), 27.

industry had little chance of long term success. Egypt lacked the necessary resources to support heavy manufacturing, and eventually the Egyptian budget could no longer sustain the importation of vast quantities of coal, iron, and timber to maintain the factories.[5] The importation of resources brought high costs and ultimately, large debt.

Nevertheless, as Khedive, Muhammad Ali dictated Egyptian commerce, maintaining a monopoly on all trade within the country and personally playing the middle-man with Europeans. He invited foreign merchants to trade in Egypt in order to develop commerce and then used the profits to build, modernize, and sustain a large army and navy. His ambitions were especially inspired by the French. He had witnessed the great victories of Napoleon and marveled at his governmental system. The Egyptian administration was accordingly modeled on Napoleon's French state and even employed many officers who had served in Napoleonic France. Likewise, the military school at Aswan was run by a French colonel and employed French officers.

In addition to his admiration for Napoleon's bureaucracy, Muhammad Ali also aimed to emulate the French dictator's success in empire-building. However, lengthy military campaigns throughout the Middle East and North Africa, including forays into Arabia and the Sudan, as well as poor investments extracted a huge financial toll on Egyptian finances. There were no written accounts of Egyptian revenue and expenditure during his regime, but Muhammad Ali's

[5] Both Cameron, a British historian writing at the end of the nineteenth century, and Edwin de Leon, the American Consul-General to Egypt in the 1850's, remark that Muhammad Ali's efforts to establish a native heavy manufacturing industry were futile. He failed to find necessary resources such as coal and iron in Egypt, and so he turned abroad to import them in high quantities. While this system worked well in times of plenty, when the budget was strained, the resources would dwindle. Eventually, when the Egyptian economy dipped dramatically late in Muhammad Ali's reign, the industry was abandoned altogether.
Cameron, 126-127.
Edwin de Leon, *Egypt Under Its Khedives, Or, The Old House Of Bondage Under New Masters*, (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882), 41.

contemporaries report of oft strained finances.[6] This extravagant spending set a dangerous precedent for his successors who would later try to emulate Muhammad Ali's grand rejuvenation of Egypt. Problems would arise as a result in the second half of the nineteenth century. Under Muhammad Ali's shrewd rule, Egypt succeeded in establishing itself as a viable power in the Levant and soon became of heightened interest to Europe.

The British in Egypt in the Early Nineteenth Century

With the advent of European empires and the colonization of the Far East, Egypt became of increasing commercial importance to Europe because Egypt connected the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, a critical junction for trade with colonies that lay in the Orient. It was vital to each power that its own interests in Egypt were protected, either by controlling Egypt or protecting its neutrality. As a result, when a venture in Egypt became the focus of one country, others were sure to take note.

When Napoleon led his army across Egypt, the country became of heightened interest to the British. For centuries, Great Britain and France had maintained a deep-seated competition and enmity towards one another, and by the nineteenth century this came to dictate the foreign policy of both nations. Indeed, the Napoleonic invasion spawned primarily from the "aspirations of the French nation...for the acquisition of new colonies and its conquest rivalry with England."[7] The British felt threatened by the French actions and consequently bolstered their own efforts to influence Egypt. It is important to note, though, that in the early nineteenth century, British

[6] De Leon references stories from Muhammad Ali's contemporaries that detail how the Khedive's lavish expenditure would leave the finances in dire straits, only to be rescued by "his sudden and inexplicable command of money from no visible source."
De Leon, 41.

[7] Haji A. Browne, *Bonaparte in Egypt and the Egyptians of To-Day*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 36.

intentions were simply to protect British trade through Egypt, and not necessarily play a role in the management of the country. Later developments both in Egypt and in Europe would alter this policy. In the 1820's, however, it was Great Britain's efforts to protect her commerce that swept Egypt up into the European power struggle.

Early attempts by the British to spread their influence in Khedival Egypt were largely unsuccessful. Muhammad Ali's success in stabilizing Egypt after the French invasion had demonstrated that he could be a tremendous regional ally for the British, but Muhammad Ali resisted British pressures out of fear that they harbored ulterior designs in Egypt. His wariness was encouraged by the remnants of the pervasive, anti-British, French influence.

The first British diplomatic foray took place during Muhammad Ali's invasion of the Saudi state in Arabia.[8] British trade was disrupted by pirates in the Persian Gulf who were emboldened by the radical Wahhabi teachings spread by the Saudis, and attacks on British ships increased. At the same time, the Saudis angered the Ottoman Sultan with their raids on nearby Turkish cities and their destruction of holy sites in Mecca and Medina. In 1811, at the Sultan's behest, Muhammad Ali sent his son, Ibrahim, to lead the Egyptian army into Arabia, ultimately destroying the Saudi state completely by 1818. However, Muhammad Ali's war against the Saudis did little to impact the pirates in the Gulf who, despite a shared belief system, were unaffiliated with the Saudis. The British took independent action against the pirates, sending two expeditions, in 1811 and 1819. From this endeavor, the British concluded that an alliance with Egypt would be beneficial in preventing another disruption in trade. They believed that Muhammad Ali would prove to be a reliable British ally in the region and thus a British emissary

[8] The Saudis had established a foothold in Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century under Saud I, who set up a state governed by a revisionist style of Islam based on the teachings of Mehemet ibn Abdul-Wahhab. The Wahhabi school aimed to restore purity to Islam, viewing the practice of the religion under the Turkish Caliphate as a self-indulgent corruption of Muhammad's legacy.

was sent to offer an alliance with Ibrahim's forces. Wary of British motives, however, Muhammad Ali declined the British request and nothing further ensued.

Muhammad Ali recognized the dangers of the British desires. After their decisive victory at Trafalgar in 1805, the British enjoyed unrivaled naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, colonies in India and the Far East were of ever-increasing importance to the burgeoning British Empire. Naturally, Egypt's rapid expansion around the Mediterranean was of high interest to the British, who depended on an unobstructed passage from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean for trade with its colonies in the Far East. With possession of Egypt, the British could secure the missing link in their empire, stretching from the British Isles to the Indian subcontinent. Muhammad Ali understood this to be the paramount reason for Egypt's significance to Great Britain, and therefore made every effort to resist British involvement in Egyptian affairs.

Meanwhile, the French had established themselves as the object of affection for the Egyptian leader. This French influence had also contributed to Muhammad Ali's suspicion of British motives. In an 1814 encounter with John Lewis Burckhardt, a Swiss traveler of the English African Association, Muhammad Ali explained his fear of the British after learning that existing tensions between Britain and Russia would not boil over into war:

> The pasha...expressed considerable alarm for the safety of Egypt, feeling persuaded, he said, that the English had always an intention of taking possession of it, as a link of value in the chain by which they would thus connect themselves with their Indian possessions; and that since the Russians were already making warlike movements, and assembling their troops on the Russia frontier, nothing could be a fairer plea for the British nation to carry its project into execution, than that of checking, and opposing the ambitious designs of so overgrown a power, and one so likely to become a dangerous rival, as that of Russia.[9]

[9] John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels of M. Burckhardt in Egypt and Nubia*, (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1819), 25.

Nonetheless, Muhammad Ali viewed the British ownership of Egypt as inevitable. "The great fish swallow the small...and Egypt is necessary to England," he said.[10] Although he considered himself a friend and trading partner to the British Empire, he was witness to the chaotic diplomacy that developed in Europe with the fall of Napoleon. From the stark transition from the Napoleonic Wars to the hastily manufactured peace, he observed: "among great men, we see many compliments, and very little sincerity."[11] He believed that British coveted Egypt in order to unite their Empire and that eventually they would act on their desires. As a result, when Egypt was drawn into the power struggle in Europe in the 1820's and 1830's, Muhammad Ali was careful not to antagonize Great Britain.

Egypt and the Eastern Question

From the 1820's until the end of the Crimean War, British policy in Egypt centered on the Eastern Question. That is, the potential effect on the European balance of power that might result from a collapse of the Ottoman Empire. By the 1820's, Russia loomed as an imposing threat to the status quo that had been established in 1815. The Ottoman Empire had long provided a critical barrier between Russia and the rest of Europe, but the once-great Turkish Empire was in steep decline and had become the 'sick man of Europe.' After the Napoleonic Wars, the great European powers tried to restore order based upon the structure that had existed before the conflict. Somewhat ironically, a series of wars were fought in order to maintain the fragile equilibrium.

[10] John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia: comprehending an account of those territories in Hedjaz which the Mohammedans regard as sacred*, Volume I (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1829), 144.

[11] *ibid.*

In particular, the Western European powers feared Russian domination of Ottoman territory. An over-powerful Russia would disrupt the delicate balance that the powers had struggled so hard to establish. Furthermore, if the Russians gained leverage over the Turks, their influence over the Ottoman Sultan, who was suzerain over Egypt, could threaten British access to commercial waterways in the eastern Mediterranean. Great Britain also feared that Russian belligerence would threaten her colonies in Asia and India from the north. Thus, it was important both for the stability of Europe and for the security of the British Empire that the Ottoman Empire maintained its integrity. In the achievement of this goal, Egypt, as a vassal of the Turks, was a critical wild card.

Under Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim, the Egyptian army had established itself as a powerful force with its swift victory over the Saudi state.[12] Additionally, Muhammad Ali's leadership had turned Egypt into a stable power with great potential. Therefore, Egypt could be used to bolster the strength of Ottoman Empire and slow its decline. Alternately, Egypt's strength could potentially impair the European status quo if Muhammad Ali chose to rebel against his Turkish suzerains. Thus, Great Britain played a very delicate game in the Mediterranean, supporting Egypt enough to maintain the Ottoman Empire, but not so much that an Egyptian rebellion could endanger the Ottoman Empire. To fulfill these objectives, the British Foreign Secretary, Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston, devised an approach that involved increasing British manipulation of Ottoman and Egyptian affairs. It was as a consequence of this strategy that the British first meddled in the affairs of Egypt.

[12] The Egyptian army become even more effective in the 1820's with the arrival of Colonel Joseph Sève (also referred to as Suleiman Pasha). A former officer in Napoleon's army, Sève helped to train Ibrahim and the Egyptian army and also served as Ibrahim's chief of staff.
Cameron, 165.

The new British strategy first developed in the 1820's in response the Greek independence movement. In 1821, rebellions against the occupying Turks erupted throughout Greece. With his troops unable to suppress the insurrection, the Turkish Sultan, Mahmud II, offered Greater Syria to Muhammad Ali in exchange for his assistance. Once again, the Egyptian army was highly successful. Under Ibrahim's skilled direction, it won numerous victories against the Greeks where Ottoman forces had previously been defeated.[13] Initially, the European powers looked favorably on Ibrahim's success in Greece. They opposed Greek independence on the belief that it would present a potential complication to the Eastern Question. However, Great Britain was even more wary of the potential of Russian expansion into the Balkans. When it became clear that the Greeks were going to turn to Russia for assistance, British Prime Minister George Canning offered to mediate the conflict. His orchestration of a British-French-Russian alliance guided the Greeks to independence and also kept Russia at bay. During this conflict, Lord Palmerston served as the War Secretary in the British Parliament. His observations of Canning's limited-intervention stance in Greece heavily influenced the more intrusive policies that he later put forward as Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister. His new approach, termed 'intermeddling', would come to dictate British diplomacy for much of the rest of the nineteenth century. In an 1829 speech to Parliament, Palmerston outlined this policy:

> If by interference is meant interference by force of arms, such interference, the Government are right in saying, general principles and our own practice forbade us to exert. But if by interference is mean intermeddling, and intermeddling in every way, and to every extent, short of actual military force; then I must affirm that there is nothing in such interference which the laws of nations may not in certain cases permit.[14]

[13] It is worth noting that Muhammad Ali was not entirely committed to the war in Greece. He largely admired the Western European powers and did not want to antagonize them. Rather, he hoped for their assistance in modernizing his military in order to advance Egyptian expansion efforts. However, as he still remained a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, and was yet unwilling to cut ties, he was compelled to send troops to Greece.

[14] Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, (London: Constable, 1970), 100.

His definition of interference was a marked change from the post-Waterloo, defensive strategies favored by Great Britain. Palmerston's policy lent itself to a much broader interpretation, justifying British interference in the administration of other countries so long as the intervention was not through military means. Whereas previously the British Government involved itself in foreign matters only when her own interests were directly at stake, the new policy allowed for much looser construal of British interests. This 'intermeddling' approach ultimately substantiated the British Government's decision to interfere with Egyptian affairs in order to secure British objectives.

After the conflict in Greece, the Ottoman Empire spent the next decade embroiled in wars. To protect its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean during these battles, Great Britain first employed Palmerston's policy of intermeddling. War broke out between Russia and the Ottoman Empire almost immediately following the encounter in Greece. From this affair, Russia obtained Ottoman territory and diplomatic concessions from the Porte. This was quickly followed by a war between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire in 1831 over territory in Great Syria.[15] The dispute resulted in an increase of Russia's influence over the Ottoman Empire. For Russia's assistance against the Egyptians, the Turks rewarded Russia with a mutual defense pact in 1833 and also volunteered to close the Dardanelles to foreign ships should Russia be drawn into war.

Conflict arose once again between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire in the late 1830's, further straining the European balance of power. In the first conflict, Ibrahim's army had found incredible success against the Ottomans; at the war's peak, the Egyptian army threatened the Ottoman capital at Constantinople. However, in this war the Ottoman Empire was allied with Imperial Russia due to their 1833 treaty. Although Ibrahim had been victorious against the

[15] The Sultan had failed to follow through with his promise of granting Greater Syria to Egypt after the campaign in Greece, so Muhammad Ali sent the Egyptian army to seize it by force.

Turks, Lord Palmerston had little faith in his ability to defeat the Russians. Palmerston envisioned a scenario where Ibrahim would once again march on the Ottoman capital, only to be repulsed by Russian troops who would then remain as an occupying force over the Ottoman Empire.[16] Faced again with the prospect of unchecked Russian expansion, the policy of intermeddling was tested for the first time.

In order to prevent the nightmarish chain of events, Lord Palmerston called for a conference of the European powers in Vienna. He proposed that the powers unanimously agree to force Muhammad Ali to withdraw his forces from Syria and return the land back to the Ottomans.[17] While the Russians[18], Austrians, and Prussians agreed, the French wavered in their commitment to the plan. The French Empire had disappeared after Napoleon's downfall. Since then, France had strived to reassert its power in order to regain its former glory. In 1829, France had annexed Algeria to Egypt's west. Now they hoped to gain an advantage in North Africa by supporting Muhammad Ali against the Ottoman Empire. Thus, while the other powers signed the Treaty of London in July 1840, the French refused.

The Treaty offered Muhammad Ali hereditary rule over Egypt in exchange for his withdrawal from the contested Syrian territory. However, should he refuse, the European powers would militarily intervene to remove him from power. Although Muhammad Ali initially refused the terms, revolts against Ibrahim's despotic rule in Syria changed the course of negotiations.

[16] Ridley, 220.

[17] Lord Palmerston explained his proposal as follows: "It seems to the British Government, that there can be no security for permanent peace between the Sultan and Muhammad Ali, as long as they have both an army in Syria; for neither of them can look upon their present state of occupation as permanently satisfactory. Muhammad Ali has too much, not to wish for more; and the Sultan has lost too much, to be able to sit down contented with his loss." *ibid*., 221.

[18] Although the Russians had much to gain from entering hostilities on the side of the Ottoman Empire, they were more interested in an alliance with Great Britain. The British had been allied with France since the restoration of the French monarchy after Napoleon's downfall. However, the relationship had since cooled, and Czar Nicholas I hoped to compel the Great Britain to break the alliance in favor of one with Russia. Thus, when faced with the competing options of joint diplomacy with Great Britain or military allegiance to the Ottoman Empire, he chose the former.

Lord Palmerston capitalized on the turn of events by selling arms to the rebels and sending a combined Anglo-Austrian force to block Ibrahim's retreat by sea. As Ibrahim's army retreated across the desert, the British commander, Commodore Charles Napier sailed to Alexandria to demand Muhammad Ali's abdication. Instead, Napier reached an agreement with Muhammad Ali where he accepted the terms of the Treaty of London in exchange for guaranteed hereditary rule over Egypt and safe passage of Ibrahim's army back to Egypt.

Although the details of the outcome differed from Palmerston's intentions[19], Great Britain emerged victorious in the Levant. Moreover, the growing French influence in Egypt was suppressed and Russian expansion had been subdued. By the end of 1840, the relationship between Great Britain and Egypt had changed from one where Egypt was seen primarily as a bulwark to protect the Ottoman Empire to one where Britain had not only become a large stakeholder in Egypt, but the only one.

Although Palmerston was unhappy with Muhammad Ali as the *pasha* of Egypt, his actions during the Egyptian-Ottoman crisis in 1839 and 1840 had permanently established Muhammad Ali and his descendents as Egypt's leaders. This outcome brought with it the goodwill of the *pasha*, who had now firmly established himself in the eyes of the European Powers as the rightful leader of Egypt. Additionally, it further hampered French designs in Egypt as Egyptians now understood that Britain was the more powerful ally. They had prevented the breakup of the Ottoman Empire at a time when the largest beneficiaries of such an outcome

[19] Lord Palmerston despised Muhammad Ali. Palmerston had hoped that this war would result in Muhammad Ali's removal from authority in Egypt. In a June 10, 1839 letter to Lord Granville, he wrote: "I hate Muhammad Ali, whom I consider as nothing better than an ignorant barbarian who by cunning and boldness and mother wit has been successful in rebellion.... I look upon his boasted civilization of Egypt as the arrantest humbug, and I believe that he is as great a tyrant and oppressor as ever made a people wretched."
Ridley, 222.

would have been Russia and France. Great Britain had secured its trade interests in Egypt and benefited from the collapse of its rivals.

There was an economic aspect to the Treaty of London that even more directly tied the British to Egypt. The British had outstanding free trade agreements with the Ottoman Empire that, by the Treaty of London, were extended to include Ottoman dominion in Egypt. As a result, the British avoided the Egyptian trade monopolies and began developing their own trade interests in Egypt. Soon, British steamships were navigating the Mahmudieh Canal and plans were being laid out for a British railway to be built from Cairo to Suez. With Egyptian commerce now secure, the British Government attached even greater weight to the expansion of an overland route across Egypt for trade with the Far East. In the aftermath of the Treaty of London, the British became, for the first time, truly economically and politically invested in Egypt.

Pressures on the European continent ultimately produced Great Britain's first direct involvement in Egypt. Largely through the actions of Muhammad Ali and Lord Palmerston, Egypt's relationship with Europe was dramatically altered between 1811 and 1840. Muhammad Ali had put Egypt on the map through his wars and reforms, transforming Egypt into the most consequential vassal of the Ottoman Empire.

In many ways, however, Palmerston's diplomatic maneuvering during the Ottoman-Egyptian conflict in 1840 took Egypt away from Ottoman suzerainty and placed it under British guidance. While the Ottoman Sultan still maintained nominal authority over Egypt, the British became the protectors of his supremacy. With the Treaty of London, Great Britain had humbled Egypt. Muhammad Ali owed his hereditary rule and his army's survival to British intermeddling.

The economic benefits extended to the British by the treaty encouraged more direct relations between the British and Egypt. With Muhammad Ali's monopolies broken, British

goods and services flooded Egyptian commerce. Muhammad Ali's successors would, for the most part, embrace this new Western influence. Over the next few decades, the British would benefit from their unrivaled access to the Egyptian market. Although the Suez Canal, one of the most important commercial developments of the nineteenth century, was designed and built by a Frenchman, Great Britain's commanding influence over the Khedive ultimately resulted in its benefit from the endeavor. The relationship established by Lord Palmerston established a framework for Anglo-Egyptian relations that would develop as the nineteenth century progress.

Chapter 2: The Egyptian Financial Crisis

Muhammad Ali's dreams of an Egyptian Empire were dashed in the wake of the Treaty of London. After 1841, he continued his agenda of reform within Egypt, but he would never again venture to extend Egypt's borders. Similarly, Great Britain and France turned their attention away from Egypt as they dealt with wars and revolutions on their own continent. Muhammad Ali's successors' continued efforts to modernize Egypt ultimately drew European focus drawn back to the country. Muhammad Ali's rule had revealed Egypt's potential. Egypt's location was significant for trade and transit, and both countries desired to establish a route through Egypt that would drastically ease travel to the Far East. The creation of the Suez Canal developed from this objective, and the debate surrounding its construction once again set the British against the French.

Muhammad Ali's immediate successor, Abbas, did little to embrace the growing European interest. It was not until Abbas' successor, Said, that Egypt truly became open to Europe. During Said's rule, the contract for the Suez Canal was signed and the Egyptian cotton market peaked. Said also spent thriftlessly, however, causing Egypt to become indebted to European creditors for the first time. Said's successor, Ismail, was even more reckless with Egypt's treasury, and financed grand improvements with foreign loans. While Egypt's infrastructure grew immensely and the economy peaked under Ismail's financial policies, the national debt grew unchecked until it became burdensome to Egyptian interests.

Prior to 1841, Egypt had been a pawn used by Great Britain and France in the European power struggle. By the 1870's, this power structure had changed. Egypt's debt was primarily to British and French bondholders, and thus the two European countries had a new, financial stake

in Egypt. Great Britain and France could no longer keep up their fair-weather alliance with Egypt, reaping the benefits when Egyptian commerce was booming only to disengage when there was a bust. Faced with Khedive Ismail's unwillingness to yield to European advisors and the growing financial crisis, the British and French were driven to assume direct control of Egypt's finances, and in doing so, become a regulatory body in the Egyptian Government.

The Successors of Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali died in 1849 and his grandson Abbas assumed leadership of Egypt. Abbas was a much different leader than the others in Muhammad Ali's line. He was largely unsympathetic to foreigners, and made no effort to learn any European languages. All interactions with European diplomats and tradesmen were conducted through translators, thereby preventing productive relationships from forming. He was described by his contemporaries as "a true Turkish gentleman of the old school" who disliked European encroachment into Egypt but felt it futile to resist.[20] He believed that he lacked the authority to expel foreigners from Egypt, yet he did little to foster Egypt's relationship with Europe. Instead, he recalled Egyptians who were studying abroad and closed schools that taught European ideas.

Furthermore, Abbas made little effort to continue his grandfather's wars of expansion or to develop a thriving Egyptian infrastructure. He lacked Muhammad Ali's desire to modernize Egypt and did little to further this objective. Nevertheless, his detached rule resulted in the removal of the state monopolies that his grandfather had instituted, thus encouraging trade within Egypt. His primary goal as Khedive was a failed endeavor to secure from the Porte succession by primogeniture, so that his son, El-Hami, and not his uncle, Said, would inherit rule over Egypt.

[20] Cameron, 227.

While Abbas did not do much to accommodate Europeans, those that he did oblige were often British. This preference marked a noticeable difference between Abbas's reign and that of his predecessor Muhammad Ali as well as his successor, Said. While they were very much Francophiles, Abbas favored the British on a few occasions. He appointed a British adviser in his Foreign Office and hired British tutors for his son. Additionally, he authorized Great Britain to begin construction of a railroad from Alexandria to Cairo, part of the overland route, which would ultimately be extended to Suez.[21] This allowance aside, his withdrawn and conservative approach to leadership lacked the vibrancy and innovation of Muhammad Ali. When he died in 1854, his rule had done little to benefit Egypt structurally, but his thriftiness had resulted in a surplus in the Egyptian coffers.

Abbas was succeeded by his uncle, Said, whose rule was marked by tremendous infrastructural development, the expansion of Egyptian trade and commerce, and the first European advisers in the Egyptian cabinet. In every way, "Said was the direct opposite of his predecessor."[22] An ardent Francophile, Said had been educated by a French tutor from an early age, spoke French as his primary language and enjoyed French cuisine. He emulated the aristocratic European lifestyle, regularly hosting large banquets and celebrations for all Europeans who cared to join, and his administration was described as "a court not unlike that of Louis XIV."[23] From the beginning of his reign, he saw advantages to European investment in Egypt:

> …he at once inaugurated a large and liberal policy of expansion. He invited and encouraged European immigration, and under his reign the foreign colony more than doubled its numbers…. By encouraging foreign immigration, surrounding

[21] Cameron, 228.

[22] De Leon, 58.

[23] John Eliot Bowen, *The Conflict of East and West in Egypt*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1887),10.

> himself with European employés in the different administrations, inviting eminent engineers, and removing many of the restrictions on trade and commerce imposed by Abbas, the new viceroy gave a powerful impulse both to the agricultural and commercial development of the country.[24]

These travelers brought new information and technologies that augmented Said's efforts to develop Egypt. He used the profits from the expanded international trade to reinvest heavily in Egypt's infrastructure. He dramatically cut taxes, built irrigation canals, expanded the rail system, laid telegraph wires into the remote desert villages, and made special efforts to improve the condition of the *fellahin*. In an endeavor to improve agriculture, he imported new steam-powered pumps and machinery to control the regular Nile floods. He also expanded the army's size to 50,000 men and dressed his soldiers in stately new uniforms.[25] Although his financial policies eventually led Egypt into debt, he was able to capitalize on foreign interest in Egypt.

During his reign, Said doubled Egypt's annual revenue from £3,000,000[26] to £6,000,000.[27] He recognized that the American Civil War had hindered the cotton trade in Europe, so he therefore encouraged the production of Egyptian cotton to fulfill the European demand.[28] Discussing the success of the cotton trade with American diplomat Edwin de Leon,

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[24] De Leon, 59.

[25] *ibid*., 62.

[26] Cameron, 229.

[27] De Leon, 64.

[28] The American Civil War had essentially stopped all trade of American cotton to European countries. Beginning in April 1861, the Union Navy had effectively blockaded all Confederate ports, a hindrance that would be maintained until the close of hostilities four years later. Up until that time, cotton grown in the southern United States had composed a large portion of cotton imported to Europe. In England alone, it made up 80% of all raw-cotton used in production. As the War dragged on, European buyers were forced to look elsewhere for supply, and Egypt was in a prime position to meet the demand. Production had peaked in the years preceding the American war and new technologies had improved the quality of the product. The improvements to transportation undertaken by Muhammad Ali and Said as well as the limited trade restrictions made Egypt the perfect candidate to replace the United States.
Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy 1820-1914: A Study in Trade and Development* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1969).

Said once quipped: "if your people stop growing cotton, I should be glad to supply their place."[29] By Said's death, the cotton trade had dramatically increased Egypt's wealth. Nevertheless, his enormous spending had taken its toll on the Egyptian treasury. When Said died in 1863, Egypt was at the peak of a renaissance, but a five million pound debt to European creditors foreshadowed problems to come.

The Suez Canal

The construction of commercial infrastructure in Egypt had its origin during the reign of Muhammad Ali. His sweeping reforms were largely based on a necessity to meet European demands for goods, which would increase dramatically after the opening of trade in 1840. Among the most significant developments was the 1819 construction of Mahmudieh Canal, connecting the important port city of Alexandria to a branch of the Nile. After 1840, this waterway carried British steamboats between the Mediterranean and Cairo. As a result, Great Britain paid an increasing amount of interest to the overland route across Egypt.

A British Navy officer, Lieutenant Thomas Waghorn, spent years establishing a route from Alexandria to Suez which became the primary path across Egypt by the late 1830's. The Waghorn route was designed for commercial and postal transport however and thus was ineffective for passenger travel to the Far East. To cross Egypt, travelers had to sail to Egypt via the Mediterranean, trek across the desert, and board another ship from Suez to Bombay, or else brave the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa.

A faster method of transportation across Egypt could dramatically reduce the amount of time it took to travel to the Far East. The Waghorn route "had shown the world that a shorter

[29] De Leon, 64.

route between Europe and the Orient was both feasible and desirable."[30] After 1840, European travel through Egypt dramatically increased. In that year, 275 passengers crossed Egypt by the overland route. By 1846, that number had jumped to 3,000.[31] With the recognition of the need for faster travel across Egypt, an important debate developed, once again pitting the British against the French.

In 1834, Muhammad Ali granted a British engineer permission to survey a potential railway between Cairo and Suez. In 1850, another Englishman, George Stevens, was contracted to build the first Egyptian railroad, connecting Alexandria to Cairo. These ventures marked the beginning of the British fixation on an overland rail route across Egypt. The French, conversely, pushed for the construction of a canal connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea at Suez. A canal was not a new concept, but previous attempts to build one had resulted in failure.[32] However, in the 1850's, a Frenchman named Ferdinand de Lesseps believed he could succeed where others had failed. Thus the new motivation for the Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt was established.

Although now recognized as a cornerstone of trade through the Middle East, the development of the Suez Canal began as a hotly contested issue. The possibility of a canal linking the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean had been considered since the mid-eighteenth

[30] Zachary Karabell, *Parting the Desert: The Creation of the Suez Canal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 57.

[31] John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations: 1800-1953* (London: The Cresset Press, 1954), 49.

[32] Calls for the construction of a canal had existed among Europeans since the French invasion, but had never come into fruition. A big reason for this failure in the early nineteenth century was Muhammad Ali's unwillingness to permit the canal's construction. He believed that a canal would "simply allow the powers of Europe to trade with the Orient without having to pass through areas controlled by Muhammad Ali." Egypt would miss out on customs and duties as well as the opportunity to prosper as the middleman.
Karabell, 36.

century. In the days of the pharaohs, a route between the bodies of water had existed.[33] In fact, when Napoleon invaded in 1798, he brought engineers to examine the feasibility of building a new canal.[34] Although the plans were abandoned when French were forced out of the country in 1801, by the 1850's, the idea was firmly entrenched in French ambitions in Egypt.

The British were vehemently opposed to this. Their opposition was led by Prime Minister Lord Palmerston whose rationale was four-fold. He believed that the construction of the canal was an impossible task and a waste of money. Second, he opposed the project because he felt British profits from the overland route would be undermined by a canal. Third, he also maintained that the French had an ulterior motive in their fierce support of a canal. The British had long held naval supremacy not only in the Mediterranean, but also in the Indian Ocean. He feared that should French warships have access to a short route to India, rather than sailing around Africa, the prospect of war would spike. Finally, Palmerston felt it was crucial to maintain the link between Egypt and her Ottoman suzerains. The development of an important canal in Egyptian territory had the potential to further distance Egypt from the Ottoman Empire and hamper any restraints the Turks had on Egyptian power.[35]

Although various groups made efforts to secure the rights to build the canal in the 1830's and 1840's, Muhammad Ali refused to allow it, in part to avoid antagonizing Great Britain. His successors did not share his concerns, however, and in 1852, Ferdinand de Lesseps became the canal's newest standard bearer and made progress towards its construction.

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[33] Remnants of a canal connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea were actually discovered by Napoleon's engineers. As early as the seventh century BCE, Pharaoh Necho began constructing a canal that would be finished centuries later by the Persian king Darius I. It was restored a number of times by later rulers before falling into complete disuse by the time of Fatimid rule.
Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 61.

[34] Karabell, 19-20.

[35] Ridley, 536-537.

De Lesseps ran into difficulties at first, but he eventually succeeded in acquiring permission from Said to begin building the canal, to Palmerston's dismay. De Lesseps had first proposed the idea to Khedive Abbas, who "showed himself altogether unfavourable to the enterprise."[36] But de Lesseps was not easily dissuaded. He had been in the French diplomatic service in Egypt during Muhammad Ali's reign. At that time, he was introduced to Said who was then in the care of the French consul.[37] After Said came to power, de Lesseps approached him with his plan. Said saw the potential benefits of the strategic waterway and was easily persuaded to oblige his old friend. In November 1854, he granted de Lesseps permission to establish a company for the development of a canal at Suez.

As Egypt was still the property of the Ottoman Sultan, final authorization would have to come from Constantinople. As news spread about de Lesseps's project, the British were quick to appeal to the Porte. The British envoy, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, insinuated "that a canal might so increase the importance of Egypt that the child would break with its parental authority."[38] De Lesseps felt that he had already received the Sultan's approval, citing a letter from Rashid Pasha, the Ottoman Grand Vizier, which referred to "the interesting project of the canal" as "of the most useful kind."[39] This dubious consent did not satisfy the British objections or justify disregarding current Ottoman disapproval. De Lesseps pressed the matter for three years with help from the French Ambassador in Constantinople, but an agreement was never reached. By late 1859, even Said had turned against the project, and ordered de Lesseps to shut

[36] Joseph Blakesley, "M. de Lesseps and the Suez Canal," *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection*, (The University of Manchester, The John Rylands University Library, 1860), 407.

[37] In an effort to raise his son to be a skilled diplomat, Muhammad Ali had sent Said to study with the French consul. Karebell, 9.

[38] Bowen, 13.

[39] Blakesley, 407.

down the operation. Ultimately, de Lesseps changed his tactics and decided to establish the company without Said's permission, persuading the French Emperor, Napoleon III, to support the project. With the Emperor's blessing, Said renewed his approval, and de Lesseps began selling shares of the company. His team of engineers drew up the blueprints, and work began on the canal without approval from the Ottoman Sultan. The Suez Canal would stretch from Port Said, a new city named in the Khedive's honor, through Ismailia, another city named for Said's eventual successor, to the Port of Suez.

With the project underway, Palmerston's resistance did not let up, but Great Britain and the Ottomans did nothing to stop the construction. Palmerston's administration framed Great Britain's newest opposition based upon the conditions of the laborers who worked on the canal. The canal was built largely through the use of forced labor by the *fellahin* as part of the Egyptian *corvée* system. Citing an 1856 Ottoman edict that declared that "the lives, property and honour of every subject in the Ottoman dominions should be held secure," Member of Parliament Darby Griffith railed against the *corvée* as "a great evil."[40] The Sultan bowed to Great Britain's grievance and threatened to invade Egypt unless conditions improved, but Napoleon III stepped in and mediated a resolution that allowed the work to continue, staving off war.

Palmerston next turned his attention to the financing of the project. While most of the shareholders in the Suez Canal Company were French, the largest shareholder was actually the Khedive. He owned 177,642 shares[41], and paid a first installment of fifteen million francs. [42] Although the Egyptian treasury could afford the first payment, subsequent disbursements forced

[40] Karabell, 179.

[41] *ibid*., 164.

[42] This amounted to nearly half of the 400,000 shares initially offered for sale by de Lesseps. *ibid*., 137.

the Khedive to borrow money from European creditors. In his continued opposition to the project, Lord Palmerston accused de Lesseps of swindling Said. He asserted that construction would be expensive and drawn out, and that its high costs would eventually lead Egypt to fall into the hands of the French. Should Egypt then default, the French Government would be obligated to step in and take control of Egypt's finances to support the interests of French banks.

Nevertheless, Palmerston's constant objections to the canal did little to hamper construction. The canal finally opened in 1869, four years after Palmerston's death, and almost immediately proved its value to global trade. Still, Palmerston's worries were not entirely misguided. Although his supposition was wrong in its details, the general course of events that he outlined did come to pass, however it was the British, and not the French, who were drawn into Egypt.

The Peak and Decline of Khedival Egypt

After Said's death, his nephew, Muhammad Ali's grandson, Ismail, assumed leadership of Egypt. His ascension came very much by accident. Until 1858, the heir apparent had been Ismail's older brother Ahmed, but in transit to one of Said's grand events, his carriage had tipped into the Nile, and Ahmed was drowned. Thus, in 1863, it was Ismail who assumed the title of Khedive.

Ismail had never intended to lead Egypt, and he had spent his youth traveling throughout Europe. He received a liberal education in Paris and bore witness to the industrialization of the West. As a result, when he became Khedive of Egypt, he aimed to develop Egypt on the European model. On his second day as Egypt's leader, he made a speech to all of the foreign representatives in Egypt in which he laid out his plans to reform Egyptian government and

society. His policies included the drafting of a constitution and institution of a parliament, public education, abolishment of the *corvée*, and responsible fiscal planning.[43] During his reign, he enacted many of these ideas and began a great reformation in Egypt. Ismail continued to expand on Said's improvements and worked to further distinguish Egypt from the Ottoman Empire. He undertook large public works projects to develop the vast expanse of unused land. He developed railways, irrigation canals, and other commercial improvements, and also commissioned gardens, palaces, and a variety of luxury attractions.

The city of Cairo underwent a makeover, transforming the once medieval-looking city with its high walls and mud huts into a landscaped, modern city. The American diplomat Edwin de Leon described the approach to Cairo after its renovation:

> …it is on approaching the Cairo station that the great improvement of that city and its suburbs, becomes perceptible to the visitor who has been absent for several years. He rubs his eyes, and almost distrusts his own vision; for...where formerly stretched for miles fields under cultivation, he now sees, far as his eyes can reach, in every direction well-built and even palatial residences, surrounded by gardens, adding on new cities, for several miles.[44]

Ismail also introduced a number of social and governmental reforms that reflected his European experience. He encouraged education among the Egyptian youth and dramatically increased the budget for public instruction. He instituted the first school for women in the history Ottoman Empire.[45] Additionally, he worked to provide education to the *fellah* "in the hope of elevating the social, moral, and intellectual condition of this large class of the labouring

[43] Green, 15.

[44] De Leon 26.

[45] *ibid*., 94.

population."[46] The *corvée*, the system of forced labor that so angered the liberal Europeans, was abolished early in Ismail's reign.

In order to ensure more power for himself and his descendents, Ismail secured a series of *firmans* from the Sultan. In 1867, he was granted the official title of Khedive from the Sultan, although his predecessors had carried the title unofficially since Muhammad Ali. In 1872, the law of primogeniture was established for succession and Ismail was given the power to negotiate loans without the Porte's consent. The following year, limits on the Egyptian military were removed and the Khedive was admitted the authority to "conclude conventions with foreign states concerning all internal and other affairs of Egypt in which foreigners might be concerned"[47] By these concessions, Ismail had all but achieved what amounted to Egyptian independence from the Porte in every way except by name. Ismail had accomplished what Muhammad Ali had sought decades earlier, but this Egyptian renaissance was very short lived.

Despite a peak in Egyptian power and under his regime, Ismail ultimate led Egypt to financial ruin. Although his reforms had a profound impact, they were extremely costly. Said had left the country in debt, and Ismail had done nothing to remove Egypt from its financial difficulties. While he had come into power at the peak of the cotton boom, by 1866, the Egyptian cotton industry had collapsed.[48] Ismail compensated for the loss of revenue by recklessly taking loans at high interest rates from European banks. When the cotton industry deteriorated, he

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[46] *ibid*.

[47] Bowen, 23.

[48] The Egyptian cotton industry had been boosted by the American Civil War. But just before the end of the American Civil War, the price of cotton fell from $52 per cantar in August 1864 to $37 per cantar by December. As many growers refused to sell at the low prices, many of the manufacturers were also forced to halt their production. When the American Civil War ended, cotton prices went up again briefly after American production failed to meet production estimates. Ultimately though, renewed American production, poor Egyptian cotton yields and the London Stock Market crash in 1866 led to end of the Egyptian cotton boom.
Owen, *Cotton*, 119.

invested heavily in the cultivation of sugar cane instead. Egypt lacked the necessary resources to manufacture and refine the sugar, however, and the industry failed to repeat cotton's success.

Some of Egypt's hardships at this time came as a result of bad luck. Such was the case when cattle murrain struck in the mid-1860's taking a severe toll on the *fellahin*. In order to lessen the impact of the famine, the Egyptian government spent £5 million in aid.[49] Nevertheless, instead of recognizing the consequences of an economic downturn, Ismail continued his extravagant spending, and furthering the national debt. To receive the concessions from the Porte, he poured money into bribing court officials. Additionally, he aimed to regain some of the land that Said had ceded to the Suez Canal Company and spent over £6 million, an amount equivalent to the Egypt's annual revenue under Said, to do so.[50] In the 1870's, after it had already become clear that Egypt was struggling financially, he pursued a drawn out war with Ethiopia financed almost entirely by European creditors.

Despite his high expenditure, Ismail's policies of modernization and reform attracted many European supporters. As a result, many Europeans bought shares of the Egyptian debt, believing it to be an investment in the future success of the country. Although it was not until 1872 that Ismail obtained the power to take loans without the Ottoman Sultan's approval, the European powers, notably Britain and France, had come to largely replace the Porte in authority over Egypt due to the diplomatic developments in the previous decades. Because it served European interests to continue lending Ismail money, there was little to stop the Khedive from borrowing.

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[49] *ibid*., 21.

[50] Per the convention of the day, Said had granted de Lesseps a much wider swath of land at the Suez isthmus than was necessary for the construction of the canal. At the time, the land was arid desert and there seemed no reason why it would benefit Egypt not to include it in the contract. However, with the Ismail's development of new irrigation canals, the land had become productive. By this point, it had also become clear that it would not be directly necessary for the construction of the canal.

The European powers saw financial leverage in Egypt as a new way to manipulate their interests in Egypt. Ismail's reckless spending and inability to procure revenue led Egypt to the brink of default on more than one occasion, yet, to relieve Egypt's financial straits, the Europeans continued to come through with new loans and extensions. Ultimately, developments on the European continent slowed the flow of money into Egypt from European banks, and the Egyptian financial situation reached a dire position. Finally, the French and British deemed it necessary to intercede in the management of Egypt's finances. Following numerous financial inquiries, Ismail was removed from power in 1879.

The Collapse of the Egyptian Economy

Since the rule of Muhammad Ali, it had been common practice among the Khedives to borrow large sums of money in order to fund innovations and improvements in Egypt. It was not until the end of Said's reign, however, that the Khedives looked outside of Egypt for help financing their projects. The first European loans were made in the early 1860's in order to help Egypt pay for its stake in the Suez Canal. Under Ismail, this debt had grown so large that Egypt became almost perpetually on the verge of default. In order to protect their own stake, it became necessary for the European powers to take a proactive approach in managing the Egyptian finances.

When Ismail took the throne in 1863, Egyptian debt amounted to £3,293,000.[51] By the first European efforts to alleviate the problem in 1876, that figure had reached £68,110,000, plus an additional floating debt of £26,000,000.[52] As Khedive, Ismail had dramatically increased

[51] Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, Volume I (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 11.

[52] *ibid*.

revenue by the expansion of Egyptian agriculture and a sharp increase in taxation, but the profits did little to offset the cost of his elaborate projects and expensive endeavors.[53] As Ismail drew Egypt to the brink of financial collapse, European bankers and shareholders stood to be hit the hardest. As a result, the European powers had a vested interest in preventing Egypt's default in order to protect their citizens.

Furthermore, Egypt remained of great commercial importance to Europe, especially since the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal. With diplomatic tension rising in Europe after German unification in 1871, the last thing that the French and British desired was an interruption in trade. Beginning in 1876, European financial advisers were sent to Egypt to help prevent default, but the added counsel proved unable to restore financial stability. The degree of European interference in the Egyptian government grew as a result. In return, Khedive Ismail began to resent foreign meddling. A standoff between the Khedive and Great Britain and France ensued, culminating with the deposal of Ismail and the establishment of the Anglo-French Dual Control.

Ismail did make efforts to increase the country's revenue, but he never found enough success to balance the Egyptian budget. To an extent, Egypt was set up to fail by the European bankers who made the loans. Due to commissions, discounts, and a variety of other reasons, the Egyptian treasury only ever saw a portion of the nominal value of the loan. Similarly excessive measures undertaken by the moneylenders resulted in extremely high interest rates on the

[53] In his memoir, *Modern Egypt*, Lord Cromer, who served as Controller-General in Egypt from 1877-1879 and later as Consul-General from 1883-1907, wrote that Ismail added about £7,000,000 per year to the debt, and "for all practical purposes it may be said that the whole of the borrow money, except £16,000,000 spent on the Suez Canal, was squandered."(11) It is important to note that Lord Cromer's memoir was written to validate his actions as Controller-General and Consul-General. In his introductory chapter he describes his desire "to place on record an accurate narrative of some of the principal events which have occurred in Egypt…since the year 1876" as well as "to explain the results which have accrued to Egypt from the British occupation of the country in 1882." (1) However his examination of Egypt's finances in the late 1860's and early 1870's was based off of the 1876 report released by British Paymaster-General Stephen Cave upon his visit to Egypt. Cave reported that Egyptian revenue from 1864-1875 amounted to £94,281,401 while expenses were only slightly higher, costing £97,240,966. Cave concluded that of what was loaned to Egypt, "there is absolutely nothing to show but the Suez Canal." (12)
ibid.

repayment of the loans. By 1873, Egypt was paying almost £5,000,000 per year in interest on outstanding debt, nearly the entire annual revenue under Khedive Said.[54] Nevertheless, Egyptian spending did not decrease.

Instead, Ismail attempted to repay his debts by raising revenue from within Egypt. In 1871, he instituted a taxation scheme called the *mukabala*. The idea was simple yet highly effective in the short term. Egyptians were given the opportunity of cutting their future annual land tax in half by paying the next six years' tax in advance. However, while the *mukabala* was effective for meeting immediate obligations, it was "a ruinous financial device" that deprived future administrations of reliable revenue.[55]

Ismail's taxes and Egyptian agricultural output could not sustain Egypt for long. In 1875, Egypt approached the very real possibility of default. At the time, the British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield, proposed to buyout the Egyptian shares of the Suez Canal for £4,000,000.[56] Ismail, desperate to repay his loans, accepted the offer with the understanding that the British would provide assistance with the management of Egyptian finances. Prior to the purchase of the Canal shares, Great Britain had maintained an advisory role in Egypt, largely to sustain her interests there. With this arrangement, however, the British ventured into the realm of direct management in Egypt, and subsequent inquiries would only serve to reinforce this new responsibility.

As consequence of this arrangement, the British Paymaster-General, Stephen Cave, was sent to evaluate the state of Egypt's financial situation in late 1875. From his report a series of

[54] Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 91.

[55] Bowen, 21.

[56] Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 91.

missions commenced on behalf of the bondholders and countries with stake in Egypt's financial stability. In early 1876, his assessment was publicly released, providing the first comprehensive British account of Egypt's condition:

> Egypt may be said to be in a transition state, and she suffers from the defects of the system out of which she is passing, as well as from those of the system into which she is attempting to enter. She suffers from the ignorance, dishonesty, waste, and extravagance from the vast expense caused by hasty and inconsiderate endeavors to adopt the civilisation of the West.[57]

Cave summarized the intent of Ismail's reign and the reasons for the struggles he faced. Additionally, although he also spoke of the critical state of Egyptian finances, he opined that Egypt would be able to find a way out of it.[58] The report along with to the British purchase of the Suez shares, inflamed French fears that Britain was maneuvering to take political control of Egypt.[59] As a result, they wanted to send a commission of advisers of their own.

Ismail had also been attempting to raise revenue by the issuance of treasury bills. In April 1876, the system collapsed and he was forced to suspend payment on them. In order to placate the Europeans and attempt to fix his economy, Ismail issued two decrees that May. The first consolidated the Egyptian debt, then amounting to £91,000,000 in its entirety.[60] The second instituted the *Caisse de la Dette*, or Commission of the Public Debt, intended to consist of commissioners from England, France, Austria, and Italy to oversee the repayment of the debt.

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[57] Cromer, 4.

[58] Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 95.

[59] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, an Englishman who fiercely opposed British designs in Egypt, describes Cave's report as "only a partial truth." Blunt insists that the large Egyptian debt should have been treated as Ismail's personal debt rather than a public debt. He claims that Cave's report was based on "a fanciful budget of…revenue" procured by Ismail to conceal other aspects of his spending. Furthermore, Blunt writes off Cave as "worthy…man, but one who lack experience of the East, and so was specially easy to deceive." Interestingly, he determines Sir Rivers Wilson, a later advisor whose would have a much greater effect on Egypt's financial situation, to be "equally inexperienced." Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 17.

[60] Cromer, 12.

The British Foreign Office declined to interfere in Egyptian affairs, and their seat in the Commission remained vacant.

The bondholders took issue with the details of Ismail's decrees, and sent a separate mission of their own, led by Lord George Goschen as representative for the British bondholders and M. Joubert as his French counterpart. After some negotiation and special arrangements concerning portions of the debt, the two men were able to reach a settlement with the Khedive that reduced the size of the debt to £59,000,000. The agreement resulted in the establishment of a system of Anglo-French Dual Control of the Egyptian finances. Additionally, at the Khedive's behest, Lord Goschen, on behalf of the bondholders, not the British Government, nominated Major Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, to fill the vacant British seat on Commission of the Public Debt. Although the British Government still wanted to stay out of the internal affairs of Egypt, with the beginning of Dual Control, the British and the French were committed to the restoration of Egypt's financial stability.

Increased Anglo-French Control of the Egyptian Government

Under the Dual Control, Egypt renewed its attempts to pay off its debt. Setbacks and the lack of a shared goal hampered the Commission in the fulfillment of its objective. The commissioners struggled to obtain enough revenue to match the repayment goals. Even by withholding the pay of government employees and through harsh tax collection measures, the Commission fell short in December 1877 and had to restructure its repayment once again.[61] Their efforts were further hindered both by a poor Nile season that reduced Egypt's agricultural production as well as the obligation to support the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish war. By

[61] Roger Owen, *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 101.

1878, conditions had become so bad that the Commission considered financial collapse as a better alternative for Egypt.

As many of the bondholders were French, the French Government pushed hard for the repayment of the debt. From an analysis of Egyptian expenditure in the years prior, they found no record of spending vast sums of money. Thus, they alleged, the Khedive must just be unwilling to pay.[62] The French, along with the British, exerted pressure on the Khedive to establish an international Commission of Inquiry into Egyptian finances. After tedious negotiations, Ismail finally bowed to foreign pressures in March 1878.

A commission was set up under vice presidents Sir Rivers Wilson and Mustafa Riaz Pasha, Ismail's former chief treasurer, with Ferdinand de Lesseps serving as the nominal president. Their report, published in August 1878, found that Ismail had spent enormous sums of money on bribes and personal investments, overpaid for services rendered, and otherwise squandered the country's treasury. The inquiry concluded that the Khedive must agree to a Civil List, an itemized account of Egypt's indebtedness, from which there could be no diverting. Additionally, the remainder of the Egyptian treasury "must for the future be applied by responsible ministers to objects in which that State, as distinguished from the ruler, possessed an evident interest."[63] Furthermore, Ismail must relinquish all of his private lands to the state.

The Khedive immediately yielded to these demands and formed a new, largely European, Council of Ministers under his adviser, Nubar Pasha. In this new government, Rivers Wilson and the French Commissioner of the Public Debt, M. de Blignières served as the Ministers of Finance and Public Works, respectively. It initially appeared that these concessions from the

[62] John Marlowe, *Cromer in Egypt* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 29.

[63] *ibid*., 60.

Khedive would enable the two powers to restore Egypt's financial stability, but within a few months new problems arose.

With the Commission's report, a constitutional system had begun in Egypt. However, the effect, far from benefiting Egypt, was the alienation of Ismail and his instigation of a coup that overthrew the new ministry. Both the British and French Governments had been very brusque with Ismail, warning him that "grave responsibility will rest with...the Khedive for the success or failure of the new régime."[64] However, the new Council of Ministers felt that including the Khedive in their meetings would hamper discussion, and as a result the Khedive was largely left out of important decisions. Compounding the situation was European support of the new Prime Minister, Nubar Pasha. He was an Armenian Christian who spoke little Arabic and had lived in exile in Paris prior to his appointment as Prime Minister. His voice carried little sway in comparison with that of the Khedive.

By early 1879, there was evidence to lead the European commissioners to believe that Ismail was conspiring against them. In 1866, he had established a governmental body known as the Chamber of Notables. Its primary objective had been subservience to the Khedive's wishes while acting as a parliamentary system in Egypt. By January 1879, the British Consul-General, Lord Vivian, reported suspicions that Ismail had convened the Chamber of Notables and instructed them to oppose actions by the new Council of Ministers.[65]

On February 18, Nubar and Wilson were attacked by a mob of disenfranchised army officers as the ministers traveled to work.[66] Although there is reason to believe that Ismail

[64] *ibid*., 66.

[65] *ibid*., 73.

[66] The ministry had just reduced many officers to half-pay on top of the lapsed salary they were already due.

himself encouraged the mob to begin with, he rescued the ministers by personally ordering the mob to disperse.[67] After this display of authority, he dismissed Nubar from the ministry with the justification that "it would be impossible to guarantee public security if Nubar remained in power."[68] He then placed his son, Tewfik, as Prime Minister. In May, claiming that the European-influenced Council of Ministers wanted to lead Egypt into bankruptcy, he expelled Wilson and de Blignières, and formed a purely Egyptian Council of Ministers under Muhammad Sharif Pasha, a French-educated Circassian who had risen through the ranks of government under Said.

The European governments objected to his power play. Upon returning to Europe, Rivers Wilson informed the Rothschilds, the famous banking house, that Egypt would likely refuse to repay an £8,000,000 loan that Wilson had negotiated while in the Egyptian Government.[69] The Rothschilds, in turn, looked to the German Government to act on their behalf. Although he had largely been removed from the crisis in Egypt, Chancellor Bismarck sensed an opportunity to advance German interests and announced his intention to intervene if the British and French did not. Panicked, Britain and France then followed the German Government's lead denouncing Ismail's authority to expel the European ministers. They called for Ismail to abdicate in favor of his son, Tewfik, and exerted diplomatic pressure on the Sultan to remove the Khedive should he refuse to step down willingly. At this point, the European leaders felt strongly that any progress in Egypt would require a different leader. Ismail's power plays and hypocrisy had provoked the anger of the European bondholders and governments alike. Robert Cecil, Lord Salisbury, then

[67] John Marlowe, a twentieth century historian, presents this case, describing there to be "little doubt that [Ismail] organized the demonstration" in order to demonstrate his clout (Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 100). Interestingly, Blunt agrees with this theory, however he describes the scene to be a student demonstration rather than a mob of dismissed army officers (Blunt, 36).

[68] Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 100.

[69] Lady Amherst of Hackney, 318.

the British Foreign Secretary, called for Ismail's abdication as a necessity for the interest of Great Britain:

> It is not possible to review the events which ended in the dismissal of the European ministers without the conviction that the Khedive never sincerely accepted the limitations of his power proposed by the Commission.... If Egypt were a country in whose past history the Powers had no share, and to whose future destiny it was possible for them to be indifferent, their wisest course would be to renounce at this point all further concern with the relations between the Egyptian ruler and his subjects. But, to England at least, this policy is impossible. The geographical situation of Egypt, as well as the responsibility which the English Government have in past times incurred for the actual conditions under which it exists as a State, make it impossible to leave it to its fate.[70]

Instead of yielding to the European demand, however, Ismail issued decrees expanding the size of his army, attempted to buy influence at the Turkish courts, and made an effort to undo the reforms that the Nubar-Wilson Government had instituted. However, the Sultan recognized an opportunity to exert Turkish suzerainty, and on June 26, 1879, he issued a *firman* deposing Ismail and installed Tewfik as the Khedive of Egypt.

With Ismail's departure, British intervention in Egypt took on a new meaning. Previously they had 'intermeddled' in Egyptian affairs, used the country for its strategic position, sent advisers to assist the Khedive, and invested in Egyptian commerce. However, now they had directly prompted the removal of a leader. This marked an important turning point in Anglo-Egyptian relations. Egypt had once again become a state in transition, much as it had been under Muhammad Ali. In conjunction with his *firman* removing Ismail from power, the Sultan had also revoked previous *firmans* that had dramatically expanded the Khedive power. Thus, when he assumed the throne, Tewfik had little actual authority in the governance of Egypt.

Tewfik's installment as Khedive also demonstrated the newfound control of Egypt exercised by Great Britain and France. It had been in response to their pressure that the Ottoman

[70] Cromer, 137.

Sultan had deposed Ismail. It was also now their responsibility to ensure the effective administration of Egypt.[71] In this setting, Britain and France came to a private agreement that no other European power would be permitted to establish competing influence in Egypt.[72] The Dual Control was thus reestablished under British and French Controllers, Lord Cromer and Monsignor de Blignières, who were given generous leeway in their powers of oversight over the Egyptian government.

Lord Palmerston had been prescient in his prophesy that the development of the Suez Canal would ultimately bring about intervention in Egypt. It had set a precedent for poor financial management that eventually brought the Egyptian Government to bankruptcy. The British and French Governments had taken direct action in Egypt, and from this point onward, they would be committed to the establishment of a stable Egyptian state.

[71] In his call for Ismail's abdication, Lord Salisbury declared that the English Government is "bound, both by duty and interest, to do all that lies in their power to arrest misgovernment, before it results in the material ruin and almost incurable disorder to which it is evident by other Oriental examples that such misgovernment will necessarily lead."
ibid.

[72] John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, Volume III, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903), 74.

Chapter 3: Prelude to Invasion

After Khedive Ismail's fall and exile, his son, Tewfik, assumed the role of Egyptian Khedive. In contrast to his father, Tewfik has been widely portrayed as a weak leader whose rule served only to further entrench the British in Egypt.[73] He lacked Ismail's ambition and political ability and did little to assert his authority over the British and French controllers. However, his installation as Khedive initially had a stabilizing effect which appeared to be a positive turning point for Egypt. The poor Nile seasons which had exacerbated the debt crisis in the 1870's appeared to have ended, and the famine that had ravaged the Egyptian population gave way to an abundance of crops. However, the new system of Dual Control imposed by the British and French gave the Controllers even more power, and Tewfik made little effort to oppose them. His reign saw the formation of the Egyptian National Party and the rapid spread of anti-European sentiment throughout Egypt. His inability to control the growing discontent ultimately resulted in a series of military insurrections that served to turn his Council of Ministers against him and the Dual Control. Furthermore, he exacerbated his precarious position by misjudging the character of the uprisings. Instead of moving to embrace the nationalist elements that had begun to assert themselves, he turned to the British and French to help maintain his power, who in turn misread the nature of the conflict. The failure of Tewfik and the British and French to recognize this fact facilitated the rise of the most extreme elements of the Egyptian National Party to power, which ultimately proved to be the cause for the British invasion.

[73] Both the American Consul-General at Cairo, Elbert Farman, and the British anti-imperialist Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, whose writing are highly critical of British involvement in Egypt, describe Tewfik as a weak leader.

The Last Attempts to Fix Egypt

In conjunction with Tewfik's installation as Khedive, the Anglo-French Dual Control was revived by the bondholders. Despite Ismail's reform efforts and great public works projects, his mismanagement of finances and the ensuing crisis had reduced Egypt to a condition unseen since the Napoleonic invasion. The government held a stifling debt and was in structural disarray. His final schemes to undermine European influence had done nothing to change the conditions of the Egyptian economy. For both the European bondholders, as well as the Egyptian people, it was imperative that any new system of government made rapid progress to stabilize the country. In response to the failed experiment of the Constitutional ministry under Nubar and Wilson, the new Dual Control structure aimed to increase Anglo-French control of Egypt's finances.

The first Dual Control had divided responsibilities between British oversight of revenue and the Ministry of Finance and French supervision of Egyptian expenditure and the Ministry of Public Works. Under that organization the British had possessed significantly more control, and the second Dual Control sought to change that discrepancy. The military demonstration that led to Nubar's expulsion was a sign of the Egyptian populace's increasing frustration concerning the country's financial condition. Britain and France saw a dire need to succeed in stabilizing Egypt's economy or else face uprisings that could collapse the already fragile Egyptian government and disrupt their designs in the country. It was therefore important to ensure that this dual system maintained a united stance in its governance of Egypt. Lord Cromer was reinstated as the British Controller with M. de Blignières as his French counterpart once again.[74] In the second Dual Control, the administration of Egypt remained in Egyptian hands, but the two Controllers were granted ample supervisory privileges and advisory seats in the Council of

[74] Sensing the failure of British efforts at the end of Ismail's reign, Lord Cromer had resigned his post as British Commissioner of the Debt and had been replaced by Sir Auckland Colvin.

Ministers. Under the new Dual Control, the state of Egypt's finances improved. The Controllers carried out a number of reforms that abolished many of the oppressive features of Ismail's government. The *mukabala* was abolished and taxes were set at fair rates and collected regularly. Under the auspices of M. de Blignières and Lord Cromer, balance was struck between the Egyptian government and its creditors, leading a realistic arrangement for the repayment of the Unified Debt.

Among the first acts of the Dual Control was the establishment of an independent Commission of Liquidation to represent the interests of the bondholders. The goal of this Commission was to find a practical settlement of the debt favorable to all parties. In 1880, the Commission released its report, which would be decreed by the Khedive as the Law of Liquidation. The report revised the Joubert-Goschen estimate of Egyptian annual revenue from £10,500,000 to £8,500,000.[75] Additionally, it reduced the principal and interest rates on the outstanding loans to figures it deemed realistic for repayment. It further prescribed to allocate approximately £4,000,000 of the revenue for repayment and the other £4,500,000 for the necessary expenditures of the Egyptian government. The latter would be controlled by the European Controllers. This compromise satisfied the bondholders, who were pleased by the establishment of European control over the repayment of the debt, and the Controllers, who viewed the law as a successful design for the debt's liquidation. By the summer of 1880, the Controllers reported "a general feeling of satisfaction" in Egypt.[76]

In spite of the benefits of the planned debt repayment, the Law of Liquidation served to increase the reliance of Egypt on its creditors. By design, the law compelled the government to

[75] Marlowe, 107.

[76] Cromer, 171.

focus most of Egypt's revenue on repayment of the debt. Much of the portion allocated to the Egyptian government went towards tribute to the Porte and to cover any deficits accrued by the Commission of the Public Debt. Furthermore, any surplus revenue over what the report had estimated was pre-allocated to a Sinking Fund designated for the settlement of the debt. The Controllers also placed strict limits on other state expenditures, thus prohibiting the development of public works projects such as those that had propelled Egypt forward in the 1860's. Despite its shortcomings, the law became the basis on which the Dual Control administered Egypt.

The growing imbalance between the wealth and power of the foreigners and that of the Egyptian populace brought about an increase of anti-European sentiment amongst the Egyptian people. The Law of Liquidation had ensured that the Egyptian government would continue to be manipulated by its creditors. Furthermore, the rivalry implicit in the Dual Control led to the institution of redundant posts to satisfy British and French officials. This problem was compounded by the disproportionately large salaries granted to European officials while the wages of comparable Egyptians were in arrears. The most inflammatory inequity between native Egyptians and foreigners occurred in the court system known as the Capitulations. It had been established as a system to dictate the prosecution of foreign criminals in Egypt, but the Capitulations largely granted Europeans immunity from any serious punishment for their actions.[77] Although it was set up to provide legal representation for foreign nationals by their consul, the system had gradually evolved into one of extraterritoriality, where Europeans only

[77] The system was originally established when Egyptian towns and cities were largely segregated, with Europeans living in their own, separate quarter. However, problems arose under Ismail as foreign investment rose and Egypt became a more popular destination for foreign traders. Recognizing the increasing chaos in the legal system, Nubar Pasha attempted to reform the courts in 1869. He proposed to abolish the Capitulations altogether and establish a streamlined system of mixed courts under Egyptian and foreign judges. Ultimately, in 1873 a revised version of Nubar's proposal was accepted for a five year trial period in which the mixed courts would hear cases involving parties of different nationalities, while the consular courts would continue trying parties of the same nationality. Nevertheless, the mixed courts were subject to manipulation by the foreign judges who held a majority of the posts. In the end, it proved to be just as corrupt a system as before.

faced trial when their consul felt their actions warranted it. Additionally, the courts had jurisdiction over all matters that involved both foreigners and Egyptians, which provided further inequity in legal matters. The consequence of this one-sided legal system was that foreign residents were essentially free from tax collection and at liberty to do business in any manner suitable to their home government, regardless of its effect on Egypt. The enormous gap between the privileges of foreigners and those of the native Egyptians helped to foster the growth of Egyptian national movements, the culmination of which would be the revolt under Colonel Ahmed Urabi in 1881.

The Rise of the National Party

Abuse of power was not just limited to the foreign populations. Soon after coming to power, Tewfik and his ministers took actions to reinforce their authority. At first, there was a belief that the new Khedive was "a sincere and liberal reformer."[78] His early appointment of Sharif Pasha as Prime Minister and subsequent attempt to draft a constitution was seen as a movement away from the autocracy that had existed under Ismail. However, his appointment of Riaz Pasha as Prime Minister in September 1879 was a shift away from constitutional reform, prompting the young Egyptian press to begin a campaign against the new Khedive.[79] Tewfik responded by cracking down on newspapers and journalists. He exiled the Islamic philosopher and activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, whom Tewfik regarded as a political agitator, and banished

[78] Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-political Crisis in Egypt 1878-1882* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981), 104.

[79] The press was essentially non-existent in Egypt before the mid 1870's, with the exception of the Khedival organ *Wadi al-Nil*. In an effort to bolster Egyptian culture, Ismail financed the foundation of several other periodicals by Syrian Christians in Egypt. The result was rapid growth of Egyptian journals and newspapers, including important journals such as *al-Ahram* and *al-Watan* among others, which eventually helped facilitate the growth of political awareness among the Egyptian people.
ibid., 108.

Muhammad Abduh', one of al-Afghani's most prominent disciples, to his village.[80] Furthermore, the Chamber of Notables was abolished. The Khedive's efforts increased political opposition to the new government.

Additionally, in August 1879, Tewfik appointed a Circassian general named Uthman Rifqi as Minister of War in the Egyptian Council of Ministers. Prompted by the military demonstration that had unseated the Nubar-Wilson ministry in the previous year, the Khedive tasked Rifqi with the reorganization of the army and the restoration of order. This move severely exacerbated the historic tension between native *fellah* soldiers and the wealthy Turco-Circassian officers in the army. The highest military positions were reserved for officers of Turco-Circassian origin, who in turn treated their Egyptian subordinates with disdain. Rifqi's changes only reinforced the ethnic divide. Many of his reforms were seen as antagonistic by Egyptians. An 1880 recruitment law limiting active service to four years was viewed as an effort to prevent *fellah* soldiers from rising to officer ranks. Rifqi also made several questionable command changes, replacing native Egyptians with Turco-Circassian officers instead. This ethnic nepotism helped unify anti-foreign, pro-Egyptian sentiment among the soldiers.

Several secret oppositional groups developed in response to the new regime's oppressive reforms. While each had its own motive behind its founding, most shared a common goal of expelling the European controllers and the Khedival government in favor of a constitutional government. As equity did not improve under Tewfik's reign, a number of the most prominent groups banded together to form *hizb al-watan*, or the National Party. Among these groups were the followers of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, an Islamic philosopher who promoted the idea of Islamic modernism and anti-imperialism. He saw the lavish European lifestyle as detrimental to Islam and sought to restore the faith by examining its ideals in conjunction with modern thought.

[80] *ibid*., 105.

He believed "the principal law of the time was to fight against European intervention."[81] Before his exile in 1879, al-Afghani became an advocate for a constitutional government in Egypt, the beginning of which appeared to take hold under the Sharif ministry. It was his belief that only with constitutional government would Egypt be able to free itself of arbitrary rule.

When the Sharif government fell in August and al-Afghani was exiled, all progress towards constitutional government was halted, and the ministry under Riaz Pasha took a more autocratic approach to governance. As opposition grew against the new Prime Minister, a group of Egyptian notables continued the constitutional reform movement under the leadership of Muhammad Sharif Pasha and Sultan Pasha, a self-made noble with *fellah* roots. They formed the Helwan Society in late 1879 in protest of the reinstitution of Dual Control and the acquiescence of the Riaz government. In November, the Helwan Society published a manifesto[82] declaring that "the present regime would...lead the country to its ruin. Only the Egyptian nation itself, represented by the 'National Party', could avert this."[83] Alienated followers of al-Afghani joined the Helwan Society in opposition to Tewfik's progressively autocratic rule.

Simultaneous to the growth of political opposition among educated Egyptians, the Egyptian army faced growing discontent among its ranks. The Egyptian junior officers severely resented the treatment they received from their Turco-Circassian superiors as well as from the War Minister, Rifqi. As a result, in February, 1881, three Egyptian colonels led by Ahmed Urabi

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[81] *ibid*., 108.

[82] It should be noted that details concerning the Helwan Society come from the writings of John Ninet, a Swiss cotton planner who first arrived in Egypt in 1839 under the employ of Muhammad Ali. German historian Alexander Schölch calls into question Ninet's accuracy and reliability as a historian, but nevertheless accepts the existence of the Helwan Society and the distribution of the manifesto. American historian Juan Cole also accepts Ninet's account as factual, although he does not detail the discrepancies noted by Schölch.
ibid., 120-121.
Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 157-158.

[83] Schölch, 122.

submitted a petition for the removal of Rifqi as War Minister on the basis that his reforms had divided the army. When the Khedive refused their demand and court-martialed the three officers for their insolence, their battalions rebelled and forced the Khedive to replace Rifqi. This episode established Ahmed Urabi as a leader among the Egyptian army officers and served to further undermine Tewfik's authority. In his memoir *Modern Egypt*, Lord Cromer attributed the mutiny to poor leadership on the part of the Khedive:

> This was the second mutiny of the Egyptian Army. It had followed the same course as the first. It originated with legitimate grievances to which no attention was paid. The next stage was mutiny. The final result was complete submission to the will of the mutineers. The whole affair was mismanaged, and for this mismanagement the Khedive appears to have been largely responsible...The attempt to decoy the Colonels away from their troops and to punish them without any trustworthy force behind him to ensure effect being given to the decisions of the Court-martial, was probably the most unwise course which could have been adopted.[84]

British Consul-General Sir Edward Malet agreed, describing the Tewfik's actions as "the way best calculated to destroy all confidence in the Khedive and his Government."[85]

The British analyses proved to be prophetic, and on September 9, 1881, the army mutinied for a third time. Once again led by Colonel Urabi, 2,500 soldiers marched to the center of Cairo and laid out their demands to the Khedive.[86] Their primary stipulation was the dissolution of Riaz Pasha's government, however they also insisted on the formation of a Parliament and the increase of the army's size to 18,000 men.[87] With the help of British consul Sir Charles Cookson, Tewfik managed to postpone acceptance of the latter two demands, but he was forced to comply with the former and named Sharif Pasha in charge of forming a new

[84] Cromer, 179.

[85] *ibid*.

[86] *ibid*., 183.

[87] *ibid*., 186.

Council of Ministers. In doing this, Tewfik effectively confirmed what Cromer and Malet had concluded: the Khedive no longer commanded any actual power in Egypt. The appointment of Sharif Pasha as Prime Minister was celebrated by the constitutionalist groups while Urabi's demonstration was seen as a victory for native Egyptians. In effect, the September mutiny had succeeded in bringing together all of the facets of the growing nationalist movement.

The Egyptian government was never able to find complete stability under Sharif's rule. In the months following the creation of the new Council of Ministers, Colonel Urabi emerged as an Egyptian national hero and gained immense political power. He had been transformed from a military leader into "a patriotic symbol."[88] At Urabi's behest, the Khedive immediately signed new laws reforming the unfair system of promotion and regulation in the army. While Sharif and the Egyptian elite attempted reforms through political channels, Urabi represented the Egyptian people. His *fellah* roots made him a populist hero in Egypt, and his tenacious defense of native Egyptians against foreign rule allowed him to be characterized as the "protector of the fatherland and of Islam from the unbelieving and arrogant European powers."[89]

Newspapers and journals were immediately supportive of the Urabi movement. Those that had previously published in support of Riaz Pasha or the Khedive now reworked their message to take a neutral, but hopeful, tone concerning the recent coup. 'Moderate' papers, such as *Al-Watan* and *Al-Iskandariya*, pushed the new nationalist message, criticizing European management of Egypt.[90] More radical newspapers used Urabi's success to decry European culture as detrimental to Egypt and Islam. While their analysis of the uprisings differed, most

[88] Schölch, 178.

[89] *ibid*., 177.

[90] *ibid*., 179.

papers were unabashedly enthusiastic about Colonel Urabi himself. *Al-Hijaz* went so far to describe Urabi not just as an Egyptian leader, but as "the protector and supporter of Islam" as well.[91] In other accounts, he was presented as a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad himself. As testament to Urabi's widespread popular support, the November elections for the Chamber of Notables produced an assembly largely loyal to him. Additionally, his new influence provided him the means to purge all distrusted officers from the army. His popularity among the Chamber of Notables bestowed upon him enormous leverage in the Egyptian government and his uncontested support by the military granted him the power, should he care to use it, to enforce his views.

At the same time, the Sharif Government attempted to maintain a balance with the Khedive and the Dual Control. However, the Council of Ministers faced a threat from the emboldened military that rallied around Colonel Urabi. The National Party that had installed him in power was never a unified body. Although their goals had aligned on September 9, there was a deep schism between the more moderate constitutionalists who were willing to work with the Dual Control in order to develop a constitutional monarchy and the more radical nationalists who desired an Egypt free from European interference. Although Sharif Pasha's government was constructed of the former, the army, and a majority of Egyptian public opinion, was largely aligned with the latter. From the beginning, Sharif was aware of the difficulties of his position, and had initially been hesitant to consent to his appointment.[92] The consequence of the rapid

[91] Although *Al-Hijaz* was among the more controversial newspapers published at the time, it was well received in the army. After the Urabi revolt, it argued for pan-Islamism to grow from Urabi's lead. Sharif Pasha banned its publication in November, 1881 as a test of his control over the military. He took it as a good sign when Urabi did not protest.
ibid., 180-181.

[92] Sharif Pasha only agreed to accept the appointment after long debates with Urabi and the foreign consuls. Likely as a result of the recent uprisings, his primary stipulation was that the army would submit to his authority. Urabi declined his request, and countered with a demand that Sharif name Mahmud Sami and Mustafa Fahmi as War and

success of the popular national movement was that, while the moderate Sharif Government had nominal power, much of their influence was held in check by Urabi and his followers. Between the widespread admiration for Urabi and the swift dissemination of his ideas, little progress could be achieved by the Sharif Government. In *Modern Egypt*, Lord Cromer summarized the circumstances of the Egyptian government at the end of 1881:

> The Khedive was brooding over the humiliation inflicted on him by his mutinous army, and was desirous of an opportunity to reassert his authority. Chérif Pasha was inspired by some statesmanlike principles, and was endeavoring to regain the legitimate authority of the Government, but he was wanting in the energy and strength of character necessary to control the turbulent elements which had been let loose.... Arábi was the real ruler of the country.[93]

The big change that resulted from the domestic unrest in 1881 came in terms of influence over the Egyptian people. Before the military insurrections, real power laid in the hands of the Council of Ministers. By the end of the year, due to the widespread support for Urabi's uprising, the Council of Ministers found itself increasingly checked by Colonel Urabi's authority.

The Last Straw

Urabi's dramatic rise to dominance guaranteed that the more radical nationalists, those who desired to free Egypt from all foreign influence, maintained a strong voice in the government. Through the spread and increasing radicalization of the Urabi movement, nationalist fervor reached a tipping point. The Egyptian army was among the most extreme elements of the new nationalist movement. Its unyielding support of Colonel Urabi made it the deciding factor in the balance of power over Egypt. Essentially under his personal command, the

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Foreign Ministers, respectively. Urabi felt that Sharif should comply as he owed his position to Urabi's demonstration. Sharif declined, and these requests and denials continued until the Chamber of Notables put their support behind Sharif as Prime Minister and helped to broker a compromise.
ibid., 164-166.

[93] Cromer, 212.

army was difficult to control without Urabi's support. As a result, Sharif Pasha feared military insubordination. Even the Chamber of Notables, which was highly loyal to Colonel Urabi, was alarmed by the power brandished by the army. By the end of 1881, the Sharif Government found itself having to mollify the more radical contingent of the National Party to maintain order.

The British and the French managed to further erode the delicate situation with two diplomatic blunders. The first occurred as a result of a dispute over the power of the Chamber of Notables. In December, 1881, the Chamber presented Sharif Pasha with a set of bylaws defining the scope of their authority. The British and French Governments instructed Sharif to reject the Chamber's draft as they requested control over a portion of Egyptian revenue managed by the Dual Control. Relinquishing this supervision, Sir Auckland Colvin, the British Controller-General, argued, would interfere with the Dual Control's ability to "exercise any useful check on the finances."[94] Had the European Controllers acquiesced to this demand, an alliance could have been formed between the Council of Ministers and the Chamber, and the power of the army could have been marginalized.[95] Instead, the French Government under Prime Minister Léon Gambetta was intent on maintaining the status quo, and the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville, was persuaded to agree.[96]

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[94] *ibid*., 220.

[95] Marlowe, 116.

[96] Both twentieth century historian John Marlowe and Wilfrid Blunt write that compromise could have been attained and would have diffused the situation should the British and French Governments have made an attempt to do so. Blunt offers that "a frank public declaration of goodwill at that moment on the part of the English and French Governments towards the popular hopes would have secured a workable arrangement between the Nationalist Government and the Dual Control, which would have safeguarded the bondholders' interests no less than it would have secured to Egypt its liberty" (Blunt, 137-138). Marlowe suggests that "a compromise might have been negotiable, which would have driven a wedge between the Chamber and the Army, produced a viable system of constitutional government in Egypt, and safeguarded legitimate European interests in Egypt..." (Marlowe, *Cromer*, 59).

In response to the growing nationalist opposition, Gambetta orchestrated a second diplomatic error which brought about the collapse of the Sharif Government. On January 8, 1882, the French and British Governments issued the Joint Note, written as an instruction to their Consuls:

> You have been instructed on several occasions to inform the Khedive and his Government of the determination of England and France to afford to them support against the difficulties of various kinds which might interfere with the course of affairs in Egypt…The two Governments, being closely associated in their resolve to guard, by their united efforts, against all causes of complication, internal or external, which might menace the order of things established in Egypt, do not doubt that the assurance publicly given of their fixed intention in this respect will tend to avert the dangers to which the Government of the Khedive might be exposed and which would certainly find England and France united to oppose them.[97]

The Joint Note explicitly identifies "the meeting of the Chamber of Notables convoked by the Khedive" as the impetus for the Anglo-French directive.[98] This move severely undercut the authority of the Sharif Government.[99] Its emphasis on Khedival authority undermined Sharif Pasha's attempt to establish a constitutional monarchy and demonstrated to the more radical wing of the party that allying with the Europeans, as Sharif had done concerning the management of the debt, would be repaid with duplicity. The Joint Note was received by many as a threat of intervention, and the direct result was the downfall of the Sharif Government.

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[97] *ibid*., 118.

[98] *ibid*.

[99] There is debate as to the intended goal of the Joint Note. John Marlowe argues that Gambetta was prepared to intervene militarily in Egypt and was thus entirely aware of its potential consequences. He goes as far as to claim that Gambetta purposefully issued the message in order to "create a situation in which armed intervention would become imperative" (Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations*, 118). Schölch makes the case that the Note was issued in response to worries of the French Consul-General, M. Sienkiewicz, that the Chamber of Notables would develop into a "genuine parliament" which would cause Britain or the Porte to invade (Schölch, 202). In his memoirs, Lord Cromer defended British actions concerning the Note, justifying that, concerning the National Party, "the British Government appears to have been under a delusion from the first. They thought that the movement was wholly military, and, therefore, undeserving of sympathy" (Cromer, 226). Regardless of the motivation for the issuance of the Joint Note, the message was clear to Egyptians that it was a threat of European intervention.

In the aftermath of the Joint Note, Egypt experienced a dramatic anti-European surge which frightened Tewfik. The removal of the moderate Sharif government had fatally diminished the constitutionalists' goal of a limited monarchy working in concert with a parliamentary body. A new Council of Ministers was established by Mahmud Sami al-Barudi in February 1882 with the understanding that he would approve the Chamber's expanded definition of their authority. This new government was largely selected by the army, and under their influence, Colonel Urabi was appointed Minister of War. With the acceptance of the Chamber's new laws and the appointment of political allies to the ministry, the extreme nationalists now had influence over the Egyptian military and populace and as well as real power in the Government.

Among his first acts as Minster of War, Urabi purged the army of nearly all Turco-Circassian elements on the claim that he had uncovered a Circassian conspiracy. The army additionally enjoyed rapid expansion and increases in pay, and native Egyptian soldiers were heavily rewarded with new rankings. Furthermore, under the al-Barudi Government, the Dual Control ceased to be an effective form of counsel. By March, the new government had such power that the Khedive informed the French Consul-General of his desire to "retire as soon as possible to Alexandria and await the day when an intervention would free him from this nightmare."[100] Under these circumstances, Tewfik hoped that his Turkish suzerains would intervene to restore his authority.

Despite the difficult circumstances observed by the Khedive in early 1882, European intervention was still unlikely. On January 30, less than a month after he orchestrated the issuance of the Joint Note, Prime Minister Gambetta's government fell from power in France and his actively interventionist approach to Egyptian affairs was discontinued. He had been the

[100] Schölch, 231.

driving force behind European interference. When Gambetta's government fell, British Prime Minister Gladstone expressed his happiness to be "relieved from the incubus of Gambetta's forward policy."[101] Throughout the entire affair with the deposal of Ismail and the reestablishment of the Dual Control, the British Government had tried hard to stay out of direct involvement in Egyptian affairs. Nevertheless, at each stage they had been dragged in by financial and strategic interests. At this point, Gladstone and Foreign Minister Granville had no interest in deploying the British military to Egypt. Even when Tewfik appealed directly to the Ottoman Sultan for intervention, the British and French, who both opposed further Turkish influence in Egypt, chose to defer any military response. Instead, the French and British Consul-Generals, M. Sienkiewicz and Edward Malet, both argued for the Khedive to exert his own powers rather than wait for the Porte to respond.

A standoff in late May between the Khedive and his Council of Ministers finally drew the interests of the British and French Governments. Tewfik had turned to the European consuls for advice over a proposed decree to expel all Circassians from the army. This outraged the Council of Ministers who felt that they were being marginalized by the foreign powers. They demanded the convocation of the Chamber of Notables to mediate their dispute, and until then refused to work with the Khedive, although they promised to continue to "guarantee public order" until conciliation.[102] In response to this crisis, a joint Anglo-French fleet was dispatched to Alexandria harbor.

In tandem with the commitment of the fleet, the British and French Consul-Generals issued a demand that would seal Egypt's fate. They insisted that the al-Barudi ministry must

[101] Blunt, 163.

[102] Schölch, 235.

resign and leave Egypt, to be replaced by a new government under Sharif Pasha. This demand proved to be the final straw. Public opinion and the army both supported the al-Barudi Government and accused the Khedive of siding against Egypt.[103] The Khedive's hold on authority had been irreparably broken, and he, along with the European Controllers, was seen as the enemy of Egypt. On June 11, riots broke out in Alexandria. Consulates were attacked, shops looted, and any Europeans and Christians who could be found were clubbed, stabbed, and otherwise beaten and killed on streets.[104] The tally of Europeans killed that day ranges from fifty to one hundred and fifty depending on the account and the Egyptian death toll is even higher.[105] The massacre at Alexandria was the breaking point in peaceful relations between Europe an Egypt. Almost immediately, there was a mass exodus of Europeans from Egypt, as many felt that they were no longer safe. In Great Britain, people were up in arms over the news of the mass murders.

In response to the massacre, diplomatic efforts to resolve the situation in Egypt quickly picked up. A conference was called by Great Britain and France to discuss possible actions concerning the recent violence. Until this point, the British had been hesitant to consider military

[103] *ibid*., 238.

[104] However, historical accounts of the massacre differ in assessing blame for the mayhem. Blunt claims the massacre was staged by the Khedive in order to discredit Colonel Urabi (Blunt, 238). The Egyptian ministers, including Urabi himself, and others believed that the Khedive was behind the riots, hoping to incite violence as a pretext for foreign intervention. Schölch denies the factual basis of this claim as well as the idea that Urabi himself may have orchestrated the disturbance as a way to demonstrate his power. Rather, Schölch proposes that: "More logical would have been the contention that the British representatives had organized the 'massacre' as a pretext for military intervention" (Schölch, 250). He argues that Charles Cookson, then the acting British Consul-General, had armed the foreign residents of Alexandria. Cromer's memoir agrees with the notion of the Khedive's innocence. It cites Lord Randolph Churchill's Parliamentary inquiry into the riots which found no evidence of Tewfik's involvement in the riot. Interestingly, Cromer also reports that British officials who witnessed Urabi's trials found no link between him and the massacre either (Cromer, 277-278). Former United States Consul-General in Cairo, Elbert Farman, describes the entire affair as blown out of proportion. He accuses the press of inflating the scope of events to procure European opinion favorable to invasion (Farman, 306).

[105] Schölch, 250.

invasion as an option. They initially tried to diffuse the situation "in the traditional way by invoking Turkish suzerainty over Egypt."[106] However, this strategy failed as there was a belief that both the French and the Ottomans were willing to negotiate with Urabi, an option that had already been discarded by the British.[107] Thus, the main focus of the conference was to resolve the crisis in Egypt without any European power advancing their own influence in the region. The conference's slow progress, combined with British military reports of Egyptian fortifications appearing along the shores of Alexandria, forced the British to make a decision. The French made it clear they would not take part in any military action, and the British were forced to continue alone. On July 11, 1882 British ships bombarded the shores of Alexandria, and thus began over seven decades of British control over Egypt.

[106] Marlowe, 64.

[107] Prime Minister Gladstone and his Cabinet had become convinced by this point that Urabi was "a military adventurer, that there was no national party in the true sense, (and) that his uncontrolled supremacy would very shortly bring about bankruptcy and anarchy."
ibid.

Conclusion

To understand the reason for the 1882 invasion, it is important to trace British relations with Egypt from their inception in the early nineteenth century. When Great Britain first established ties with Egypt, military intervention was not a foregone conclusion. Instability in Europe, the evolution of British foreign policy, and financial speculation by British citizens played significant roles in the maturity of Anglo-Egyptian affairs. For a number of decades, both Egypt and Great Britain were able to benefit from the relationship, however destabilizing factors within Egypt ultimately necessitated the dispatching of British troops.

That the military intervention was purely a British venture is a fallacy. Although in the end, Great Britain became the occupier, the final chain of events leading to the invasion was largely driven by France. French urgency to recover its investments had pushed the British further into Egyptian affairs than they had cared to hazard. British designs in Egypt were primarily economic, not territorial. They hoped to cultivate a profitable trading partnership, albeit perhaps at Egypt's expense, and maintain easy access to colonies in India and Asia. The British Government's reticence to interfere in Egypt is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by its refusal to nominate a representative for the Commission of the Public Debt. Only through French persuasion and actions by the British bondholders did the British Government become an active participant in Egyptian affairs.

Nevertheless, Great Britain's unwillingness to interfere in Egypt is not a defense of British actions leading up to the invasion. As each successive issue weakened Egypt, the British Government compounded the problem by failing to maintain a consistent diplomatic approach. During the financial crisis, while the French Government acted to protect the investments of its

citizens, the British Government maintained a more *laissez-faire* stance. The British offered assistance when there were also opportunities for profit, for example the purchase of the Suez Canal shares in return for the Cave mission. After Cave's report, however, the British Government opted not to take any further official action. In 1879, the British Government actively pursued the deposal of Ismail, a stark contradiction to its limited intervention foreign policy. In the subsequent years until the invasion, however, it refused to take a similarly austere attitude, attempting to revert back to its older 'intermeddling' strategy. By its refusal to dictate the course of diplomacy, the British Government allowed itself to be pulled into arrangements that would ultimately force the decision to invade.

The 1882 British invasion of Egypt was an important turning point in British and Egyptian history. For Egyptians, it denoted the end of self-governance. Nevertheless, given direction by reformers like Muhammad Abduh, the nationalism would persist under British rule and ultimately reassert itself in the Egyptian independence movement. For the British, it marked an advancement of liberal imperialism, where military intervention was no longer discounted in favor of intermeddling. Although Great Britain's occupation of Egypt was initially declared to be a short term commitment until order had been restored, as time passed, the British became entrenched in the Egyptian government. Despite granting Egypt independence in 1922, the British would remain in Egypt in some facets until 1954.

Limitations and Further Research

This paper was limited by a lack of access to resources containing the Egyptian perspective of events.

This topic could be further studied from a number of approaches, including:

- Tracing the evolution of British "Liberal Imperialism"
- Examining of the impact of the financial crisis and ensuing foreign interference on the *fellahin*
- A survey of the Egyptian perspective of the events leading up to the British invasion

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