

Mohamed Ali- The Father of Modern Egypt

A Research Paper

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Mohamed Ali, a personality that has shaped the face of modern Egypt, a person who saw and took the opportunity to drive the people of Middle East away from the oppression of traditional, hardcore Islam and set the basis of a realistic and tolerant society. He was one of those people who take advantage of everything that is given by fate and exploit it to the fullest, ultimately resulting in the establishment of a dynasty that ruled over Egypt for a hundred and fifty years.

Being of modest means as the son of a local militia commander in the coastal town of Kavala, then under Ottoman rule, Mohamed Ali was struck by fate after losing his father in an early age. He was then taken and raised by his uncle, the governor of Kavala.^[1] There, he worked as a tax collector and was rewarded for his efficiency with the rank of Second Commander of the Kavala Volunteers Contingent that was sent to drive away the French after the occupation of Egypt. In 1801 his unit landed in Aboukir where his legend began.^[2]

During the power struggle between the Mamluks and the Ottomans^[3], following the departure of the French, Mohamed Ali used his cunning and his loyal Albanian soldiers to work for both sides, gaining power and prestige as a result^[4]. In 1801 he formed an alliance with the Egyptian leader named Umar Makram and the Sheikh of the Al-Azhar University of Cairo. From 1801 to 1805, while the Mamluks were fighting against the Ottomans, Mohamed Ali acted carefully to gain the favor of the public. Thanks to his cunning approach he was able to elevate his status even more. In 1805, he became governor of Egypt after the demands made to the Ottoman Sultan by Egyptian scholars. They wanted the governor Ahmad Khurshid Pasha replaced by Mohamed Ali. So profound was the impact of his actions on the people, which made it easier for him later to seize power.^[5]

When he became governor, he started to remove all the obstacles to take complete control of Egypt. In 1809, he exiled his ally, Makram, to Damietta because he discovered his will to seize power.^[4] Then he started to prosecute the Mamluks, which was a multilevel problem. Mamluks ruled over Egypt for more

than 600 years. That meant that their rule extended throughout Egypt. In order to eradicate their grasp on the administration, it was necessary to remove the leadership as well as the rest of the administration and then replace it with a new one. After cleverly tricking the Mamluk leaders with an invite to the celebration in honor of his son, Tusun, leading a campaign into Arabia, he ordered his troops to surround them and ambush them. Even though the numbers vary, it was surely a considerable blow for the Mamluks.^[6] With the leadership of the Mamluks eliminated, the rest were an easy prey. At last, the road was open for his reforms.

Mohamed Ali wanted a western-style state. To achieve that, he needed to reorganize and streamline the economy, restructure the Egyptian society, train a professional military and bureaucracy.^[7] The first step was to create a stable income flow for Egypt. Therefore he gradually nationalized the land. To accomplish the state annexation of property, he raised the taxes on the farmers significantly, that made it impossible to pay. That way the state could legally confiscate the land.^[8] Two important steps were taken at that time. The first was the introduction of crops specifically for exports such as rice, indigo, sugarcane and the long staple cotton crop, which was a very lucrative crop at the time. The second involved irrigation improvements on the land. Through a series of new trade regulations, all producers were now required to sell their goods to the state, and then the state would sell the goods to the Egyptian and the foreign markets. The profits from this practice were significant and extended from the state coffers, down to the farmers, since the average salary increased fourfold.^[9] The newfound income was used for public works such as urban irrigation, dams, barrages and canals. Also, to boost trade, a new canal, called Mahmudiya, was commissioned in 1819 to connect the Nile with Alexandria, making trade safer and more efficient.

The second step was to create an industrial base for Egypt. The government set up modern factories for weaving cotton, silk and wool. In order to staff the factories, many workers were drafted. In a short time, about 4 percent of the population, or between 180.000 to 200.000, was employed by the industries, which now enjoyed strong protectionism through embargoes and high tariffs on foreign goods.^[10] The main goal was to raise the industrial output of Egypt and compete with the European industries. Some factories produced chemical materials as well.^[10] Another important industry was the weapons manufactory. By the end of the 1830s' Egypt's factories were producing 1,600 muskets per

month and the shipyard of Alexandria had already built nine 100-gun warships.^[10] Thanks to that level of production, Mohamed Ali was now able to create a modern state and military.

The bureaucracy and the military were essential in order to upgrade Egypt's status. Many promising citizens were sent to European schools, mostly in France, to study in order to learn the new techniques and translate the military manuals to Arabic. By using these educated Egyptians and the imported European experts, many schools and hospitals were established in many parts of Egypt.^[10] The establishment of a modern bureaucracy also provided the means for social mobility. In order to maintain control of the region, after the defeat of the Mamluks, he assumed all central authority and replaced old officials, most likely followers of the Mamluks, with new, professional bureaucrats. Also, educational reforms took place, as the educational system was founded in 1811. The main goal of the reform was to provide education for all the people, especially for women. Culture advanced significantly during his time, as many texts were translated from French to Arabic, ranging from history and medicine to military technology and sociology. Some say that it was the second greatest translation movement since the translation of ancient Greek texts to Arabic. Thanks to the educational mission to Europe, this time period is considered the dawn of the Arabic literary renaissance. This contact with the European literature resulted in the writing of various wonderful creations from Egyptian scholars. The year 1835 is when the first native press was founded in the Arab world with the name Bulaq which published the official gazette of the government.^[11] Another improvement in the cultural area was the accumulation and breeding program of Arabian horses. These horses became very popular thanks to the unique characteristics and careful attention to bloodlines.

The army experienced reforms on every level. Before Ali, every time an army was sent on a mission, the wives and the families of the soldiers accompanied them. This had a negative impact on the soldier's discipline and will to fight. The new system isolated the recruits in the barracks and the training camps which gave them a sense of order and significantly increased their discipline.^[12] Through daily roll-call, desertion was practically eliminated. Also, by exercising daily and engaging in useful tasks the troops were kept busy and fit for duty. Along with the establishment of specialized schools for doctors and engineers and the

conscription of peasants as carriers and other non-military personnel, he finally had a modern fully equipped army and navy.

The military campaigns present very interesting features. Since Egypt was under ottoman rule, even if it seemed very distant, Mohamed Ali had to follow the ottoman Sultan's requests whenever asked. The first request came in 1811. With most of the ottoman army engaged in Europe in the Russo-Turkish war, Sultan Mahmud II requested from Mohamed Ali to retake the Arabian territories after their capture by the House of Saud. Mohamed appointed his son Tusun to lead the expedition. The result was unsuccessful, so a second attack was launched in 1812 that resulted in the recapture of the Hejaz region.^[13] Even so, the Saudis were not broken. They continued to create problems to both Egyptian and Ottoman troops. So finally Mohamed sent another of his sons, Ibrahim to crush the Saudis after a two year campaign. After serving the Sultan, Mohamed Ali made his first move towards independence from the High Porte. His target was Sudan, a valuable territory with abundance of gold and slaves. At that time, Sudan had no central authority, and was divided into tribes with primitive weapons. In 1820 Ali sent his third son Ismail with 5, 000 troops to invade Sudan. They were met with strong resistance from the tribes, especially the Shaigiya. Eventually, the superiority of the Egyptian army ensured the defeat of the tribes.^[14] Now Mohamed Ali had an important strategic outpost, from which he could expand to the roots of the Nile, down to Ethiopia and Uganda. During the Greek revolutionary war in 1821 the Sultan asked again for assistance from Egypt, since the ottoman troops were inefficient. In exchange the Sultan offered Ali the island of Crete, which was very rich and strategically important. He sent 16,000 troops with 100 transport and 63 escort ships under the command of Ibrahim Pasha. In 1827 in coast of Navarino, Britain, French and Russian warships engaged the Ottoman and Egyptian fleets and destroyed them.^[15] The Sultan had forced Mohamed Ali into a battle from which he had no tangible gains and lost his highly expensive navy. Ali was now furious with the High Porte, and he requested the territory of Syria as compensation for the great loss. The Sultan was completely indifferent to the request which made Ali determined to change the situation. A new navy was created and a new army was recruited and on the 31st of October in 1831 the Egyptian army, under the command of Ibrahim Pasha invaded Syria, starting the first Turko-Egyptian war. To strengthen his argument against the Ottoman Empire, he alleged that about 6,000 Egyptian peasant fled to Acre to

escape the draft and the taxes, and he wanted the back.^[16] The Egyptian forces overran most of Syria quite easily, with the most significant resistance sited in the city Acre. After the capture of the city, the Egyptian army moved against Anatolia, in modern-day Turkey. On the 21st of December in 1832, at the battle of Konya Ibrahim crushed the Ottoman army and opened up the path towards Constantinople. During all this time, Mohamed Ali paid focus to the European powers. He feared an intervention in the site of a total destruction of the Ottoman Empire. So he tried not to show an independent course of action. He kept the ottoman coins in circulation and continued to praise the Sultans' name in the Friday prayers.^[17] Even so, Russia was the first to offer military aid to the Sultan, resulting in the treaty of Hunkar Iskelesi. This treaty hurt the British and French interests in the area, so they intervened in order to protect them.^[18] Finally in 1833, a peace treaty was signed at the Convention of Kutahya which stated that the Egyptian army would withdraw and Mohamed Ali would take the island of Crete and the territory of Hejaz in exchange. Also Ibrahim Pasha was to be appointed Wali of Syria. The treaty denied Ali an independent kingdom. Fearing further actions, the Sultan offered Ali hereditary rule over Egypt and Arabia, if he withdrew from Crete and Syria. Ali was not content with the terms. All he wanted was his country independent.^[19] On the 25th of May 1838, the Egyptian government informed the British and the French that Egypt would declare independence from the Sultan. Since the European forces were against it and seeing the upcoming clash, they tried to moderate the situation.^[20] In 1839, both sides were ready for war once more. Mahmud II ordered his troops to invade Syria, but they were attacked by a large force under Ibrahim and were destroyed at the battle of Nezib. The road to Constantinople was once again open. The final blow came with the defection of the Ottoman fleet to Egypt. After the battle of Nezib, Mahmud died and was succeeded by his sixteen-year old son. At this point, Ibrahim urged his father to take the imperial seat, while Ali though that it would be impossible, and was content with independence for Egypt and significant territory gains. On 15th of July 1840, at the convention of London Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia offered Ali hereditary rule over Egypt as a part of the Empire but he had to withdraw from Syria and the coast of Lebanon. Ali was hesitant in waiting for support from the French. When the French turned him down, it was already too late.^[21] British naval forces moved against Syria and Alexandria. Along with Austrian naval forces, they bombarded Beirut, blockaded the Nile and

captured Acre. Ali now had to accept the terms of the convention on the 27th of October 1840. He also had to renounce his claims on Crete and Hejaz, downsize his navy and reduce his army to only 18,000 troops. In the end he only gained hereditary rule over Egypt and Sudan.^[22] One more defeat was the treaty of Balta Liman in 1838 which forced the Egyptian government to tear down the import barriers for the British products, resulting in problematic debt levels.^[23]

During his final years after experiencing great victories at first and defeats later, his mind started to become increasingly clouded and tended towards paranoia. Later, Ali's son Ibrahim was inflicted with tuberculosis which made it impossible for him to rule over Egypt. After he secured hereditary rule for his family he ruled until 1848, when he retired and was succeeded by his nephew Abbas I. Finally, he took his last breath on the 2nd of August 1849 and was buried in the imposing mosque in the Cairo Citadel. Mohamed Ali fought to create an independent Egypt free from Ottoman rule, away from the radical Islam and economically independent. Perhaps his main goal of an independent Egypt was not satisfied, but he started a revolution that shaped the face of the Arab world for the next hundred years, thanks to him it was possible for an Arab state to break free from the oppression of hardcore Islam and towards a secular government.

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