

Political Situation in Egypt on the Eve of Construction of the Suez Canal

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Abstract: The Suez Canal was put into operation in 1869 and had a huge impact on political and economic development of Egypt, on the change of its place and a role as in region of the Middle East and North Africa and on the international scene, as a whole. Undoubtedly, this event had great reformative influence not only on Egypt, but also on all the system of international navigable routes and, through this - on the further development of the international, trade, economic, cultural and civilization relations.

Key words: Egypt • Suez Canal • Muhammad Ali • Ferdinand de Lesseps

INTRODUCTION

Profound acquaintance with political, social and economic development of Egypt in the XIX - middle of the XX centuries, an explanation of the nodal processes and the drama events, which have affected further change of a geopolitical, trade and economic place of the country in a format of that time of the international relations in a context of realization of a thousand-year idea of connection of the Mediterranean and Red seas by a waterway, is actual in two plans:

First, it promotes the reconstruction of a real picture of objective preconditions, accelerated implementation of the project of the Suez Canal as a whole and also the main stages of its construction.

Secondly, it helps to correct assessment of real reasons of increased role of the enormous international waterway, as in a global trade and in economic relations and in a new aggravation of colonial rivalry between the largest powers of the world of that time, first of all, between Great Britain and France, for strengthening of the positions as the main military-political, financial and economic force on a joint of two great continents - Asia and Africa with the maximum use of opportunities of the appeared new factor - the Suez Canal. As according to Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory "Owning by sea or control over it and using by it - are great factors in the history of mankind " [1]. It is obvious that these specified and

interrelated aspects had a very ambiguous impact on the political situation and the process of the development of social and economic relations in Egypt.

It is known, from the beginning of XVI century, until the end of the XVIII century, Egypt was a part of the Ottoman Empire, which ended almost 270 years of existence on its territory the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517), which was finally conquered in January 1517.

By the end of the XVIII century the military-political situation in the world was changed fundamentally acquiring new shapes, that could not be reflected on such important geopolitical field as North Africa and the Middle East. The main actors in the face of colonial rivalry of England and France, this vast space was considered, on the one hand, as a region with immeasurable natural resources and labor potential for developing industry in Europe and on the other hand - as the most important strategic communications hub, providing huge preferences for further expansion sphere of colonial conquest in the direction of the East, especially in the Indian Ocean. Weakening of Turkey in the war with Russia in 1769 and strengthening of contradictions between Sultan and his Egyptian deputies from the number of Mamluks, which coincided on time with this period, was very favorable to France and Great Britain, as well as Spain, Portugal, Prussia, Austria and Holland, seeking to develop resolute actions in the north of Africa and the Middle East [2].

The main goal of their expansionist intentions consisted of the usurpation of possessions, belonged Great Port. Egypt in their series stood alone, above all, in keeping with his favorable geo-strategic position, providing almost complete control over communications, linking the Mediterranean pool with the Red Sea.

Special eagerness to gain of Egypt at the end of the XVIII century, poured out in Bonaparte's expedition. So, on May 19, 1798 the 35-thousand French fleet under Napoleon Bonaparte's command. He considered that Egypt was "the most important country in the world" [3] and left the port of Toulon on 55 warships. On July 1, French reached the coast of Egypt and intruded in Alexandria. On July 24 Napoleon captured Cairo without fight. During his expedition to Egypt, Napoleon commissioned scientists, who accompanied the army, to study the question of the possibility of digging a canal across the isthmus of Suez. The result of the investigation was extensive work of Leper, dedicated to digging of the canal [4].

It is appropriate to remember also, that except the Leper's project, there were others - later projects of Talabot and brothers Barrot. But their main disadvantage was, that they crossed the Nile - not on a channel, but on the path - in this case they had to regulate the unruly flow of the Nile with a very weak expectation of success. Therefore, the project of Lesseps was based on the Leper's idea about the direct water communication between two seas [5].

On August 1-2, 1798 the admiral Nelson crushed the French fleet at Abukir, having cut off Napoleon's army in Egypt. Later, the 38-thousand army was completely cut off from France. In January, 1799 the Anglo-Turkish alliance was concluded against presence of France at Egypt [6]. In 1802 there was signed the peace treaty of Amiens, on which Egypt was recognized as the ownership of the Ottoman Empire [7]. Despite the fact, Britons were on the winning side in this confrontation, however they failed to gain a foothold in Egypt, where escalated domestic military-political confrontation between the Mamluks and Ottoman troops. At the same time, the failure of Bonaparte's expedition didn't force him to refuse the plans, connected with Egypt. Sent to this country Mathieu de Lesseps - the father of Ferdinand de Lesseps - in the future "father of the Suez Canal" - as the charge d'affaires of France, was among those who had to recover French positions in the East and Egypt, in particular [8].

In such difficult conditions, Muhammad Ali, the Commander of Albanian detachment, arrived in Egypt as part of Turkish forces. On May 1805, becoming the leader

of 4-thousand Albanian detachment, he managed to install complete control of Cairo and in November 1806, obtained from Port an appointment himself Egyptian Pasha [9].

Towards the establishment of the strong centralized state in Egypt Muhammad Ali was going to manage with two most difficult tasks: prevention of fixing Britons in Egypt and their transformation into the actual owners, on the one hand and also resistance overcoming Mamluks, still represented rather terrible force, capable to create the real threat board of the new Pasha - with another hand. At the solution of these formidable tasks Muhammad Ali proved himself as the wise statesman. The main target of his uncompromising and cruel actions in the first stage of creation of the independent State from the Great Port was the Mamluk elite, retained military-political and economic positions in the country despite all the historical vicissitudes of that period. He led a relentless struggle against that system. One of the successful implementations of his intention for destruction of the main internal enemy is planned operation to luring the most prominent members of Mamluks in celebration of the day, "Wafa an-Nil". 16 August 1807, there were killed more than a thousand of them. The second devastating blow to Mameluks Muhammad Ali inflicted on March 1, 1811 related with the departure of his son Ahmad Tusun to the Hijaz to fight with Wahhabists [9]. He invited Mamelukes at the arranged on the occasion of the celebrations in the citadel and killed them there.

In 1807, the following English invasion into Egypt came to the end with a failure also. Its results actually even more strengthened Muhammad Ali's positions on a post of the Egyptian Pasha. Muhammad Ali's position became stronger after entering upon Ottoman throne by Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839). In the same period, Mathieu de Lesseps tried everything to facilitate the strengthening of the authority of Muhammad Ali, thus acquired a certain influence on the ambitious ruler. Having used a favorable situation Muhammad Ali conducted a program of civil and military reforms. The ultimate goal in these reforms its inspirer saw not only in transformation of Egypt into the strong independent state, but also in making it a kernel of great Arab empire, capable to adopt military and technical achievements of Europeans, having kept thus an essence of the social and political relations inherent in Arab-Islamic society.

Implemented reforms by Muhammad Ali in the first two or three decades of his rule in agrarian relations, including elimination of iltizam, moving most of the waqf land to the state, distribution of land to peasants

abadiyya (lands, not included in the inventory) on the terms of their mandatory treatment with the rights to them by inheritance, etc. had dramatically changed the nature and the character of feudal land tenure in the country, helping to improve the productivity and profitability of agriculture. The imposition in 1842 of a new rule that allowed the sale of land abadiyya categories and Waqf, the construction of new irrigation canals, significantly improved conditions of the irrigation and some other measures, contributed further dynamic growth of agriculture. The area of cultivated land increased from 3 to 3.8 million feddans. Big profits began to bring the cultivation of export crops, especially cotton. Naturally, all of these reforms were done, first of all, in interest of the new ruling class. Approximately, about half of the villages were distributed to the new feudal lords as personal possessions-Chiftliks and the governor became the largest landowner of the country [1. P.52]. There was brought into the governmental monopoly on the sale of the export of raw materials that bought from farmers at very low prices and then resold with a huge advantage. It brought such huge revenues, by the end of reign of Muhammad Ali, all external and up to 90 per cent of domestic trade were monopolized by himself [10].

A certain place among the reforms initiated by Muhammad Ali, was allocated for improvement of an educational system [11]: there were first secular schools of the European type, groups of youth began to submit for study abroad, the first Islamic printing houses were created. All this naturally promoted growth of consciousness of Egyptians, expansion of their political outlook, the gradual increase of their political activity.

The central place in complex of reforms of Muhammad Ali was allocated, nevertheless, for the military sphere, that is quite explainable in a context of the military-political situation dominating at that stage of development of Egypt. It can be said, the burden of vassalage from Ottoman rulers - on the one hand and the steadily increasing threat of the ultimate colonization of Egypt by European powers - on the other hand, set the stage and the logic activities of Muhammad Ali. So, steps were undertaken to the accelerating establishment of Egyptian regular army, using experience and assistance of the same European team, in the first place - French. The Feature of the reforms in the military can be considered that the masses of soldiers in the newly established regular units were fellahs, which first began to involve the army and the officer corps - Turks, Circassians and Albanians.

By 1820, Muhammad Ali finally achieved his goal of foundation an efficient army in Egypt. The first major operation was the war in Sudan and its conquest over the years 1820-1822 and in 1823-1824. - of the island of Crete. In 1824, Ottoman Sultan appointed Muhammad Ali also a ruler of Morea. Thus, the most important outcome of the wars of the conquest of Muhammad Ali was the foundation of the Egyptian power, de-facto independent, but formally remained part of the Ottoman Empire [12].

In 1827, the contradictions arose between Egypt and Turkey, which subsequently acquired an irreconcilable character. In 1831 began an open war with Turkish Sultan, which resulted in the conquest of Palestine, Syria and Khilikhia by Muhammad Ali. He demanded the post of governor of Syria from Ottoman Sultan. Muhammad Ali continued the war and in 1832 had been refused, captured Akka and Homs. He also defeated Turkish army at the battle of Koniya. The treaty of mutual assistance in this difficult situation for Turkey was signed with Russia. Russian troops, landed on Bosphorus in March-April 1833, stopped the attack of Egyptian army. Being afraid of further strengthening of positions of Russia in Ottoman Empire, interfered England and France, that led to the signing of the so-called Kyutakhiysky agreement of 1833. Sultan published the hatti-sheriff, according to which Syria, Palestine and the Adansky pachalyk passed under Muhammad Ali's management; for this the last recognized himself the vassal of the Sultan [13]. After signing of the Unkyar-Iskelisiysky treaty of 1833 Russian armies were evacuated from Turkey.

The European powers were greatly alarmed by the rise of Egypt as well as the containing of the Alliance between Turkey and Russia. As a result of the incitements of England, unhappy with the independent policy of Muhammad Ali, in summer of 1839, Turkish troops launched the new military actions against Egypt. However, in the second Turkish-Egyptian war success attended Muhammad Ali. The victory of his son - Ibrahim Pasha in the battle of Nezibe in June 24, 1839 over Turkish army brought to the origin in 1840, on the agenda of European countries of the so-called "Egyptian issue". In this time was signed the London agreement, under which Egypt had to withdraw all its troops from Turkey and Syria. However, Muhammad Ali had rejected this demand, but eventually was defeated in the struggle for Syria and Arabian Peninsula. Not having received the promised support from France, Muhammad Ali capitulated under the threat of bombing Alexandria. On 11 February and June 1, 1841 Sultan Abdulmazhid (1839-1861) issued the

relevant ordinances to limit authorities of Egypt. According it, only Egypt and Eastern Sudan were declared the hereditary possessions of Muhammad Ali, who had pleaded himself the vassal of the Sultan; the strength of Egyptian army was reduced from 200 000 to 18 000, shipyards were destroyed; there were circulated on Egypt all international treaties and commitments of Turkey; Muhammad Ali had pledged to pay tribute to the Sultan's treasury. Despite all this, he continued his efforts to strengthen the State authorities, including the adoption of the law of the establishment of seven sofas. Even at this stage, despite the fact, that Egypt had formally remained one of the pashalyks of the Ottoman Empire, the country was the independent State with its own Government and army. Muhammad Ali entered the system of ministries on the European model by zoning Egypt on seven provinces headed by the Governors, who were subordinate to Cairo, provided reliable centralized management by the State. The researchers appreciate the results of the reforms of Muhammad Ali and consider them as more effective than results in Turkey during the first period of Tanzimat [14].

Muhammad Ali was, of course, mature and far-sighted politician, well versed in twists and turns of the history. During his reign of Egypt, the question about connecting waterway Mediterranean and Red Seas in one form or another, arose more than once and always stumbled over the negative attitude of the ruler, who thought, this would be an additional incentive for the European powers on the way of the final subjugation of the country. So, some researchers provide his words about it: "What do Voltaire, Saint-Simon, Leibniz or Montesquieu's opinions on the Suez Canal if the real swindlers rule by Europe, mean? Once we open the canal, England will hang locks at its entrance and exit and keys of the canal will put in a pocket itself ..." [15].

Due to the illness of Muhammad Ali in his last years, the country was ruled by his son Ibrahim Pasha - firstly, as a co-ruler and since April 1848 - as the own ruler. But because of the demise of Ibrahim Pasha (10 November 1848) on the disease, state management was transferred to Abbas Hilmi I (1848-1854) - the grandson of Muhammad Ali, as history shows, he was not the most far-sighted and decisive representative of the dynasty founded by Muhammad Ali. Thus, under the pressure of external and internal factors he canceled the series of reforms of his grandfather: eliminated the school of European type, stopped the construction of a dam on the Nile and closed the factories. Britons was granted a concession for the

construction of a railway from Alexandria to Cairo and Suez. But soon (1854), Abbas I, was overthrown by Said Pasha (1854-1863), known for its sympathies to the Europeans, especially France. Father of Said Pasha spared much attention to his upbringing and instilled him good manners. He taught him the seamanship, the shipping art and the science. At first, he became the deputy of Matush Pasha, being at that time the commander of Egyptian fleet. By the end of the board of his father Said-Pasha reached the post of the Supreme commander of Egyptian fleet. Said pasha differed the bravery, the honesty and the other noble qualities. At the same time, at the governing of the country he often had not a determination that negatively affected a course of maintaining of the public affairs. There was openly looked through the influence of his European friends" in his behavior. He suffered from an excessive trust to European financial institutions; excessively favorable attitude towards Europeans that was shown, in particular, in its real policy towards France created, under the influence of Ferdinand de Lesseps. It is possible to claim, the last circumstance played a crucial role in acceptance of the final decision on the construction of the Suez Canal. As a whole, at board of Said-Pasha an intervention of Europeans in public affairs of Egypt considerably increased.

However, Said-Pasha was remembered in the history of Egypt, as a ruler, turned a particular attention to carrying out of the progressive transformations in agriculture for that time, which were objectively promoted an advancement of fellahs. The last had the right of ownership of the land they farmed. In this context, should mention about his famous Act of August 5, 1858, which entered the history of Egypt, "The plan of Said". Analysed in the "Encyclopedia of administration and officiating" [16] of Philip Glad and in the book of Jirjis-bey Hunein "the land and taxes" [16], this Act became the Foundation for the most magnificent of his reforms in the agrarian sphere, providing the legal basis for land tenure and taxation. The Act abolished the monopoly of the State on the harvest, prevailed with his predecessors. As a result, the farmer for the first time gained the right to independent implementation of the harvest and selection on the cultivation of crops on his own discretion. As a result of the reforms of Said-Pasha there were the taxes lowered and fellahs received more independence from the State. All this gave the positive dynamics of the economic development of the country and an improvement of the social-economic situation of fellahs - the largest class of Egyptian society.

Summary: Thus, throughout the period of the time, considered in article, the political, social and economic development of Egypt experienced on itself the powerful external pressure. It was expressed not only in the strengthening of the pressure of the European powers on the weakening Turkey, but also on the new governor of the country - Muhammad Ali. Egypt, as the most developed province among the possessions of Great Port and as the country with an advantageous geostrategic position, appeared in the epicenter of the Anglo-French colonial rivalry. Only the Muhammad Ali's farsighted policy, who had carried out the cardinal reforms, laid the foundation of the new Egyptian statehood, for a while removed country of depriving at Turkey by the European powers and its transformation into the colony of the Europeans. The project of linking the Mediterranean and the Red seas by the waterway across the isthmus of the Suez, put forward by France and considered as the part of the largest strategy to capture the new colonies in the East, was revealed by Muhammad Ali, who did not allow its implementation in life, during his reign. But the situation changed dramatically after his death, which executed to the fundamental change of the policy of his successors against the Europeans.

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