

Comparing and contrasting the levels of development in Iran and Egypt between the end of the 18th century and the start of the Great War reveals that multiple factors contributed to these two states. When analyzed, these factors can give us a deeper understanding of the occurrences in Egypt and Iran's pre-Great War period. The factors range from the individual political structure, the resources available in each state, and, most importantly, European intervention. Both states were treated much differently based on their individual factors, but the end goals were the same: economic exploitation and control.

To begin, we analyze the political situation in each at the time of European intervention. In Egypt, the Mamluks controlled a region that had ebbed and flowed for a few hundred years and, at the same time, fell under the governorship of the Ottoman Empire. It is widely accepted that the Mamluks were a loose, ruling, factitious Sunni body unpopular with most Egyptians. The Mamluks were said to be the accepted rulers by the Egyptians because they were armed while the population was not, and the Mamluks would defend the population in times of necessity.¹ Here, we encounter our first similarity between the Iranian and Egyptian military, which is that of an unorganized and tribal regime; however, the Mamluks were far weaker than the Iranian tribal factions, and therefore, upon the first punitive expedition to Egypt by the Ottomans resulted in the absolute retreat and cowardness of the Mamluk regime which sent them to northern Egypt.² The Mamluks later completely ceded leadership to France upon Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798, which sent the Mamluks running. Napoleon sought to exterminate any Mamluk and their supporters who did not fold to the French occupying forces. Egypt's position was a driving force in the initial occupation. It was strategically placed at the center of

¹ Marsot, *Napoleon in Egypt* (1997) P. 1

² Marsot, *Napoleon*, P. 1

trade for most of the world and would allow France to control trade with India, directly inhibiting Britain's economy.

Napoleon dictated everything that had happened in Egypt for nearly two years until a joint expedition by Ottoman and British forces. In the aftermath of this expedition, the British likely became weary of their tactics in allowing an Ottoman Viceroy, Mehmed 'Ali, to retain control in the region as he was arguably one of the most successful reformers in the Middle East. It was under his rule that Egypt had gone through vast transformations and turned to monopolize many of its developing industries and the state. Mehmed 'Ali was an empire builder who sought to reinvest heavily in Egypt's military and industries to make them self-sufficient.

Mehmed Ali grew beyond the limits desired by the European forces after he attempted to expand into Syria against the Ottoman forces to increase Egypt's production capacity. By 1840, European intervention had imposed extreme limits on the Egyptian military's capacity and production, and within a year, all industries diminished.³

After the intervention by European powers, further developments of Egyptian industries flourished (in support of Europe) while others continued to diminish. In the 1850s, Egypt fell deeper under direct European capitalist control. In 1852, railroads were implemented but under European control and made to ensure exports, such as cotton, could be delivered efficiently. The Suez Canal was established in 1854, followed by the growing colonization of concession hunters, and by 1872, nearly 80,000 European colonists were residents of Egypt.⁴

This direct occupation exerted the most influential aspects of development in Egypt. Isma'il sought to continue to develop but, in doing so, drove Egypt into further debt, which eventually resulted in Cromer's direct intervention in the leadership and management of

³ Hurewitz, *The Beginning of Military Modernization in the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis* (1968) P. 147

⁴ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (2013) P. 87

Egyptian finances to ensure repayment while implementing policies that stripped funding for state projects, including limited education, which Cromer carried out under the guise of Egyptians not being ready for independence and requiring further suppression.⁵ The collection of these factors led to the growth of Egyptian nationalism and “during the Urabi revolt-Egypt for the Egyptians.”⁶

Due to multiple reasons, Iran did not experience the same level of development as Egypt, partially because the Shi’a religious majority was resistant to it, with the religious establishment holding more power than any acting Shah.⁷ Additionally, Iran was in a peculiar situation in which Russia and Britain had both hesitated to intervene in the development for fear of overstepping the other's boundaries and triggering hostility between the two. Most importantly, and related to the first, the military lay supremely in the hands of the tribal chiefdoms, including the Qizilbash and the Kurds.

Because of these factors, Iran never quite recovered after its Safavid era and, in effect, did not modernize much in the way Egypt did until after the Great War.⁸ Many of the factors encountered by the tribal leaders in Iran’s earlier periods likely resulted in their additional resistance to the Qajar dynasty in modernizing its public and military affairs.

Many of the above-listed factors contributed to a resistance to centralization. Additionally, the geographical landscape in which Iran consisted of made it hard to communicate with communities as Iran was a vast mountainous region with populations primarily dispersed. With no significant railway systems, there was no way for military forces to organize at the call of the shah, nor was there a desire to do so as the Shah, Nasir al-Din, often did not have the

⁵ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, P. 107

⁶ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, P. 107

⁷ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, P. 108

⁸ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, P. 51

finances he was willing to put forth to pay them. The lack of infrastructure, on top of Russia's and Britain's hesitance, is that the European forces needed to see more excellent value in directly intervening in Iranian life. Unlike Egypt, Iran was a victim of economic colonialism rather than direct colonialism, as economic colonialism was far less costly.

The European powers sought concessions, which Nasir al-Din was almost always willing to grant; however, unlike Mehmed 'Ali, who sought to build Egypt's military forces and self-sufficiency, Nasir al-Din shared no similar desires but wanted to spend his money frivolously. One of the most noteworthy mistakes of Nasir al-Din's rule was granting concession to Baron Julius de Reuter, in which he sought to "develop Iran's economy and resources."⁹ This was one of the shah's many missteps that further unified the ulama, bazaaris, Iranian notables, the general population, and the tribal chiefdoms in opposition to the shah's rule, and they fortified their rule outside of his monarchy. Further, in 1890, the Shah granted a monopoly to tobacco sales and production to Major G. F. Talbot.¹⁰ This was a highly contentious concession as Tobacco was a heavily used and produced commodity in Iran, and it completely undermined the merchant class and bazaaris. This does not go over well because the merchant class and bazaars were held in higher regard than the shah himself and often invested more in public works than the monarchy. The Shah was forced to rescind this concession and was eventually assassinated in 1896.

The heavy concessions culminated when the Shahs granted concessions to Britain, granting nearly exclusive rights to Iranian oil while asking for only 16% of royalties, none of which would be reinvested in the Iranian state. This again unified the bazaaris, ulama, and a group of radical reformers who had called for a constitutional movement.¹¹ The constitutional

⁹Cole, *Millenarism and Democratic Thought in the 19th Century* (1992) P. 11

¹⁰ Nasir al-Din, *The Concession for the Tobacco Monopoly in Iran* (1890) P. 1

¹¹ Cleveland, *Modern Middle East*, P. 132

reforms were implemented as a measure of checks and balances on the monarchy but led to a degradation of society and caused clashes amongst the tribal factions once again. On the eve of the Great War, Iran had officially occupied southern Iran while Russia Occupied the North to secure their economic interests.

Egypt and Iran developed in many ways, but they also shared similarities. Namely, their development was guided by what they had to offer the European powers. Egypt's value was determined early on as it was a central point for trade; however, Iran became a critical region for concessions, primarily upon the discovery of oil. Both have developed along similar lines, with Egypt falling victim to European exploitation first and Iran following not long after. One of the most significant differences was in the resistance between Egypt and Iran. Iran maintained its tribal characteristics far longer than Egypt, which made it harder for a monarchy to rule. Nasir al-Din and any other leader could centralize Iran in the same way it had been in the Safavid era. If Iran had a robust absolutist regime like Mehmed 'Ali, the result might have been different, but Nasir al-Din was weak and did not share the same ambitions. In the end, however, both were directly occupied by European forces, just in varying forms.