

The Early British Attitude Towards Urabi Revolution

(9-14 September 1881)

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Abstract

Urabi Revolution is considered a turning point in the Egyptian modern history. It has been studied extensively, but little has been written about the immediate British reaction to this movement in the few critical days of 9-14 September 1881. This study focuses on the events from the British point of view from Abdeen demonstration to the formation of Sherif Pasha's Government. The article investigates the early British attitude towards Urabi and his demands. This paper proves that it was clear since the beginning of the movement that the British aligned themselves with the Khedive against the revolutionaries as the British documents clearly demonstrate. The evidence proved that the British Government considered this nationalist revolt a menacing movement and hostile attitude. This research depends mainly on relative historical documents, writings of some contemporaries of these historical events and research papers on the subject.

Keywords: Urabi Revolution; the British Response towards Urabi Revolution; Abdeen Demonstration; Ahmed Urabi; Mohamed Sherif Pasha; the British Occupation of Egypt.

Introduction

September 9, 1881 witnessed a crucial confrontation between the Khedive and Colonel Urabi, the army's Nationalist group commander. Urabi tried to confirm himself as the true power in the country by surrounding the Khedivial residence with his allied forces.

Urabi Revolution 1881-82 had been studied extensively, but little has been written about how the British authorities reacted to this movement at its early stages. This article focuses on the British attitude at the early beginning of the Revolution from the military demonstration of Urabi and his allies in front of Abdeen Palace on September 9, 1881 until the formation of Sherif Pasha's government. Mohamed Sherif Pasha accepted this position after deep negotiations with different active political actors at that moment; the Khedive, foreign agents in Egypt, and the revolutionaries.

The paper demonstrates the role played by the British representatives in Egypt as mediators between the Khedive and the demonstration leaders in Abdeen Square. The research investigates the British point of view towards the events in Egypt from September 9 to September 14, 1881. Fortunately, the British archives contain a vast number of reports, dispatches, telegrams, and letters relating to the way the British authorities dealt with the revolutionary movement that threatened Khedive Tawfiq's position in Egypt.

The article focuses on the British role in inducing Sherif Pasha to accept the government formation. The study also demonstrates the Anglo-French coordination regarding the crisis in Egypt, and how they tried to influence the Ottoman Sultan not to directly interfere in the Egyptian crisis, whether by sending Ottoman military forces or by sending an Ottoman delegate as an advisor to the Khedive to help resolve the crisis that threatened Khedive Tawfiq's position in Egypt.

For the sake of analytical clarity, the British relations with the "Urabists" and the Egyptian standing authority (the Khedive and his Government of Riad Pasha) were investigated through consulting relative historical documents, writings of some contemporaries of these historical events and research papers on the subject.

The Way to Abdeen Demonstration

Othman Pasha Rifky, the Minister of War proposed a new law which would make it difficult for the Egyptians in the army to be promoted to the officers' corps or to join the Military Academy. Rifky was a Turco-Circassian who had a record of giving preference to other Turco-Circassians over native Egyptian officers in the army. In January 1881, Ahmed Urabi, Ali Fahmy, and Abdel-Al Helmy made a petition opposing the proposed legislation. The Council of Ministers decided to arrest the three officers and to court-martial them.¹

On February 1, 1881, Urabi, Ali Fahmy, and Abdel-Al Helmy were summoned by the Minister of War, Othman Pasha Rifky, stripped of their weapons, and arrested for court-martial.² Urabi believed that there was an intention to execute them on that day because they were stripped of their weapons and placed in prison under armed guard, which meant they would be executed on charges of corrupt ideas and harmful movements to the country's interests. Their fellow officers came to support them, from the First Regiment and Sudan Regiment, they were able to liberate Urabi and his associates.³

On February 2, 1881, Urabi and his allies surrounded Abdeen Palace and demanded the dismissal of the Circassian War Minister, Othman Rifky.⁴ Khedive Tawfik was forced to positively respond to the Egyptian officers' request and dismissed Rifky Pasha.⁵

To remove the revolutionary Egyptian officers from the center of events in Cairo, the Minister of War, Daoud Yakan Pasha, ordered on September 8, 1881, the Third regiment

¹ Peter Mansfield, *The British in Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 18-19.

² "Wathā'q tārykhya 'n althawra al'rābya 7: Maḥāḍer altaḥqyqāt m' Maḥmūd Sāmy Albārūdy," *Majalat Alṭaly'a* 2/6, June 1966, 199.

Shāhyn Sehām 'Abd Al Razeq, "Althawra al'rābya: Namwdhaj motkāmīl lelthawra al'rābya motamathela bshakhshyat Aḥmed Uraby," *Majalat AlAdab* 124- University of Baghdad (2018): 193.

³ "Wathā'q tārykhya 'n alnoṣuṣ alkāmela lemaḥāḍer altaḥqyqāt m' Aḥmed Uraby." *Majalat Alṭaly'a* 2/2, February 1966, 158.

⁴ Mackenzie Wallace, *Egypt and the Egyptian Question* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1883), 72.

⁵ Elizabeth F. Thompson, *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 69.

of Infantry to move from Cairo to Alexandria. This measure was taken in an agreement with the Premier, Mostafa Riad Pasha.⁶

The Egyptian officers felt the gravity of the situation facing them, so they rose up against the Government of Riad Pasha. In his notice to the Minister of War on September 9, 1881, Ahmed Urabi considered the proceeding of the 3rd Regiment of Infantry to Alexandria a threat intended “to disperse the military power with a view of revenge upon us [the revolutionaries] and as we can not deliver up ourselves to death.” Urabi indicated that he and his associates would assemble in the Abdeen Square on September 9 “for deciding this question.”⁷

On the same day, Ahmed Urabi and his forces, about 4000 soldiers, marched to Abdeen Palace to confront Khedive Tawfik and to deliver their demands.⁸ The Movement of the nationalists towards the official residence of the Khedive shocked different local and international political constituencies. The movement surprised the Khedive himself, his government, and the European powers. The shock originated from the audacity of the confrontation and from the demands of the nationalists themselves which included increasing the number of Egypt's standing army, enhancement of the function and power of Parliament, and dismissal of Riad Pasha's government.⁹

The British authorities in Egypt assumed that the Khedive who was at Tanta on September 8, 1881, did not expect what was going to happen.¹⁰ Riad Pasha was confident that these events would go quietly as he took the measures of getting the disaffected regiments out of Cairo.¹¹

The Immediate British Response to the Call for Abdeen Demonstration

The crisis in Egypt which resulted from the existing discontent among Egyptian army officers with the Khedive and the Egyptian Government attracted the attention of the British Government since its beginning. Edward Malet, the British Consul-General in

⁶ Usama Abu Nahl, “Althawra al‘rābya: qera’a jadida,” *Ḥawlytāt AlAdab wal’olum alijtmā’ya* 31/328 (2011): 38.

⁷ Notice of Ahmed Urabi to Othman Refky, Minister of War, on September 9, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Inclosure in Doc. No. 21, 14.

⁸ Usama Abu Nahl, “Althawra al‘rābya: qera’a jadida,” *Ḥawlytāt AlAdab wal’olum alijtmā’ya* 31/328 (2011): 38.

⁹ ‘Abd Al Raḥman Al Raf‘y, *Althawra al‘rābya waliḥtilal alinjizy* (Cairo: Maktabit Alnahḍa Al Masrya, 1949), 119-130.

¹⁰ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 1.

¹¹ Memorandum by A. Colvin, the British Controller, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 3.

Cairo, was directed by his government “with great interest” to send his reports upon the situation.¹²

The British advised the Khedive to lead a loyal regiment to meet the forces that Urabi and his companions had called to gather in front of the palace. Riad Pasha claimed that two regiments in Cairo were faithful to the Khedive. Auckland Colvin, the British Financial Controller-General, advised the Khedive to lead the two regiments with the available military police to Abdeen Square and wait for the arrival of Urabi to arrest him. The Khedive expressed his fear that the forces accompanying Urabi might open fire. Colvin tried to reassure the Khedive, “they would not dare to” open fire. Colvin believed that if the Khedive took the initiative and exposed himself to the “mutineers”, he might succeed in overcoming Urabi and his associates, “otherwise he [the Khedive] was lost,” Colvin reported.¹³

It seems that Cookson and the Egyptian Minister of War, Daoud Pasha, were not sure of the loyalty of these forces to the Khedive; Daoud Pasha said that he did not know whether he could rely on these troops. General Charles P. Stone, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Army and the Military Adviser to the Khedive, tried to reassure the British - confidentially - that “there was no cause for fear, if none was shown by the Khedive.” While Riad Pasha encouraged prompt action, he also advised prudence and trying to reach a settlement before employing force.¹⁴

Cookson believed that there was no risk of the Khedive's person being disrespected and that the crisis had reached a point where temporization was no longer possible. According to the British narrative, the battalions that had just moments earlier demonstrated their loyalty to their Khedive united with those commanded by Urabi Bey, and the Palace was surrounded by artillery, cavalry, and infantry.¹⁵

However, the British authorities in Egypt acknowledged Urabi as the leader and spokesperson of all the officers around him, they considered that he was surrounded by more “violent and ignorant” ones who could force him to act against his will. Cookson

¹² Letter from Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, to Francis O. Adams, Secretary of British Embassy in France, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 4, 6.

¹³ Memorandum by A. Colvin, the British Controller, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 4.

¹⁴ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 1.

¹⁵ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 1.

felt for a moment that a serious quarrel could break out among the officers gathered around Urabi.¹⁶

Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, reported on September 10, 1881 to Granville Leveson Gower, the British Foreign Secretary, that a military protest had occurred, leading to the removal of the entire Ministry and, at the army's insistence, the appointment of Sherif Pasha as the President of the new Council.¹⁷

The British Response to the Showdown on September 9, 1881

Colvin was summoned to the Palace on September 9, 1881, and met the Khedive, Riad pasha, the War Minister, Stone Pasha. The Khedive told Colvin the three demands of Urabi; the dismissal of the ministry, raising the number of the Army to 18.000 soldiers, and a Representative Chamber.¹⁸

Cookson sent two persons to the Palace to report on the Khedive's attempt to subdue the rebels. It seems that they were late in responding to him, so he decided to go to Abdeen Palace himself about 4:30 p.m. where he found that the square in front of the Palace was under military guard. The three infantry regiments were positioned on each of the square's four sides, with the artillery and cavalry in the middle. A cluster of officers surrounded Urabi Bey in the middle.¹⁹

At the palace, there were the Khedive and the ministers who had no proposal to present to settle the situation. Cookson, Colvin and the Acting Austrian Agent, M. Bolaslawski went out to meet Ahmed Urabi and his associates. The British considered this revolt a menacing movement. Cookson tried to warn Urabi and to threaten him that his army would confront the combined forces of the Sublime Porte and of the European powers if they continue to control over the government in Egypt. Cookson explained to Urabi the serious danger that his hostile attitude had brought upon him and others around him. He assumed that both the Sublime Porte and the European powers were interested in the welfare of Egypt, and they would not allow the country to be ruled by a military government.²⁰

¹⁶ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 3.

¹⁷ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 1.

¹⁸ Memorandum by A. Colvin, the British Controller, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 3.

¹⁹ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 2.

²⁰ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 2.

Cookson said that the request to overthrow the Government and the request to form the House of Representatives are the rights of the Egyptian people, not the rights of the military, and as for the request to increase the number of the Egyptian army, the budget did not allow for that. Urabi indicated that the people had appointed him on their behalf to submit their requests to the Egyptian Government, and they would not give up their demands or leave this place unless they were implemented. Cookson warned the revolutionaries that Urabi's desire to implement his suggestions by force might cause serious harm to the country.²¹

Urabi attempted to clarify his attitude by stating that the army had been gathered to use force to protect the Egyptian people's liberties. Cookson was not convinced assuming that neither the Khedive nor Europe could accept a military rebellion as the will of the Egyptian people.²²

Cookson tried to reassure Urabi and to persuade him to withdraw his forces; he said that if Urabi withdrew the troops, any legitimate representations would be taken seriously, and he would even ensure his and his allies' safety, "This I said because I was, and am, convinced that fear was the principal, if not the only, motive for his conduct.," Cookson reported.²³

The British claimed that Urabi and his fellows were driven by fear of punishment. It appears that this judgement was formed because Urabi regarded the 3rd Regiment of Infantry proceeding to Alexandria as a threat and revenge upon him and his fellows as demonstrated in his notice to the Minister of War on September 9, 1881. It also seems that the text of the Urabi's circular to the foreign agents on September 9 contributed to the British's conviction that the main motive behind Urabi and his friends was the fear of arrest. Urabi began his letter by recalling what he called the February 1 conspiracy. Urabi stated in his circular: "I have the honour to inform you that ever since the 1st February intrigues commenced, inaugurated by Othman Pasha Rifkee."²⁴

The British authorities in Egypt believed that the letter of Ahmed Urabi to the Minister of War on September 9, 1881, demonstrated the fear of the revolution leaders of punishment which was the main motivator for their revolt. Cookson thought that this letter explained the Urabi's choice of Sherif Pasha as Premier because his reputation for honesty was

²¹ 'Abd Al Mon'im Al Jmai'y, *Mozakirat alza'im Ahmed Uraby: Kashf alsitār 'n sir alasar̄ fi alnahḍa almasrya almashhura belhawra al'rābya* (Cairo: Dar Alkutub w Alwathaeq Al Qawmya, 2005), 300.

²² Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 2.

²³ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 2.

²⁴ Circular from Ahmed Urabi to Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, on September 9, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 4.

important for the revolutionaries' personal safety if they submit. On the contrary, the revolutionaries were afraid that the Khedive and Riad Pasha were waiting for the appropriate opportunity to take revenge on them.²⁵

Urabi indicated in his memoirs that it was rumored among Egyptian officers that the order to transfer the 3rd Regiment from Cairo to Alexandria aimed to drown them at Kafr El-Zayat Bridge, as occurred with Prince Halim Pasha and Ahmed Pasha Raafat, son of Ibrahim Pasha during the reign of Said Pasha(1854-1863).²⁶ Urabi pointed out to the party of Mohamed Said Pasha in Alexandria in May 1858 when he invited the princes of the Royal family and among them were Prince Halim Pasha, the youngest son of Mohamed Ali, and Ahmed Pasha Raafat. When the party was over, the two princes took a special train to return to Cairo. The carriage carrying them fell into the Nile at Kafr El-Zayat, causing Prince Ahmed Pasha to drown, but Prince Halim Pasha survived.²⁷ Urabi argued that he managed to demonstrate on September 9, 1881, because of many intrigues against him and his fellows. He assured that this demonstration was a national one combining the military and other Egyptian civilians to ask for their own legitimate rights.²⁸

The British authorities in Egypt believed that Urabi movement "had been deliberately planned" because of Urabi's circular to the foreign agents in Egypt. In this circular, Urabi assured the foreign agents that they would continue to protect the foreign interests in the country.²⁹

Cookson got the Urabi's demands and delivered them to the Khedive and his ministers, "I found His Highness and the Ministers quite unable to find any way of getting out of the difficulty," Cookson stated. The Khedive authorized Cookson to tell Urabi his response to the demands that the Khedive agreed to change the Government while the other demands should be suspended until the response of the Porte arrived.³⁰

Cookson put the blame on Riad Pasha for the dismissal of his government when he agreed upon the decision to move the Third Regiment of Infantry to Alexandria. This procedure went directly against the advice Cookson had given Riad Pasha to take no

²⁵ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 21, 14.

²⁶ 'Abd Al Mon'im Al Jmai'y, *Mozakirat alza'im Ahmed Uraby*, 295.

²⁷ Elias El Ayouby, *Tarikh Misr fi 'ahd alkhedewy Ismail Pasha min sanat 1863 ela sanat 1879*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat Madbouly, 1996), 14.

²⁸ 'Abd Al Mon'im Al Jmai'y, *Mozakirat alza'im Ahmed Uraby*, 295.

²⁹ Circular from Ahmed Urabi to Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, on September 9, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 4.

³⁰ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 2.

initiative measures until Malet's arrival. As a result, he had caused the crisis that had brought down his Ministry from the British point of view.³¹

When the Khedive named two possible persons to form the new government; Haider Pasha or Ismail pasha Ayoub, Cookson announced these two names to Urabi. The revolutionaries did not accept both; Haider Pasha was the brother of Daoud Pasha, the present Minister of War while Ismail Pasha Ayoub had no experience except in finance from the revolutionaries' point of view. Cookson tried to persuade Urabi that this was a betrayal of his trust by pointing out to him that this dictation to the Khedive as to his choice within the agreed limits was contrary to the solemn engagement which he had made to him. During these deep negotiations between Cookson and Urabi, M. Bolaslawski appeared announcing that the Khedive accepted to appoint Sherif Pasha as President of the new government.³²

The nomination of the new Prime Minister was followed by the withdrawal of the troops to their barracks. Cookson played a prominent role in the previous proceedings. Urabi treated him politely and with great respect. Urabi used friendly expressions towards Europeans generally and towards England in particular. Cookson claimed that at one point he told Urabi that he must withdraw unless he showed the same good faith that was being shown to him and to the army, "Urabi sincerely implored me to finish what I had started," Cookson claimed.³³

However, Riad Pasha had resigned his office on September 9, Cookson paid him a visit on September 13. Cookson told Riad Pasha that his retirement was necessary for the security of the country "from a military despotism." Riad Pasha said that he was satisfied with the choice of the new Premier, Sherif Pasha, as he considered him "his own most eligible successor."³⁴

Efforts to Induce Sherif Pasha to Accept Office

On September 9, 1881 in the night, Cookson and M. Sienkiewicz, the French Agent in Egypt, went to meet the Khedive who told them that he called Sherif Pasha to form the government. According to Cookson, the Khedive had little optimism that, in such a crisis

³¹ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 1.

³² Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 2.

³³ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 10, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 2, 3.

³⁴ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 16, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 27, 16.

and as the nominee of “an insurgent army”, Sherif Pasha would accept the position of Premier.³⁵

On the next day, September 10, the Palace was rife with foreign agents; M. Bolaslawski, the Acting Austrian Agent; M. de Lex, the Russian Agent; M. Machiavelli, the Acting Italian Agent; and Cookson. Cookson tried hard to induce Sherif Pasha to accept office; he made an appeal to Sherif Pasha’s sense of patriotism to stay with the Khedive at this difficult moment. Cookson said that taking on this position in these circumstances could only be a very agonizing responsibility placed upon Sherif Pasha by his prior national service.³⁶

Sherif Pasha began to present his legitimate concerns to any politician in these difficult circumstances in the country’s history. He said that it was not consistent with his self-respect to let the world understand that he was imposed on the Khedive by mutinous soldiers. He couldn't see how he could continue running the Government because everyone would think he was an accomplice. Sherif Pasha thought that if he could not comply with the army's demands, they would undoubtedly demand his dismissal.³⁷

Cookson acknowledged the difficulty of convincing Sherif Pasha due to the strength of his arguments. Cookson made it clear to Sherif Pasha that, should he accept, he might be able to keep matters quiet until the Porte and the European Powers had taken action to ensure public security. Nevertheless, Cookson hoped that he would do everything within his power to save the Khedive as intermediary between him and the army. Cookson committed to ensuring that every effort would be made to exclude any possibility that he was aware of the use of his name by the army. Other foreign agents tried to convince Sherif Pasha to accept the position. He agreed to give it some thought before responding in full.³⁸

In the afternoon of September 10, following an interview with Sherif Pasha, Colvin was able to get Sherif Pasha’s consent to negotiate with the army leaders to find a common

³⁵ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 3, 5.

³⁶ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 3, 5.

³⁷ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 3, 5.

³⁸ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 3, 5.

ground on which to work should he accept office. Without this, he stated that he would never consent to do so.³⁹

There was continuous, close, and round-the-clock follow-up by the British authorities in Egypt on what was going on in the Palace. At 10:30 P.M. Cookson and M. Sienkiewicz went to the Palace to follow the results of the previous negotiations with Sherif Pasha. Sherif Pasha had a conversation with Urabi that afternoon. Sherif Pasha described this conversation as a protracted and visionary tirade that was primarily made up of generalities but revealed no concrete plan of action. At this point, Sherif Pasha seemed extremely pessimistic about any chance of reaching an understanding with the army leaders. He informed Cookson and M. Sienkiewicz with his impressions on his meeting with Urabi.⁴⁰

Sherif Pasha had another interview with Urabi and the leaders of his movement on the morning of September 11. This interview was unsatisfactory as well as Sherif Pasha concluded that "it would be useless for him to attempt to form a regular Ministry," because it was impossible to find any colleagues who would be accepted by Urabi and his associates.⁴¹

The situation changed dramatically on September 13; members of the former Chamber of Notables were called to Cairo by Urabi to back his demand for a constitution, which he used to support his military agitation. After being aware of the ongoing negotiations with Sherif Pasha, they all went to him and begged him to accept the formation of a ministry. They also personally guaranteed that the army would submit to his instructions without question if he agreed. Based on the guarantees provided by the Notables, Sherif Pasha gave his approval to move forward with the formation of a government.⁴²

Sherif Pasha formed the new government on September 14, 1881. In his letter to Khedive Tawfiq, Sherif Pasha referred to the reasons for his acceptance of the formation of the Ministry, which were to give priority to the public interest of the nation and to prevent crisis such as those that befell Egypt during the last events.⁴³

³⁹ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 3, 5.

⁴⁰ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 3, 6.

⁴¹ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 10, 9.

⁴² Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 10, 9.

⁴³ Abd Al Rahman Al Raf'y, *Althawra al'rābya walihtilal alinjilzy*, 134-135.

It seems that the British authorities were keen to support Sherif Pasha at the beginning. The British believed that if Sherif Pasha refused to form the government, the country would be thrown back to state of anarchy. On the same day of Sherif Pasha's acceptance to form the government, M. Sienkiewicz and Cookson went to Sherif Pasha's house to thank him for his patriotism in taking over the government in the face of such difficulties, and they assured him of their assistance.⁴⁴

Cookson reported that Sherif Pasha requested that the British and French governments agree to use their good offices to prevent an Ottoman army from occupying Egypt if the Egyptian army demonstrated that it was obedient and submissive.⁴⁵

Coordination between Britain and France Regarding the Crisis in Egypt

There was a clear coordination between the British and French governments regarding the crisis in Egypt. The British Foreign Secretary, Granville, instructed the British Embassy in France to discuss this issue freely with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Barthelemy St. Hilaire. The British clarified to the French that they wanted the French and the British governments to continue acting in a calming and pacifying manner throughout the current Egyptian crisis. Honesty between the two governments and cooperative action on all occasions were stressed by Hilaire who referred to the establishment of a joint Anglo-French military control in Egypt.⁴⁶

It is worth noting that the Ottoman Empire tried to exploit Urabi Revolution to establish its sovereignty over Egypt and detract from the advantages that Egypt gained during the reigns of Muhammad Ali Pasha (1805 – 1848) and Khedive Ismail (1863 – 1879).⁴⁷ The Ottomans had an opportunity when Khedive Tawfiq asked to send Ottoman forces to Egypt to put down the revolution, but the Ottoman Empire did not take advantage of that opportunity due to the intervention of Britain and France.

During the demonstration of Abdeen Palace on September 9, 1881, The Khedive applied to the Porte to send him troops to intervene in such difficulty with the Egyptian army. However the French and the British governments acknowledged the Sultan's suzerainty over Egypt, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed his objection to Ottoman troops being sent to maintain security in Egypt at this moment. The French believed that if the Sultan sent his troops to Egypt, he would gain a greater hold upon the country, and

⁴⁴ Letter from M. Sienkiewicz, the French Agent in Egypt, to Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, Sherif Pasha, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Inclosure in Doc. No. 10, 11.

⁴⁵ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 10, 10.

⁴⁶ Letter from Francis O. Adams, Secretary of British Embassy in France, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 6, 6.

⁴⁷ 'Abd Al Mon'im Al Jmai'y, "Mawqif Al Dawla Al 'Uthmanya min Althawra al'rābya," *Al Majala Al Tarikhya Al Masrya* 26 (1979): 142.

this was not welcomed by the French. There was a fear among the French that if the Ottoman forces entered Egypt, they would remain there permanently. Hilaire supposed that if the Sultan took this measure, it should be taken at the joint request of Britain and France.⁴⁸

The British Government showed similar terms regarding the potential Ottoman intervention. The British Foreign Secretary informed his French counterpart that it would be preferable if the Sultan refrained from taking any active measures of repression until the need for them had been clearly demonstrated and the appropriate course of action had been discussed and agreed upon.⁴⁹

The British expressed no objection to the Sultan send a Turkish General to support the Khedive's authority and provide him with advice. At this urgent moment and considering the unwillingness of British politicians to allow Turkey to intervene in the Egyptian crisis, Cookson suggested a solution of the difficulty by a Special Commission from the Porte. He explained that his excuse for doing so was that he thought if matters became worse in Egypt, the fact of such a mission having started might be most useful in restraining the military leaders. While any form of intervention was much to be deprecated, this seemed least calculated to cause political complications.⁵⁰

The French did not support the idea of sending a Turkish General to Egypt to support the Khedive; they claimed that the arrival of such a General might provoke more actions, potentially resulting in "a permanent occupation of the country by Turkish troops." Hilaire thought a French and an English General would be able to bring discipline and order to the Egyptian army, thus he greatly liked the notion of a joint military control. The British indicated to the serious situation in Egypt at this moment and they saw that "no time should be lost in deciding upon some step to be taken in common by the two Governments."⁵¹

It sounds that the French were able to convince the British with their point of view on the possibility of sending a Turkish General to Cairo. The British Foreign Secretary instructed Lord Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, to endeavor to

⁴⁸ Letter from Francis O. Adams, Secretary of British Embassy in France, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 11, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 6, 7.

⁴⁹ Letter from Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, to Francis O. Adams, Secretary of British Embassy in France, on September 12, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 7, 7.

⁵⁰ Letter from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 10, 9.

⁵¹ Telegraph from Francis O. Adams to Earl Granville, on September 13, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 8, 8.

dissuade the Sultan from adopting this attitude if he intended to send a Turkish General to Cairo to assist in the re-establishment of order.⁵²

Sherif Pasha expressed his desire that Britain and France consent to interpose their good offices with the Sublime Porte to avert from Egypt an occupation by an Ottoman army if the Egyptian army showed submissive and obedient.⁵³ Granville instructed Lord Dufferin to advise the Porte to take no hasty action against the movement in Egypt and to use calming and pacifying language.⁵⁴ The French Government adopted similar attitude when they instructed their Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire to protest against “any sort of intervention on the part of Turkey in Egyptian affairs.”⁵⁵

In a meeting between the Sultan and Lord Dufferin on September 15, the Sultan talked about the Egyptian affairs and said, “it would be necessary to do something.” Dufferin concerned that the Sultan might have an intention to send military forces to Egypt, so he indicated to him Britain’s desire to preserve the current state in Egypt, which would provide sufficient security for the freedom of the Suez Canal and some sort of good government for the Egyptian people.⁵⁶ This means that he advised the Sultan not to send troops to Egypt.⁵⁷

Britain clearly and early (about four months before sending the Anglo-French joint note of January 1882 in support of the Khedive) expressed its support for Khedive Tawfiq in his position against Urabi movement. In his meeting with the Sultan on September 15, Dufferin demonstrated the British desire to support and uphold the Khedive’s rights in Egypt as a ruler in the interests of the current regime. Dufferin indicated that the British “would certainly deprecate any change, which would probably prove as disadvantageous to us [the British] as to him [the Khedive].” Dufferin claimed that the Sultan was evidently mortified at finding that the British Government had associated itself with the

⁵² Letter from Earl Granville to the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, on September 18, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 20,14.

⁵³ Telegraph from Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 12,11.

⁵⁴ Telegraph from Earl Granville to the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, on September 14, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 11,11.

⁵⁵ Telegraph from the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 15, 1881, and letter from Francis O. Adams, Secretary of British Embassy in France, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 16, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 14,12.

⁵⁶ Telegraph from the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 19, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 15,12.

⁵⁷ Telegraph from the Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, to the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, on September 17, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 18,13.

French view of the issue. Dufferin tried to reassure the Sultan that the British Government did not have any ulterior motives “*arrière-pensée*” regarding Egypt and did not have hostile plans to the Sultan’s and the Khedive’s own legal interests or destructive of their acknowledged rights.⁵⁸

What indicates the strength of the British influence on the Egyptian political scene at that time is the Dufferin’s claim that the Sultan asked Dufferin about the extent of Britain’s satisfaction with Khedive Tawfiq and whether Britain wanted to change him or not. Dufferin replied: “I had no reason to believe that we [the British] either objected to him or desired to remove him.” It seems that the Dufferin’s audience with the Sultan was successful from the British point of view; the meeting concluded that the Sultan considered the Egyptian crisis “as for the moment closed.”⁵⁹

Despite the attempts of Britain and France to dissuade the Ottoman Sultan from sending military forces or even an Ottoman delegate to help the Khedive in resolving the crisis, the Ottoman Government sent a committee known as the Ottoman Delegation, which arrived in Alexandria on October 6, 1881. This delegation visited Khedive Tawfiq, the Minister of War, and some sheikhs, and everyone confirmed that the army was obedient to the Khedive and to the Government. Thus, their mission in Cairo ended and they left for Alexandria on October 18, 1881. Britain and France were displeased with the previous measure, the two countries sent two war ships to parade along the coast of Alexandria. These war ships were ordered not to leave the Egyptian coasts until the Ottoman Delegation left Egypt and this what had been happened, the warships left the port of Alexandria on October 20, 1881.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, the British Government showed a great interest in Urabi movement since its beginning and commissioned its delegates in Egypt to follow the situation closely. The British representatives in Egypt followed the situation developments immediately and were keen to inform their government of the situation developments in Egypt by sending telegrams, reports, or letters.

The immediate British documents demonstrates that the British authorities in Egypt considered Urabi Revolution a military protest not as a nationalist movement. The evidence presented in this article proved that the British advised the Khedive to use military power to suppress what they considered a mutiny in the army.

⁵⁸ Telegraph from the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 19, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 15,12.

⁵⁹ Telegraph from the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, to Earl Granville, the Foreign Secretary, on September 19, 1881, 1882 [C.3161] Egypt. No. 3 (1882). Correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, London 1882, Doc. No. 15,12.

⁶⁰ ‘Abd Al Mon‘im Al Jmai‘y, “Mawqif Al Dawla Al ‘Uthmanya min Althawra al‘rābya,” *Al Majala Al Tarikhya Al Masrya* 26 (1979): 144-145.

This article proves that the British were not satisfied with merely monitoring the Egyptian crisis, but they were greatly involved in it and played the role of mediator between the Khedive and the Egyptian nationalists in the events of the Abdeen Palace demonstration on September 9, 1881.

The historical documents investigation made it clear that the British Government considered this nationalist revolt a menacing movement and hostile attitude. The representative of the British authorities in Egypt, Cookson, tried hard to break up the demonstration in front of Abdeen Palace, he even threatened Urabi that the revolutionaries would confront joint Ottoman-European military forces.

The British believed that the motivator of Urabi and his associates to demonstrate in Abdeen Square was the fear of arrest not the national causes referring to the February 1, 1881 incident. Therefore, Cookson tried to persuade Urabi and to reassure him that if they withdrew their forces, their safety would be guaranteed and that no retaliatory measures would be taken against them.

Britain and France made it clear as early as September 1881 their full support for Khedive Tawfiq in his struggle with the revolutionaries, even before sending the Joint Note of January 1881 in support of the Khedive Tawfik.

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الموقف البريطاني المبكر من الثورة العربية (٩-١٤ سبتمبر ١٨٨١)

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المخلص:

تعتبر الثورة العربية نقطة تحول مهمة في تاريخ مصر الحديث، وقد تمت دراستها بشكل مستفيض من الباحثين المصريين والأجانب، إلا أنه لم يكتب إلا القليل عن رد الفعل البريطاني الفوري على هذه الحركة الثورية في الأيام الحرجة القليلة التي أعقبت مظاهرة عابدين في 9-14 سبتمبر 1881م. تركز هذه الدراسة على تلك الأحداث من وجهة النظر البريطانية منذ مظاهرة عابدين وحتى تشكيل شريف باشا للحكومة الجديدة. يتناول المقال الموقف البريطاني المبكر تجاه أحمد عرابي ومطالبه يوم 9 سبتمبر 1881م. تثبت هذه الورقة البحثية أنه كان واضحاً منذ بداية الحركة العربية دعم الإنجليز للخبوي توفيق في مواجهته مع العربيين كما تظهر الوثائق البريطانية بوضوح. أثبتت الأدلة أن الحكومة البريطانية اعتبرت الثورة العربية منذ بدايتها حركة عدائية تمثل تهديداً للمصالح البريطانية وللسلطة الحاكمة في مصر. يعتمد هذا البحث على دراسة الوثائق التاريخية المرتبطة بالموضوع محل الدراسة وكتابات بعض المعاصرين للأحداث التاريخية وبعض الأوراق البحثية حول الموضوع.

الكلمات الدالة: ثورة عرابي – الموقف البريطاني من ثورة عرابي – مظاهرة عابدين – أحمد عرابي – محمد شريف باشا – الاحتلال البريطاني لمصر