

HISTORY OF THE EGYPTIAN NAVY

“A Reconsideration”

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Lying in the heart of the world, **Egypt** is granted a unique geographical and strategic location, as well as a great people. Such a location, destining it to be a maritime country, more than anything else, had a major part in Egypt's history, while still influencing its international status, foreign policy, and its political, economic and social orientations.

How seas are important for the countries overlooking them:

This factor is essential, in terms of the following two key **points**:

First point:

This has to do with the country's ability to make use of the natural resources of its seas and oceans, which can be added to its landriches. Starting from fish wealth to mineral, petroleum and gas resources, and ending with energy generation from the hydraulic power, direct benefits for the country will be innumerable, and this amplifies its potentials, resources, and areas of development, in addition to boosting its economy.

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Second point:

The ability of a country to freely use its seas and maritime resources to have power, which will be adapted to its benefit in various fields, is relevant to this point. As a fact, no country can advantage from its sea wealth unless it has the scientific capacity, economic and military policies, and naval strategies, in particular, to be qualified for that.

Naval power of a country and its effect on the national interests and economic capacity of states**Concept of naval power**

A country's naval power can be defined as the power it enjoys for overlooking seas and/or oceans that fall within its maritime territory, along with its effective ability to use this geographical advantage to achieve its economic, political and military aspirations.

This concept is becoming clearer and easier, in terms of understanding the power a country can acquire from the sea through defining its factors and parts.

Factors of Egypt's naval power

The value and influence of these factors are concentrated in the ability of the exclusive-rights country to use these factors and protect them against any external or internal threats. They are directly related to its national security areas. Such factors come as follows:

Maritime-related wealth factors: economic resources

Oil and gas platforms - fish and mineral wealth - maritime tourism - Suez Canal - economic zone of the Suez Canal

Factors of profiting from maritime-related wealth

Maritime equipment that helps in advantaging from the commercial transportation fleet - fishing fleet - research vessels
Natural maritime resources

Factors of supporting and securing maritime-related wealth

Sea ports - shipyards, floating and dry docks, maintenance and repair workshops - personnel preparation institutions, etc.

Factors of protecting maritime-related wealth

The military forces, particularly the Navy

Egypt's naval power is directly linked to the state's holistic powers, in an integrated and mutually proportional relationship, being an influencer and influenced. And as long as the state's holistic powers seek to achieve comprehensive development, and that the Egyptian national security aims to realize the greatest protection and stability for the state's comprehensive development. This is because the Egyptian national security is closely related to Egypt's naval power, something that grants Egypt its naval power, which is a main pillar for progress and prosperity in all fields, also given the unique strategic location, the extended coasts and the large bodies of water Egypt has.

Although this notion is a modern one that was not developed into a scientific framework before the end of the 20th century, it can be stated that it was a central point for the stops in the history of the Egyptian Navy.

To start this, **the history of the Egyptian Navy** spans for more than seven thousand and five hundred years. This is actually difficult for any researcher to address in a few pages. Therefore, I will overview the major stops in this rich and eventful history, **as follows:**

First stop: Navy of ancient Egyptians

Second stop: Navy of the Ptolomies

Third stop: Navy of the Islamic era

Fourth stop: Navy of the Fatimids

Fifth stop: Navy of the Ayyubids and Mamluks

Sixth stop: modern and contemporary Navy, under the rule of:

- 1) Muhammad Ali Pasha
- 2) Khedive Ismail
- 3) King Farouq
- 4) President Gamal Abdel Nasser
- 5) President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi

Overview of the first stop of the Egyptian Navy (ancient Egyptians):

Ancient Egyptians knew boats about eight thousand years ago, since settling in the Nile Valley. Paintings of boats appeared on the pottery of Naqada I and II, whereas the boats were used for transportation between the east and west of the Nile, and for religious and funeral purposes. Boats were steered by oars, with a rudder for direction. A sailor used to stand at the boat's forefront with a weighted stepped rope to identify the depth and nature of the bottom (despite the scientific development, this method is still followed, and is called the "hand sonar" or "Eskandeel").

At the beginning of historical eras, about 5200 years ago, and in Dynasties I and II, ships with masts, sails and oars appeared. Their forefront and stern were raised to resist the high waves, which were often used for sailing in the Red and Mediterranean Seas.

Under the Old Kingdom reign, about 4700 years ago, there were trade and cultural exchanges with Phoenicia and Jezebel, eastern the Mediterranean.

As Egypt was unified under Dynasty I (King Mina Narmer), and thousands of years before Hatshepsut's famous journey to Punt, there were trips to and trade relations with the countries of the eastern coast of the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, such as Yemen and Oman.

Hatshepsut's journey was not the first to Punt. There were many before, which continued afterwards. The Palermo Stone, found at Palermo Museum, shows that King Sahure established trade exchanges since 2400 BC, while King Mentuhotep went to Punt since 2000 BC, and so did King Amenemhat II since 1900 BC. Hatshepsut's journey to Punt was in 1500 BC.

The first naval fleet in the human history goes back to King Sneferu (father of King Khufu), the fourth family, 4600 years ago (3600 years BC). The Palermo Stone shows that the fleet (40 large ships and 60 smaller ones) loaded with cedar wood, had returned from Syria.

The first military naval operation in history took place during the reign of Thutmose III (nephew of Queen Hatshepsut), who led 17 military campaigns that established the great Egyptian empire. He was the commander of Qadesh Battle, the oldest major naval operation in history, in addition to being the founder of the military strategy, in place to date (attack is the best means of defense), transferring the battle to the opponent's territory. Thutmose III was the first to diversify the weapon sources, owning Creteil and Gible ships, and soldiers, horses, and cattle carriers.

No one should forget the iconic leader Ramses III who thwarted the attacks of the Sea Peoples on the Delta coasts in 1880 BC, 3880 years ago.

We can summarize the achievements of the ancient Egyptian Navy as follows:

- Extending Egypt's influence beyond its geographical borders to be remotely secured and to expand and develop the Egyptian Kingdom.
- Repelling hostilities that came from the sea.

- Opening new commercial markets and bringing in different products (plants - incense - ivory – oils, etc.)
 - Practicing fishing and making use of the fish wealth.
- These were related to Egypt's naval power and national security.

Overview of the second stop of the Egyptian Navy (Ptolomies):

The Persian King, Cambyses, conquered Egypt in 525 BC. Egypt remained governed by the Persians for two centuries until Alexander the Great overthrew them in 332 BC. He chose the small village of ر ع ق (Rhacotis) to be the new capital that bore his name and was linked to Macedonia. He turned it into a big Greek city to be a base for launching the conquests of the ancient East countries. Alexander the great sought the assistance of the Egyptian sailors, and shipbuilders. And after his death in Babylon, his empire was divided among his leaders. Egypt went to Ptolemy for three centuries.

The Ptolemies aimed to achieve naval sovereignty. Therefore, they took Egypt as a means to enable them of having a leading role in the Mediterranean. They absorbed the Egyptian riches to build a sea and land military force. So, Ptolemy I owned a huge naval fleet that was called the “Prince of Ships”. This helped him extend his influence over the neighboring countries (Syria - Phoenicia- Cyprus - the Aegean islands). This was the largest naval power known to the post-Alexander world. Ptolemy I cared about the merchant fleet and revitalizing the foreign trade. Hence, the Ptolemaic Empire was a primarily maritime one. It focused on Egypt, its position and naval power, until the decay period that occurred during the reign of Ptolemy IV, who died and left the rule for his six-year-old child, surrounded by corrupt entourage, with the rise of Rome and Macedonia as a promising naval power. The situation continued to worsen until the Battle of Actium took place, where Octavius defeated Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony. And Cleopatra’s suicide, the rule of the Ptolemies in Egypt ended in 31 BC. The Roman rule of Egypt began.

The Romans were interested in making ships, using the wood that grew in Europe and the copper nails that were covered with a layer of lead. Alexandria was their political and commercial capital. However, after the Battle of Actium, the Mediterranean did not witness any maritime warfare activity for more than 350 years.

Overview of the third stop of the Egyptian Navy (Islamic era):

The Muslims realized that naval power was indispensable to secure their conquests. Amr ibn al-Aas, directed by Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, dug a canal to link the Nile with the Red Sea. It was called the "Canal of the Leader of Believers" and was used to transfer supplies and crops to Hijaz during the Famine Year. But the real beginning of the Islamic naval power was under Caliph Othman bin Affan. The first Islamic naval invasion was in 28 AH (648-649 AD) on the island of Cyprus during the reign of Caliph Muawiya. It relied on the Egyptian and Syrian fleets.

One of the most prominent Islamic battles (Zatal-Sawary) took place in 34 AH (654-655 AD) between the Byzantine fleet and the Egyptian and Syrian fleets, in which they won, ending the Byzantine naval sovereignty. The campaigns of the Egyptian and Syrian fleets against Constantinople continued in 43 AH (663 AD) and 49 AH, while it was besieged by sea in 53-60 AH. Crete was also conquered in 54 AH. Fighting took place every summer and the Islamic fleet was withdrawn in the winter. Constantinople was besieged again by sea in 99-100 AH.

The Islamic fleet (which relied on the Egyptian fleet and the state position) had many successful battles, in addition to taking part in the conquest of Africa, the Mediterranean islands, and others.

Overview of the fourth stop of the Egyptian Navy (Fatimids):

The Fatimids used their fleets to empower their political influence and to put down counter-movements. They continued the naval fight against the Romans and the Franks and took control of the Mediterranean islands (Sicily - Sardinia - Malta) depending on the position and naval power of Egypt (the fleet - the role of shipbuilding - the ports). The Egyptian fleet supported and supplied the gaps against the Crusader invasion (Jaffa 497 AH - Tripoli 499 AH) and the raids against the coasts, occupied by the crusaders in 499 AH, as well as defending Sidon in 501 AH and Beirut (503-504 AH). Efforts of the Egyptian fleet against the Crusaders continued until the end of the Fatimid state.

Overview of the fifth stop of the Egyptian Navy (Ayyubids and Mamluks):

The Ayyubids interest in the Egyptian fleet and its shipbuilding arsenal continued. The navy played an active role against the Crusades. Asad al-Din Shirkuh and his nephew, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, defeated Amalric of Jerusalem when he attempted to invade Egypt and enter the Nile River from the sea (1169 AH). He led another naval campaign in 1170 AD to control

Damietta and the Nile Stream, using the fleet of the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel I, at the beginning of Salah al-Din's rule, who stood in their face and forced them to withdraw. The Egyptian fleet continued to face the crusaders campaigns, while the Nile navy was transporting soldiers, weapons and equipment to Aswan and Nuba to confront the rebellious movements. The fleet in the Red Sea carried out disciplinary campaigns.

Sultan Qansuhal-Ghoury (1500-1516 AD) sent fleets and a campaign of 50 ships, along with builders and workers, to fortify the port of Jeddah and confront the Portuguese fleet, which was defeated and failed to invade Jeddah and al-Hadidah, thanks to the efforts of the Egyptian fleet and the efficiency of the Egyptian garrisons. The influence of the Portuguese was limited to the Indian Ocean. Egypt became the naval master in the Red Sea.

The Mamluks were concerned with the fleet, shipbuilding and Alexandria. Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbaysent the maritime expeditions to the island of Cyprus in 1424-1426 AD. The Mamluks continued to send the campaigns to Rhodes (1440-1444) AD.

With the transformation of trade from Egypt to the Cape of Good Hope, Egypt suffered an economic collapse. The Mamluk fleet did not play a role in any naval battle.

When the Ottomans settled in Egypt, they were not much interested in the fleet. The Egyptian Navy began to decay and weaken. The French campaign found only three Ottoman warships that withdrew from the events, while some Nile ships confronted the French campaign in the Nile River.

Overview of the sixth stop of the Egyptian Navy (modern era): Muhammad Ali Pasha's

When Muhammad Ali Pasha took over the rule of Egypt in 1805 AD, his naval concerns were not clear before the Fraser campaign in 1807 AD. The Wahhabi War was the main motivation for establishing a naval fleet. He used the Bulaq arsenal, established by the French, to build the fleet. He also used the commercial navigators (French - English - Greek) and some slaves and Turks, sent by the Ottoman state.

France built three warships in August 1826 at Marseille shipyard, and then stopped after the press attack on arming Egypt with the latest ships that could be used against the Greek rebels. So, Ali went to Italy and England to complete his fleet. But after the Battle of Navarino and the destruction of the Egyptian fleet, it was difficult to build ships abroad. So, he sought help from

the French engineer Cerisy and the Egyptian expertise to repair and restore ships after the Battle of Navarino. He drew a new construction policy to build the Egyptian fleet. So, he established the Naval School with the help of French officers, setting a recruitment system. Ali had an interest for the training and health of the navy personnel. Hence, he established two naval hospitals to treat the navy men and their wives, assigning Claude Bey to set up Ras el-Teen hospital according to the latest European regulations. There was a monthly check-up for the navy men.

Muhammad Ali's navy carried out major combat actions in the Greek War of Independence, the suppression of the Wahhabi movement, the Battle of Stampalia in 1824 AD, the Battle of Serigo in 1825 AD, the seizure of Acre, the Battle of Nusebin, the Battle of Tabiyya against the Russians, and the battle against the Ottomans, where the commander of the Ottoman fleet handed over the entire fleet to Muhammad Ali in 1839 AD. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire was a reason for the intervention of the major powers. The powers of Muhammad Ali and his naval and war control were restricted according to the decree of 1841 AD.

Khedive Ismail's

When Khedive Ismail took power, Muhammad Ali's navy had diminished. He began to reform and organize the military and merchant fleet, the shipbuilding, maintenance and repair shipyards, and the naval school. American officers were brought in to develop the navy.

The fleet participated in the glorious actions of putting down Asir revolution in 1863 AD in Yemen and the Crete revolution of 1866 AD, transferring forces and supporting garrisons on the island of Crete - the Somalia campaign - the Balkan war (1876-1877). Egyptian influence extended in the Red Sea. Ismail fought the slave trade and established a large merchant fleet to roam the seas.

The British occupation deliberately destroyed the factors of Egypt's naval power. It abolished the fleet, scrapped its ships and canceled the shipyards. The merchant ships were sold to English companies, while foreign captains were appointed instead of the Egyptians, who were transferred to work on the railways.

King Farouq's

The Egyptian navy paid the price for its contribution to the WWII, on the part of the Allies, losing 22.1% of its ships' cargo and half of its maritime sector,

while 63% of its merchant ships' cargo sank. The Commander-in-Chief of the Alliesfleets in the Mediterranean sent a letter in 1946 AD thanking the Egyptian navy for its assistance that helped achieve victory.

King Farouq issued a royal decree in December 1946 AD to establish the Egyptian Navy. Egypt bought some old ships (minesweepers) and some fighting ships from Britain and America. Soon after, the 1948 AD war erupted, where the Egyptian naval forces took part. The most prominent events included bombarding the port of Caesarea and Nahariya, Majdal naval battle, the first and second battles of Gaza, bombing Tel Aviv and Gaza ports.

The Egyptian navy has performed well and carried out the tasks entrusted to it efficiently, including the transportation of supplies and ammunition, provision of supplies to the ground forces to engage with the enemy, monitoring the Israeli ports during the truce, guarding the coasts, striking the enemy ports, and securing the flanks of the Egyptian forces. It had been equipped with British-made destroyers.

President Gamal Abdel Nasser's (23rd of July 1952 Revolution Navy)

The Navy was reorganized in 1955 to become the naval forces. It was commanded by Lieutenant General Suleiman Ezzat. The Naval School, educational facilities, specialized schools and main workshops were developed and supplied with Russian destroyers, Scory model, in addition to submarines, snipers, minesweepers, missile launchers, tugboats, supply ships, artillery, coastal missiles, etc.

Shortly, the tripartite aggression occurred in 1956 AD. The naval forces entered into a war against the navies of great powers that won a global war. Despite that, the Egyptian naval forces did well in an unequal war.

President Gamal Abdel Nasser was interested in Egypt's naval power. Besides rebuilding and organizing the naval forces, he developed the Alexandrian arsenal to accommodate the ships of the Egyptian merchant fleet, and establish arsenals, ships maintenance and repair companies, shipping agencies, the merchant and fishing fleet. Abdel Nasser also nationalized the Suez Canal. Here, we must remember the role of the Egyptian naval forces in nationalizing and operating the Suez Canal after the foreign officers' strike, as well as in clearing the canal from the remnants of war.

The Egyptian naval forces had a prominent role in supporting the union with Syria and in backing the Yemeni revolution and the independence of Algeria.

The Egyptian naval forces are the only main branch that was not defeated in the 1967 war. Rather, it succeeded in thwarting the attack on Port Said port, securing Alexandria port, drowning an Israeli submarine, capturing six Israeli frogmen in Alexandria port, thwarting their attack, and securing ships and marine units in the port. They did not lose any ships or naval units.

The Egyptian naval forces also had a prominent role in the attrition war, starting with the naval rangers that were the backbone of the fighting group No. 39, led heroically by Brigadier General/CoS Ibrahim Al-Rifai, which bitterly defeated the enemy and carried out unprecedented actions. The reconnaissance men were behind the enemy lines, while the submarines stayed at sea for a month to explore the enemy's ports. There are also the successful combat actions, carried out by them in the Mediterranean, the drowning of the Israeli destroyer Eilat on 21st of October 1967 with the first naval missile in the world that was launched from a small unit to destroy a large destroyer, drowning an Israeli submarine on 23rd of January 1968, bombarding Rummana and Balouzaareas with the destroyers' artillery on 8th of November 1969, drowning an Israeli research ship on 15th of May 1970. Regarding the Red Sea operations, the port of Eilat was successfully raided for three times, with an interval of about three months, for the first time in the history of the operations of the Special Forces, in addition to destroying its berths and ships (15 November 1969 - 5 February 1970 - 14 May 1970) and destroying the Kenting rig in West Africa, beyond the scene of operations, on 8th March 1970.

As for the glorious 6th of October 1973 War, the operation idea was crystallized in two objectives. The first (strategic) one was to put pressure on the Israeli economy by depriving Israel of the seaborne oil supplies. The second (mobilization) objective was to assist the fighting actions of the Egyptian land forces, working near the coast, by participating in the fire preparation and assistance and bombarding the vital targets near the coast of the enemy in the occupied areas, securing the mobilization range of the naval forces in the Mediterranean and Red Sea to protect the locations of the Egyptian marine units in the ports and berths, opening them before the movement of maritime transport, and securing the vital targets near the coast. The most prominent results of the naval forces fighting was closing Eilat port before the Israeli maritime transport as of 8th of October, while the Egyptian ports remained open throughout the war period. Israel was deprived of the seaborne oil supplies in the Red Sea. And the naval forces succeeded in securing the Egyptian ports and vital targets

After the October 1973 war, President Sadat was keen on diversifying the sources of weapons and developing the naval forces. President Mubarak followed him in building the technical and administrative insurance base for the naval units, which efficiency was preserved and developed. The naval forces were supplied with missile launchers, Ramadan model, from the British company Vosper, along with the October model, manufactured in Egypt, and the launcher, supplied with missiles, Automat model, the Descubierta-class corvettes, minesweepers, the American Knox and Berry type destroyers, frigates, snipers, Chinese submarines, missile launchers, supply ships, German supply ships, etc. The interest in the joint drills increased, which granted the Egyptian naval forces the skills and craftsmanship to carry out combat missions and cooperate with friendly naval units. This enabled them to participate in securing and transporting forces during the war of Kuwait liberation (Orouba 90). The Egyptian naval forces had a prominent role in clearing the Suez Canal of mines and remnants of the 1973 war, as well as securing transit ships and vessels of special importance, in addition to evacuating the Egyptians, stranded in Libya, and securing vital targets, coastal cities and elections there after the Arab Spring revolutions.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's

After President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi assumed power, he focused on Egypt's naval power. He worked on developing all its factors and reactivating Egypt's strategic position. Therefore, he put the naval dimension in its rightful place in the Egyptian policy. It became clearly imperative that the Egyptian naval forces must be developed to protect the naval Egyptian economic interests (blue economy), as well as to fill the gap in the strategic balance, especially in the military aspect in the region, which resulted from the Arab Spring revolutions. This is in addition to securing Egypt's main project for the 21st century, which is the economic zone of the Suez Canal that depends primarily on the naval dimension and is the second activation of Egypt's strategic location after the construction of the Suez Canal.

El-Sisi established the new Suez Canal, linked Sinai with tunnels under the canal, and established a network, routes, railways and ports to serve the logistic aspects. Also, the arsenals of building and repairing ships were developed. And for the first time since the reign of Khedive Ismail, a frigate was manufactured with French expertise and Egyptian hands. Petroleum and gas discoveries expanded and economic regions were drawn, etc.

The Egyptian naval forces were reorganized. We had two fleets. New ports and naval bases were established. It was provided with the latest technology in the global arsenals, such as the amphibious attack ships, the French helicopter carriers (Mistral model). And for the first time in the history of our naval forces, a naval unit with a capacity of 21,000 tons was added, while the largest capacity did not exceed 5000 tons. These are in addition to the modern French frigates, Frame model, the Gowind-class corvette, the advanced German submarines, Type 206, the American Ambassador-class missile launchers, modern Russian missile launcher, Molinea type, and others. The naval special units were supplied with the latest armament and equipment, as well as the artillery and coastal missile units. The number of coastal traffic facilities was increased to control the regional waters. The development included all elements of the naval forces, educational facilities, workshops, warehouses, the technical insurance base, etc. The naval forces were provided with the latest simulation technology, with attention focused on joint drills. The Egyptian naval forces have come to occupy an advanced position in the classification of international navies, and they are able to carry out their tasks and protect and secure the Egyptian interests in the Mediterranean and Red Sea.

Special thanks and appreciation

My special thanks and appreciation extend to everyone who assumed command of the glorious Egyptian navy forces and their assistants. Each of them was keen on developing and building it sincerely on scientific grounds, and according to the capabilities available at their time to reach a unique standard under the rule of President el-Sisi, with the wise leadership of Lieutenant General Ahmed Khaled to become a pride-worthy unprecedented national naval force with high combat capabilities to protect and secure this dear country.