

الملف الوثائقي

انجلترا وذريعة الدفاع عن مصر قبل الإحتلال !! (فى ضوء تقرير بريطانى)

دكتور

خلف عبدالعظيم سيد الميرى

كلية البنات للآداب والعلوم والتربية

جامعة عين شمس

انجلترا وذريعة الدفاع عن مصر قبل الإحتلال !! (فى ضوء تقرير بريطانى)

كثيرة هى الدراسات والبحوث فى مختلف الجامعات ومراكز البحوث ؛ التى تناولت المصالح والعلاقات البريطانية الخارجية ؛ سواء بمصر أو بقية الدول العربية أو غيرها فى العالم الخارجى ، وذلك فى المجالات السياسية والإقتصادية والعسكرية والثقافية وغيرها ، وخاصة تلك التى توافرت وثائقها إبان الحقب الإستعمارية بمختلف أشكالها ؛ سواء كانت بالإحتلال أو الحماية أو الإنتداب ، وما اتسمت بها هذه العلاقة فى بعض حلقاتها بتبادل المصالح وفى غالبيتها بعدم التكافؤ ؛ أو ما اصطلح عليه بعلاقة التبعية .

وعلى الرغم من كثرة وتنوع هذه الدراسات ، يبدو أن الوثائق لا زالت بكرا ؛ تجود بين حين وآخر بمعلومات تُضيف أبعادا جديدة لتلك العلاقة ، وهو ما أفاد الباحث أثناء إعداد له رسالة الدكتوراه ، ومنها هذا التقرير العسكرى الذى وضعه أحد كبار المسئولين العسكريين البريطانيين الذين زاروا مصر أواخر عام ١٨٧٦م ، أى عشية بيع أسهم قناة السويس وهى مسألة تُثير الريبة ، مثلما تُثار مع التقرير عدة اشكالات على صعيد العلاقات بين قوتين غير مُتكافئتين ؛ تحينت فيها القوة الكبرى الفرصة لإلتهام القوة الأخرى الصغيرة ؛ وإن بدت هذه الأخيرة كبيرة فى إقليمها أو محيطها ، مثلما يُجيب على عدة تساؤلات حول حقيقة التفكير البريطانى فى إحتلال مصر قبل أحداث الثورة العربية بسنوات ، وماهى إستقراء الأحداث التاريخية والإستفادة منها فى وضع الخطط الإستراتيجية ، وبطبيعة الحال قد تختلف الرؤى وفقا لأدبيات البحث العلمى ، ولكن رؤى من المُهم إلقاء الضوء على هذا الموضوع فى الملف الوثائقي ، ويُمكن تبين جوانبه من خلال النقاط التالية .

أولا : مصدر التقرير وبياناته :-

هذا التقرير تضمنته الوثائق البريطانية الخاصة بالشئون الخارجية ، التى نُشرت منها طبعة خاصة فى عدة مجلدات تحت عنوان-BRITISH DO-
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شارك في التحرير العام لهذه الوثائق كل من " كينيث بورن وكامرون وات Ken- neth Bourne and D.Cameron Watt " ويشتمل الجزء الأول من هذه المجموعات على وثائق الفترة الممتدة من منتصف القرن التاسع عشر حتى الحرب العالمية الأولى ١٨٥٦ - ١٩١٤ ، وتختص بكل من الشرقيين الأدنى والأوسط .

وقد تم إصدار هذا الجزء في عدة مجلدات ؛ وضمن السلسلة B؛ يوجد المجلد رقم (٨) الذي كان ضمن محتوياته (التقرير) محور موضوع هذا الملف الوثائقي ، أما المجلد نفسه فيختص بالدولة العثمانية في شمال أفريقيا ؛ قناة السويس والبحر الأحمر والمشكلات التونسية The Ottoman Empire in North Africa : The Suez Canal, Red Sea, and Tunisian Problems وذلك في الفترة من ١٨٥٩ إلى ١٨٨٢ م ، وكان المحرر الخاص لهذا المجلد " دافيد جلارد . David Gillard

ثانيا : ظروف التقرير :-

أما بالنسبة للتقرير ؛ فهو يتكون من اثنتي عشرة صفحة ؛ ومعنونا : تقرير من اللواء باتريك مكدوكال بكيفية الدفاع عن مصر Report by Major-General Patrick Macdougall on the defence of Egypt ومؤرخ ١٦ يونية ١٨٧٦ م ، وكان ضمن مرفقات خصوصية أرسلت من فخامة J.C.Vivian إلى اللورد Ten- derden في الرابع من شهر يوليو من نفس العام ، وقد إستلمها في السادس منه .

ويستهله مكدوكال بأنه إرتحل إلى مصر في زيارة - سياحية - للإستمتاع بجوها نظراً لإعتلال كان قد ألم بصحته ، وإنه رأى أن يُحول إقامته بها إلى شئ مفيد يتفق ومهام وزارة الحربية التي يعمل بها ، ومن شأنها دراسة الكثير عن إمكانات النظم العسكرية للبلاد الأجنبية .

وإنه فور وصوله إلى القاهرة حاول إنتهاج أسلوبا دبلوماسيا مهذبا في مهمته ، وإن الضباط المصريين عاملوه بالمثل ؛ رغم أن زيارة ضابط من هيئة أركان الجيش البريطاني ، كانت كفيلا بإثارة الشك والريبة ، وقد إلتقى بالجنرال ستون Stone الضابط الأمريكي رئيس هيئة أركان الجيش المصري ، وتحدث معه حول إمكانية العمل معا في المستقبل ، فأجابه بأنه متأكد بأن إنجلترا هي خير

حليف لمصر ، حتى أن الأمير حسين باشا - نجل الخديو إسماعيل - وزير الحربية ، ليس متقبلا ما يراه الشعب المصرى حول بيع أسهم قناة السويس إلى إنجلترا ؛ بأنها أول خطوة نحو ضم مصر، ثم رافق ستون فى لقاء مع الخديوى إسماعيل ، وأخبره أنه جاء إلى مصر مرتحلا فى زيارة صحية على نفقته الخاصة ، ورأى تحويل زيارته إلى شئ مفيد .

وقد أوضح للخديوى أن لدى حكومته (إنجلترا) معلومات كافية عن جيش سموه والمعالم العسكرية - الإستراتيجية - لمصر، ولكن لأن قناة السويس باعتبارها معلما جديدا ؛ أضيف إلى المعالم السابقة ، لذا فقد رغب فى التعرف من منظور عسكرى على كافة الأعمال هناك وفى البقاع المجاورة لها ، وذلك لاعتقاده بإمكانية العمل العسكرى - الأنجلو مصرى - المشترك مستقبلا ، جنبا إلى جنب فى حالات الحرب ، ووافقه الخديو على ذلك وأكرم وفادته ، ثم أمده بالخيام والإبل والخيول وقوة حراسة عسكرية صغيرة .

ثالثا : محتويات التقرير :-

إستعرض مكدوكال فى سائر نقاط التقرير رحلته من منظور إستراتيجى ؛ حاول فيها رصد العلاقة بين المعالم الجغرافية والمنظور العسكرى ، والتوقف كثيرا أمام أثر الموقع المصرى فى الطريق الذى يربط بين إنجلترا والهند ، لذا أشار فى تقديمه إلى أن المواصلات - من خلال مصر - بين إنجلترا والهند ، يُمكن أن تمر بسلسلة مكونة من ثلاث حلقات هى : الرحلة من إنجلترا إلى مصر ، المرور خلال مصر نفسها ، الرحلة من السويس إلى بومباى .

ثم أضاف ؛ ونظرا لأن قوة هذه السلسلة تعتمد أساسا على الحلقة الأولى ، ولذا ؛ فهذه إذا كُسِرَتْ فلا قيمة للحلقتين الأخريين ، ومن ثم فلا بد أن يظل محل الإهتمام فرض سلطة إنجلترا فى البحر المتوسط ، وأن تمسك بيدها زمام الأمور دون محاولة إحداث عداوة مع أية دولة أخرى ، ولكن لكى يتحقق الدفاع العسكرى ؛ فهذا يتطلب الإحتياط لكل الأوضاع ، حيث يُفترض وجود عقبات قد تُفقد إنجلترا سطوتها فى البحر المتوسط ، ولذلك لابد من أخذ أمرين بعين الإعتبار :-

الأول : لابد أن تتوافر لإنجلترا القدرة فى هذا البحر، بالدرجة التى تمكنها

من المبادأة ، حتى قبل حصولها على فرصة إرسال قوات من إنجلترا لدعمها في مصر؛ نظرا لما قد يستغرقه تجهيز الإمدادات من فترة قد تصل إلى خمسة أسابيع على الأقل ؛ لوضع فيلق واحد من الجيش على ظهر السفين ، وإلى حين إتخاذها وضع الإستعداد في الموانئ سوف تستغرق فترة أخرى ؛ فيما يُصبح غير مناسب ، كما أنه في حالة الحرب هذه ؛ ستكون الصلة - عبر مصر - مفقودة بالهند ، بينما قد تجئ قوات برية كبيرة من العدو ؛ تحقق لبسيلدة وتحتل مصر، ولذا فمن الضروري الإستعداد لهذا بقوات احتياطية من إنجلترا نفسها - والبحر المتوسط - إلى مصر ، وكذلك من الهند أيضا حتى يفقد أى عدو سيطرته .

الثانى : فى حالة فقد إنجلترا سيادتها فى البحر المتوسط ؛ وحاولت دخول مصر بقوات احتياطية ، فإنه يلزم ثمانية أسابيع لكى تتدخل فرقة من الجيش ، وفى هذه الحالة تتجه الأنظار إلى الهند ، لأنه قد تُقطع المواصلات مع إنجلترا ذاتها ، ولذا لابد من تعاون قوات وطنية (مصرية) ، خاصة إذا ما دفعت أوروبا بقوات ، ويُمكن لإنجلترا إرسال حملات أخرى ، بحرية من الشواطئ المجاورة (القريبة) بنفس القوة ، وكذلك من تلك التى يُمكن استدعاؤها من الهند ، وعلى كل فالتعاون ضرورى بين الجيشين المصرى والبريطانى .

وهو يعتقد أن هناك ثمة عقبات تُهدد مسار المصالح البريطانية فى مصر ، ولذا يبدو أن إنجلترا ستكون مضطرة إلى إحتلال مصر بجيوشها فى المستقبل القريب ؛ سواء برضا مصر أو باستعمال القوة (رغما عنها) It is assumed that England may be at some future time under the necessity of occupying Egypt with her armies either with consent of Egypt or by force .

ثم أشار إلى أن إنجلترا ؛ يبدو أنها هى التى ستتعهد بأمر الدفاع ضد أى هجوم ، رغم أهمية التنسيق العام مع مصر، ولكنه ترك مسألة التنسيق هذه جانبا ، وأخذ يتناول المواضع الجغرافية التى يُمكن حدوث إحتلال (أوروبى) من خلالها ، ومن ثم يحسن إتخاذها نقاطا دفاعية فى شمال البلاد ، وبما يكفل تقدم فيلقين عبر جبهة ضيقة إلى الصحراء ، وأن السكك الحديدية والخطوط التلغرافية وخطوط المواصلات المائية ، ستوفر وسائل مناسبة لتقدم كلا

الفيلقين إلى القاهرة من تلك النقطة (ويقصد بها الإسكندرية) .

ثم يتناول التقرير الموانع الطبيعية عبر الأراضي الزراعية التي تم شقها من ترع وقنوات ، وإمكانية التغلب على ذلك من خلال المعابر المائية ودراسة إمكانات التحرك ، ومدى تحقيق مرونة الانتقال بالمدفعية والخيالة ، مؤكداً على أن ظروف الإدخالات البشرية للمشروعات الجديدة في الأراضي المصرية - يقصد القناة والترع وما في عدادها - قد غيرت من شكل الأراضي الذي كانت عليه أيام مقدم نابليون ؛ الذي لم يلق مثل هذه الصعوبات ، والتي ستصبح مُعوقاً لتقدم جيوش العدو القادم ، والتي لن يكون أمامها سوى المضي في الصحراء في هذه الحالة ، ومن ثم يُمكن القول بأن الخطوط العسكرية القديمة عبر مصر قد تغيرت أيضاً ، وأن وجود قناة السويس (الحاجز المائي) هو الذي أوجد هذا التغير الجوهري في تشكيل الملامح الجديدة للخطط العسكرية .

وقد حاول توضيح ذلك في نقطة مستقلة (رقم ١٣) من التقرير ، فذكر أن هدف أي غاز للبلد (مصر) للوهلة الأولى : إما إعاقة القناة أو إمتلاكها ، وهذه يُمكن أن يُقال عنها في الإطار الجغرافي (عسكرياً) أنها تقع خارج (على مشارف) مصر ، ولهذا فإن مسألة الدفاع عن الساحل الشمالي ليست كافية لمنع أي عدو يأتي من البحر لكي يحتل جزءاً مجاوراً للإسكندرية فيما بينها وبين دمياط ، لأنه في هذه الحالة سيكون من الصعب عليه الإختراق إلى داخل البلاد ؛ نظراً للصعوبات التي تعترضه في الأراضي الزراعية مما سبق الإشارة إليه ، أو أن يقوده ذلك إلى الصحراء بعيداً عن الهدف الحقيقي .

ثم أكمل في النقطة التالية (رقم ١٤) : إنه لما كانت الغزوات القديمة لمصر قد حدثت من فلسطين ، من ثم يجب البحث عن نقاط الضعف في تسليح مصر على الضفة الشرقية لقناة السويس، ثم يفترض مقدم عدو من تلك الجهة ليس لديه سيادة في البحر المتوسط ، أي قوته برية ، وفي هذه الحالة قد يتخذ من غزة نقطة إنطلاق للغزو ، ولذا إستعرض مكدوكال ما يلزم لذلك من الوقت وآبار المياه ، ولكنه إفترض عدم نجاح قوات كبيرة في ذلك ، رغم أن هناك قوات سلكت الصحراء ونجحت في هذا ، ومنها قوات الجنرال بيرد General Baird عندما نزل بقواته في القصير عام ١٨٠١ ، وسار عبر الصحراء ؛ من هذا المكان

على البحر الأحمر إلى قنا ، ثم إلى النيل للمشاركة فى دحر الحملة الفرmsية حينذاك وبعد أن خلص إلى عدم امكانية نجاح غزو مصر من جهة الشرق مع وجود الصحراء وهذا الحاجز المائى -القناة- وبالتالى فليس من سبيل لإنجاح ذلك سوى امتلاك قوة بحرية تسيطر على البحر ومن ثم القناة ، بأن يرسى قواته عند مدخلها فى بورسعيد ، ثم يمد قواته إلى انقاط ساحلية أخرى مناسبة بجوارها ، ثم يسير إلى القنطرة ثم يحاول فتح طريق للمواصلات بواسطة السفن ، وأنه لكى تصح التقديرات فى هذه النقطة يجب مراعاة ما يلى:

× أن هدف انجلترا على طول الخط هو حماية القناة من أى توتر أو تدخل .

× أن هدف أية قوة تريد غزو مصر سيكون إما ملكية دائمة للقناة بالفتح أو ردم مؤقت يفرض غلق الطريق على إنجلترا إلى الهند لبضعة أسابيع وهذه تكون مدة حرجة .

× يُمكن ردم القناة مؤقتاً بتأثير عاملين مختلفين هما :- بواسطة مجموعات صغيرة من الأعداد الذين قد يتخذون من الصحراء (الشرقية للقناة) طريقاً بغرض الاستيلاء على بعض الأجزاء المتقطعة ، أو بواسطة القوارب المحايدة ، بعد رشوتها واستمالتها ، وهذه يمكن إغراقها بالثقب ، إبان وجودها فى الممر ذاته وهذا خطر يمكن اتقاؤه أساساً باستبعاد القوارب المحايدة أثناء الحرب ، كما أنه يمكن حماية ممر القناة ذاته بواسطة قوارب مدرعة مسلحة بمدافع لممارسة الهجوم المفتوح من خلال البحيرات ، إذ أن القناة بوجه عام يمكن وصفها بأنها ممر المائى خلال سلسلة من البحيرات الداخلية التى ترتبط ببعضها البعض بوصلات من الجبال .

ثم استعرض مكدوكال القناة ، وقسمها إلى ثلاثة قطاعات رئيسية دفاعية هى : بورسعيد إلى القنطرة ، والقنطرة إلى الإسماعيلية ، ثم من الإسماعيلية إلى السويس، وإنه لدرء أية محاولات للإستيلاء على القناة من جانب أية قوة مناوئة ، يُمكن حراستها برىا فى الجانب الشرقى من خلال فرق من الهجن ، تكون كل منها مُلزمة بحراسة قطاع ، بينما يتم انتشار القوارب فى القناة بالقرب من الشاطئ الغربى لتأمينها والدود عنها .

وقد حدد التقرير أبعاد وأهمية كل قطاع وقسمه إلى عدة أجزاء أو مقاطع ،

وشرح كيفية أو معوقات احتلاله ، وسُبل الدفاع في ظل الظروف الطبيعية وغير الطبيعية إلى آخره ، مثلما حدد أيضا النقاط الملاحية الخطرة بطول القناة ، وأكد على أهمية القطاع الأول باعتباره الأكثر قربا من القوى الأخرى في أوروبا ، وهو بذلك يُعد الأيسر في الوصول إليه بحريا ، فضلا عن أنه في الوقت الحاضر لا تتوافر له حراسة ، واقترح إنشاء بطاريات عائمة قوية وطوربيدات ، وجميعها تكون على أهبة الإستعداد سواء في حالتى الدفاع أوالهجوم .

ثم استعرض في عشرات النقاط التالية القطاعين الأخيرين حتى السويس ، وتناول بالشرح تفاصيل عسكرية أخرى لا تهمنا كثيرا ، ولكن ما نشير إليه هو عدم إقتصار التقرير على القناة ، وإنما رصده كافة الأجزاء التى تربط بين منطقة القناة والظهير الداخلى لها في منطقة الدلتا وصولا إلى القاهرة ، مؤكداً على أهمية السكك الحديدية والطرق البرية والمسالك الأخرى ، فضلا عن البحيرات ، وأكد ثانيةً على أن الخطر الحقيقي على القناة يكمن في بورسعيد ذاتها ، كمفتاح لها في البحر المتوسط ، والتي يُمكن أن تحتلها إحدى دول البحر المتوسط ، أما المدخل الجنوبي للقناة حيث السويس فهو في أمان ، وسيظل كذلك طالما بقيت انجلترا قابضة على زمام الأمور في البحر الأحمر .

على أن مكدوكال أشار في النقاط الختامية التى تضمنها هذا التقرير، إلى أنه بالرغم من أن قناة السويس هى أكثر الوسائل المناسبة لمرور القوالت البريطانية إلى الهند عبر مصر، إلا أنها ليست الوحيدة في هذا الصدد ، حيث يُمكن إستخدام السكك الحديدية في طريق الاسكندرية - السويس ، في حال قيام قوات معادية بإعاقة المرور في القناة ، وهناك في الوقت ذاته طريق رأس الرجاء الصالح .

وبصفة عامة ، فقد أشار مكدوكال مرارا إلى ضرورة توفير سُبل الدفاع عن القناة بإستخدام وسائل الإعاقه أمام أى عدو فيما سبق ايضاحه ، فضلا عن تواجد قوات استراتيجية في الاسكندرية لحماية استخدام الخط الحديدى ، ومؤكدا على أنه في كل الأحوال لابد أن تكون القناة ملكا لنا أى لبريطانيا ، وهذه هى الضمان الوحيد الذى يحول دون مقدم الأعداء ، ومن ثم ضرورة وجود نقاط دفاعية استراتيجية للقوات البريطانية فوق المرتفعات الموجودة بالقرب

من القناة عند التل الكبير وغيرها .

ثم أشار التقرير فى النهاية ، إلى أنه طالما لا تتعرض مصر لهجوم عدو عاتٍ يمتلك وسائل السيطرة فى البحر المتوسط ؛ فإن أمر الدفاع عنها سيكون مُمكنًا وناجحاً ، وحتى إذا ما كان العدو ذا سيطرة فى البحر المتوسط ؛ فإن طرف القناة عند السويس سيكون مفتوحاً أمام القوات البريطانية الآتية من بومباي ، والتي ستتجه إلى حيث المعسكر المُحصن عند الاسماعيلية ، والذي سيكون فى غاية الأهمية الاستراتيجية فى هذه الحالة ، وعامة فيجب على إدارة المخابرات البريطانية تجميع كافة المعلومات من أجل التحرك العسكرى .

تعقيب : إقتصر تناول فى هذا الحيز على أهم ما تضمنه التقرير من نقاط ؛ فى سياق الظروف التاريخية ، ولا يتسع المقام هنا لتناول مُجمل ما تضمنه التقرير من النقاط العسكرية التى فاقت المائة نقطة ، فليس هذا مجاله ، ولكنه بصفة عامة يُثير التفكير عن وضعه فى هذا التوقيت الذى واكب شراء إنجلترا أسهم القناة من جانب ؛ ومسألة الديون الأجنبية وصندوق الدين من جانب آخر ، ناهيك عن إعلام الخديوى بأغراض نبيلة عن دفاع مشترك ، وفى حقيقة التقرير خطة للإحتلال ، فضلا عن جوانب أخرى إرتبطت بتزايد المصالح البريطانية بصفة خاصة فيما يتصل بالملاحة والتجارة فى مصر ، وهذا تناوله الباحث تفصيلا فى رسالته للدكتوراه بجامعة عين شمس ، وكانت الأمور جميعها تدفع ببريطانيا صوب إكتمال حلقات السيطرة بالخطوة العسكرية .

وفىما يتصل بالتحرك العسكرى ؛ فإنه بدأ فعليا منذئذ ، وعلى سبيل المثال ماتم فى بورسعيد آنئذ ؛ فيما يُشبه بروفة الإنزال البحرى أو الإستيلاء المؤقت ، فالذى حدث أن لاحت بوادر الخلافات الروسية العثمانية خلال عام ١٨٧٦م ، ولم تلبث أن أعلنت الحرب بينهما فى ٢٤ ابريل ١٨٧٧ ، هذا فى الوقت الذى تعالت فيه الأصوات المطالبة بالحفاظ الاستراتيجى على مصالح بريطانيا ، فى هذه المنطقة الواقعة على طريق الهند ، وفى ٢٧ يناير ١٨٧٦ نشرت التيمز مقالا ذكرت فيه : أنه بعد أن حصلت بريطانيا على الأسهم عليها بالمطالبة بحقوقها السياسى ، وهو الحق الذى يمنع أى تغيير فى العلاقات مع الدولة العثمانية ومع الدول

الآخري ، وبشكل عام منع أى تصرف قد يضر بمصالحها فى القناة أو حُرَيْتِها فى المرور الى الهند ، وفى نفس الوقت كانت قد نشرت فى موضوع آخر - حسبما يورد بعض الباحثين - أنه لا يُمكن أن تفكر بريطانيا العظمى فى مصير مصر مُنفصلا عما يحوم حول الدولة العثمانية من المخاوف ، فلو أدت القلاقل أو الاعتداء الخارجى أو فساد الادارة الداخلى الى إنهيار الدولة العثمانية ماليا أو سياسيا ، فقد نضطر الى أن نحتاط للمحافظة على سلامة ذلك الجزء من أملاك السلطان الذى تربطنا به علاقة قوية .

وقد كانت الدولة العثمانية قد عجزت عن سداد الديون منذ أواخر ١٨٧٥ بما يعنى الانهيار المالى وبقى الانهيار السياسى ، وربما قد بدا فى الأفق آنئذ إستهلال ذلك مع الاضطرابات البلقانية ، ثم مع بروز الخطر الروسى وهذا بالذات كان له وقع مؤثر للغاية على الرأى العام البريطانى ، حتى قيل أنه خلال عامى ١٨٧٦ و ١٨٧٧ ظهرت كُتيبات فى انجلترا اتسمت بموجة من الخوف من إحتلال روسيا لقناة السويس ، واقترحت آنئذ مشروع خط حديدى عبر بلاد ما بين النهرين (العراق) كطريق برى الى الهند ، وسُربت شائعات آنئذ بأن روسيا تنوى جر مصر الى غمار الحرب ، وتتوى محاصرة الشواطئ المصرية ، متلما كان دزرائيلى يعتقد أنه اذا أخذ الروس الأستانة ففى استطاعتهم اجتياح سوريا والوصول الى مصب النيل ، وهذا الخطر من جهة الشرق هو ما سبق أن أشار اليه مكدوكال وذكر فى إحدى نقاط تقريره سوريا وفلسطين .

ومن المُرجح أن هذه الظروف ، هى التى دفعت انجلترا الى إرسال وحدات أسطولها الحربى الى بورسعيد ، حيث رست فى هذا الميناء فى أواخر أبريل ١٨٧٧ ، وكثرت الشائعات آنئذ عن احتمال احتلال انجلترا لمصر ، وزادت مخاوف وزير خارجية فرنسا دوق ديكاز Duc Decazes ، وقنصلها العام فى مصر دى ميشيل Des Michels ، وكذلك مخاوف الخديوى ، وإن كان دربى وزير الخارجية البريطانى أكد مرارا أن انجلترا لا تفكر فى احتلال قناة السويس أو مصر ذاتها ، وأن الإجراء الذى قام به الأسطول البريطانى لا يقصد منه إلا المحافظة على مصالح انجلترا فى الهند .

وحسبما يذكر أستاذنا د. أحمد عبدالرحيم مصطفى فى تناوله لمصر

والمسألة المصرية ، أن هذا الأمر أثار منذئذ مسألة حياد القناة التي ظلت متداولة فيما بعد - إلى حين اتفاقية ٢٩ أكتوبر ١٨٨٨ - خاصة في ظل إرسال مصر قوات للسلطان أي معاداة روسيا , وضغوط قنصلها العام في مصر دي فلكنس ؛ الذي حذر الخديو من احتمال قيام روسيا بحصار مصر وضرب الموانئ المصرية .

وقد سارع اللورد دربي إثر ذلك بإرسال مذكرة في ٦ مايو ١٨٧٧ الى وزير الخارجية الروسى جورتشاكوف Gortshakoff عن طريق سفيره فى لندن شوفالوف , Schouvaloff يؤكد فيها على عدة نقاط أهمها ضرورة بقاء المواصلات بين أوروبا والشرق عبر قناة السويس وأيضا منطقة الإقتراب منها مفتوحة ، وعدم تعريضها للخطر , وإن أيه محاولة لإعاقة الملاحة سيُعتبر تهديدا للهند وضربة خطيرة لتجارة العالم , وألا يقوم أحد من المتحاربين بمهاجمة أو احتلال مصر ، حتى لو كان احتلالا مؤقتا من وجهة النظر الإستراتيجية .

كذلك أكد دربي فى مذكرته هذه على أهمية القسطنطينية ؛ من وجهة النظر السياسية والحربية والتجارية ، ولا يُمكن للحكومة البريطانية النظر إليها بعدم الاهتمام ولا تسمح بسقوط هذه العاصمة التى لها مركزها وأهميتها فى أيدي آخرين غير أصحابها , فضلا عن نقاط أخرى متصلة بالخليج العربى , وردت روسيا بأنه ليس فى نية الحكومة حصار قناة السويس أو تعريض الملاحة فيها للخطر بأى شكل من الأشكال ؛ لأنها تعتبر قناة السويس طريقا عالميا مهما لتجارة العالم , وأنه ليس فى صالحها مضايقة انجلترا فى ممتلكاتها بالهند أو فى طريق مواصلاتها .

وعلى الرغم من انفضاض هذه الأحداث ,فانها فجرت بدايات لتحرك عسكرى بريطانى صوب المنطقة سرعان ماتكرر بعد ذلك فى موانئ مصرية أخرى ,وكان ذلك مرتبطا فى جانب منه بأحداث مصر ذاتها ، وفى جانب آخر بالأحداث الدولية ,وبين هذه وتلك نمت وتزايدت فكرة الاحتلال العسكرى البريطانى لمصر .

- الخلاصة : وفى إيجاز ؛ فقد ركز هذا التقرير على عدة نقاط :-
- ١ ، التأكيد على أهمية بورسعيد وأنها مدخل الخطر الحقيقى على القناة من البحر المتوسط من القوى الأوروبية فى هذا البحر .
 - ٢ ، ضرورة تقوية التواجد البريطانى الاستراتيجى فى البحر المتوسط لمواجهة مثل تلك الأخطار المحتملة ضد القناة .
 - ٣ ، الحرص على أن تظل السويس مفتوحة أمام القوات البريطانية القادمة من الهند .
 - ٤ ، تعزيز التواجد الحربى فى الاسكندرية ، بحيث تكون السكك الحديدية بديلا استراتيجيا للقناة .
 - ٥ ، أهمية وجود تعاون بين الجيشين المصرى والبريطانى .
 - ٦ ، الأخطار المحتملة على القناة لا تقتصر فقط على البحر المتوسط ، وإنما برىا أيضاً من جهة الشرق .
 - ٧ ، التقدم الاستراتيجى لقوات الهند يكون من السويس إلى حيث التمرکز فى المناطق المُحصنة فى الاسماعيلية ، مع اتخاذ المواقع الدفاعية فوق مرتفعات ظهير منطقة القناة باتجاه الدلتا .
 - ٨ ، رغم أهمية التعاون الأنجلومصرى ، فإنه يبدو أن الأمر سيقصر على إنجلترا ، وأن هذه ستضطر إلى إنزال قواتها فى مصر سواء وافقت على ذلك أو رغما عنها ، أى بمعنى آخر إحتلال مصر واقع لا محالة ، حماية للمصالح التجارية والسياسية البريطانية .
- وفى تقدير الباحث أن هذه السياسة التى رُسمت أساساً للدفاع عن القناة ، كجزء مهم فى إطار مصر ككل ، بدت فى الواقع خطة للإحتلال ، وهذا جميعه حدد أولويات الإستعدادات الحربية البريطانية ؛ منذئذ وفيما تم بعد ذلك من اتخاذ البحر المتوسط أساساً لقوة بريطانية إذ توصلت بريطانيا إلى إتفاق مع الدولة العثمانية حصلت بموجبه على حق إدارة جزيرة قبرص ، ومن ثم أصبح لها قاعدة عسكرية فيها ، وإقتربت من خلالها صوب المضائق من جانب ،

وأصبحت المُرْتَكِز القريب تحينا لفرصة الإنقضاض على مصر من جانب آخر ، سواء كان ذلك لإحتلالها أو لدرء أية قوة أخرى تحاول الوصول إليها . مثلما حاز كل من مينائى بورسعيد والاسكندرية ، على الأولوية فى خطط الدفاع تبعاً لذلك ؛ الأول باعتباره مفتاح القناة الشمالى والثانى باعتباره مفتاح السكك الحديدية ، إلى القاهرة والسويس حيث البحر الأحمر .

أما بالنسبة للبحر الأحمر، فقد كان طريقا آمنا لمقدم القوات من الهند إلى حد كبير ، فلم تكن هناك ثمة أخطار من القوى الأوروبية ، فالتواجد البريطانى فى منطقة الخليج العربى قد إزداد عن العقود السابقة ، وستتمكن بريطانيا بعد أربعة سنوات من هذا التقرير ؛ من فرض معالم الحماية على إمارات ومشىخات الخليج العربى ، بالإضافة إلى وجود قواتها فى عدن وأماكن أخرى فى شرق أفريقيا ، وفى سياق هذه الظروف يُمكن القول بأن القوات القادمة من الهند هى التى سيكون بوسعها تنفيذ الخطط البريطانية بالسيطرة على القناة وإحتلالها ، ومن ثم الإنطلاق منها إلى الداخل لقمع أية أخطار والإمساك بزمام الأمور، وهذا هو السيناريو الذى لم يختلف كثيرا عما تم بعد ذلك بوضع سنوات مع الثورة العربية وإتمام الإحتلال .

Doc. 207 The Honourable J. C. Vivian to Lord Tenterden.—(Received July 6)

(Confidential.)

My Lord,

Pall Mall, July 4, 1876.

I AM directed by Mr. Secretary Hardy to acquaint you, for the information of the Earl of Derby, that, during last winter, Major-General Patrick Macdougall, Deputy Quartermaster-General at Head-quarters (Intelligence Department), was travelling in Egypt for the benefit of his health, but, wishing to turn his accidental presence in that country to some profit, applied to the Khedive for permission to make a personal reconnaissance of the Suez Canal and the adjacent country. This permission was not only most readily accorded by His Highness, but every possible facility was given to Major-General Macdougall by the Khedive and his Chief of the Staff, for carrying his wishes into effect, even to the extent of providing him with tents, camels, horses, and a small military escort.

The result is the inclosed valuable Report upon the Defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal, which I am to request may be returned.

Mr. Hardy would be glad, therefore, if you would move the Earl of Derby to cause his best thanks to be conveyed to His Highness the Khedive of Egypt, through Her Majesty's Consul-General, for his courtesy to Major-General Macdougall during his stay in that country, and for the kindness and consideration shown to him on that occasion.

I have, &c.
(Signed) J. C. VIVIAN.

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Inclosure in Doc. 207.

Report by Major-General Patrick Macdougall on the Defence of Egypt.

Preface.

THE following notes are the result of a visit to Egypt during last winter, and more particularly of a personal reconnaissance undertaken by me of the Suez Canal and the neighbouring country.

Arriving in Cairo, as I did, shortly after the purchase of the Suez Canal shares, I was led to conclude, from the markedly polite, but at the same time the markedly reserved manner of the Egyptian military authorities, that the presence in Egypt at that time of one of the principal officers of the English Head-quarter Staff was regarded with suspicion. The Chief of the Egyptian Staff, General Stone, in discussing with me the possible future, said he was quite convinced that England was Egypt's best ally; "only," he added, "pray don't come and annex us."

In explanation of that saying, General Stone informed me that the Minister of War, Hussein Pasha, second son of the Khedive, had been seriously disquieted by representations from people about him that the purchase of the Suez Canal shares by England was the first step towards the annexation of Egypt.

Feeling, therefore, that I was treading on delicate ground, I thought it right to go to the fountain head. I was presented to the Khedive by General Stanton, and expressed myself to the following effect, viz. :—

That I was travelling in Egypt for my health in a strictly private capacity; but, as I belonged to a Department whose business it was to learn as much as possible of the military systems of foreign countries, I wished to turn my accidental presence in Egypt to some profit.

That we already possessed a considerable knowledge of the organisation of His Highness' army, and of the military features of his country; but that the Suez Canal, having recently added a new feature for consideration, I wished to undertake a military reconnaissance of that work, and of the adjacent country, provided always that my design met with His Highness' full approval, without which I expressly stated that I should relinquish it.

I indicated at the same time that my anxiety to undertake the work was based on my belief in the probability that, at some future time, English troops might be called upon to fight side by side with His Highness' army.

The Khedive at once informed me, with much kindness of manner, not only that my project had his full consent, but that if I would send to his Chief of the Staff the particulars of what I wished to do, every facility should be given me.

The result was that the Khedive ordered me to be supplied with tents, camels, horses, and a small military escort. In short, I was the Khedive's guest during my expedition into the desert, and I shall always feel grateful for the kindness and consideration with which I was treated on that occasion by His Highness.

(Signed) P. MACDOUGALL,
Deputy Quartermaster-General.

Introductory.

The communication of England with India through Egypt may be regarded as a chain formed of three links, viz:—

The voyage from England to Egypt.

The transit through Egypt.

The voyage from Suez to Bombay.

Now, the strength of the whole chain depends absolutely on the strength of the first link, for if that were broken the other two would be worthless.

Although, as argued in a former paper, it may be regarded as almost certain that England's command of the Mediterranean could be wrested from her by no conceivable hostile combination, yet, in preparing any scheme of military defence, prudence requires that it should be adapted to the most unfavourable conditions possible to foresee.

In accordance with this principle it is therefore assumed that in some general complication England might lose the command of the Mediterranean; and under this hypothesis two different cases present themselves for consideration, each offering its distinct problem.

FIRST CASE.

The Mediterranean might be wrested from England at the commencement of a war, and before she could have time to despatch troops from England to Egypt.

Under present circumstances a minimum period of five weeks would probably be required to place even one corps d'armée complete on board ship at the different ports of embarkation. Eight weeks would therefore elapse from the first alarm before the expedition could reach Egypt.

In this case the connection with India through Egypt would be lost during the whole continuance of the war. For the naval superiority of an enemy in the Mediterranean implies at the same time his power to occupy Egypt with an army such as any land forces that could be spared, either from England or India, would be powerless to dislodge.

SECOND CASE.

England might lose command of the Mediterranean after having landed in Egypt such force as she could spare.

In considering this case it is important to inquire if the one corps d'armée, which under present circumstances, and if not interfered with, England could land in Egypt

Scale of English miles

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in eight weeks from the first alarm, would be adequate for the occasion, it being borne in mind that, according to the hypothesis, that corps d'armée, being cut off from communication with England, would have to look to India for reinforcements, and that those reinforcements must of necessity consist of native troops, since Europeans could not prudently be spared.

Doubtless, if time were given to raise men, to arm and clothe them, and to provide the necessary *matériel*, England could send out from these shores an expedition of such strength as would comport with the influence she might aspire to exercise in European affairs; but time, of which it may now be said more emphatically than ever, with relation to military arrangements, "that it is more precious than rubies," would certainly not be afforded for all these measures.

Our preparations, though directed by the most consummate ability, and backed by unlimited wealth, might only be preparations after the event, and their results too late to influence the issue.

In the case now under consideration, therefore, it must be assumed that the power of England to defend Egypt against enemies possessing the command of the Mediterranean would depend on a British force of one corps d'armée, supported by such native troops as could be spared from India; and—on the assumption that Egypt would be friendly—by the Egyptian army.

The following notes are offered in elucidation of these and other questions embraced in the general subject of English interests in Egypt.

1. It is assumed that England may be at some future time under the necessity of occupying Egypt with her armies, either with the consent of Egypt or by force.

In either case the defence of that country against attacks from without would have to be undertaken by England.

3. The general configuration of Egypt is peculiarly favourable for defence. Viewing that country from the north it presents a narrow front to attack, with both flanks resting on desert.

4. The front of defence is furnished with railroad, telegraphic, and water communication from the rear generally, and from Cairo in particular, to both flanks, and to various points along the coast line between those flanks. (See Map No. 1 herewith.)

5. The different railway junctions are very favourable to such a strategical disposition of the defensive force as would enable it to be massed very expeditiously on any point threatened.

6. The march of an army through the cultivated country would be impracticable if seriously opposed, because it is irrigated by countless canals and ditches of varying size, some of the canals being navigable, which derive their water from the Rosetta or Damietta branches of the Nile.

7. The canals, and some of the larger ditches, have water in them throughout the year, the remainder are dry at time of low Nile; but all could, in a few hours, be converted into intrenchments by the labour of the country people, who are nearly all employed during several months in each year in cleaning out the irrigation canals and ditches, and would therefore find themselves quite at home in the use of intrenching tools.

8. And while the general face of the country is thus intricate, there are no roads worthy of being called such. At the time of high Nile the only means of traversing the cultivated country is by means of earthen causeways from 10 to 15 feet wide, which skirt the branches of the Nile and the canals, good only for horse, mule, or camel traffic, but impassable for wheels, owing to the number of transverse cuttings made to let the water through.

There are also narrow pathways for animals along the principal dykes.

9. At the time of low Nile, indeed, cavalry and artillery could move over the surface of the country if unopposed, but artillery could only do so with great difficulty.

If unopposed, also, troops could conveniently march along the railways, which run for the most part from 10 to 15 feet above the general level of the country, on embankments formed by excavating the soil on either side, so as to give two ditches, which are filled at time of high Nile. But the railways would facilitate the defence rather than the attack; their use by an enemy could easily be forbidden by breaking some of the very numerous small bridges over the irrigation canals, and any timber for their reconstruction would have to be brought to the country from abroad;

besides which, the railway embankments can in places be utilized as lines of defence.

11. From the local peculiarities above indicated it follows that a hostile army operating in Egypt could not make its way, as in the first Napoleon's time, through the cultivated country; it would be obliged to march over desert, and would yet be under the necessity of hugging the cultivated country for supplies and water, even supposing that the history of the campaigns in Egypt at the beginning of the present century could still furnish useful lessons for our guidance to-day.

12. But in truth the old military lines of operation have been rendered obsolete by the construction of the Suez Canal, which has imparted an entirely new feature to the question of the defence of Egypt.

13. The objective point of any invader of that country in the first instance would unquestionably be either the obstruction or the possession of the Suez Canal, which geographically may be said to lie outside Egypt proper; and thus, although the northern coast defences are insufficient to prevent an enemy having command of the sea from effecting a landing near Alexandria, or at other points between that place and Damietta, the choice of any such points of debarkation would not facilitate, but would rather lead him away from his real object, and would commit him to tedious operations through a country whose difficulties have been generally described above.

14. The historical invasions of Egypt in ancient times have always taken place from Palestine; and here as elsewhere history is found to repeat itself, inasmuch as the weak spot in the armour of Egypt now is to be looked for on the Eastern side of the Suez Canal.

15. Supposing an enemy intending to invade Egypt not to possess the command of the Mediterranean or Red Sea, he would be obliged first to possess himself of Palestine and to organize his invasion from that country as a base.

16. For such an enterprise, any force smaller than two corps d'armée perfectly appointed, would be entirely inadequate.

17. From Gaza, the supposed starting point in Palestine, to Kantara, where the direct route to Cairo crosses the Suez Canal, the number of days' march is at the least twelve; and for two-thirds of that period the whole of the drinking water for men and horses would have to be carried, since the few surface wells at the different halting places would not suffice to supply one battalion, and that only with brackish water fit only for horses or camels.

18. There are doubtless many instances in modern times of desert marches by a military force successfully accomplished; but these have been made by very small bodies.

19. For instance, in 1801, General Baird coming from India landed at Cosseir, on the Red Sea, and marched from that place to Kench, on the Nile, for the purpose of co-operating with General Hutchinson in Lower Egypt.

His total force collected at Kench was about 5,220 rank and file; the distance traversed was about 120 miles; and was accomplished in nine days without a day's halt; and the number of camels required for the transport of the force was 5,000, or nearly one camel for each of the rank and file.

20. Napoleon led 14,000 men across the Syrian desert to invade Syria. His transport consisted of 3,000 camels and 3,000 mules; of these, 2,000 camels were required to carry a 3 days' supply of water, which supply was to be renewed at Katieh and at El Arish from the wells at these places; 1,000 camels carried 15 days' provisions for 14,000 men and 3,000 horses; and the 3,000 mules carried the baggage, &c.

If the wells at Katieh and El Arith had been filled in, 6,000 camels would have been necessary to carry water alone.

21. The preparations that would therefore be necessary for the march of two corps d'armée across the Syrian desert from Palestine would be enormous; and this force might be stopped for an indefinite time by a defensive army occupying one of the strongest military positions that can be imagined, at one march distant from the Suez Canal, as will hereafter be described.* Here the defenders would be amply and easily supplied with all requirements; while the invaders would have to bring up everything across the desert from Gaza, and to guard their trains from the attacks of the Bedouins.

22. The difficulties of this method of invasion would, indeed, be so great as almost to remove it out of the category of practicable operations; yet if the enemy

* See paragraphs 67 to 70 inclusive.

did not possess the command of the sea, he must either attempt it or abandon the idea of invading Egypt altogether.

23. On the other hand, supposing an enemy to possess the naval command of the Mediterranean, he would never think of basing his invasion on Palestine; but would force an entry into the Canal at Port Said, and if he found his further progress obstructed, he would land his army at some point on the coast in convenient neighbourhood to Port Said, march on Kantara, and then proceed to open communication with his ships.

But in order to a correct appreciation of this point a short description of the Suez Canal is necessary.

SUEZ CANAL.—(See Map No. 2.)

24. The object of England at all times will be the protection of the Canal from injury or interruption.

25. The object of any other Power invading Egypt will be—

(1.) Either the permanent possession of the Canal by conquest;

(2.) Or its temporary obstruction for the purpose of shutting out England from India during a few critical weeks.

26. The temporary obstruction of the Canal might be effected in two different ways, viz. :—

(1.) By small parties of the enemy which might find their way through the Syrian desert for the purpose of blowing in the sides of some of the different cuttings;

(2.) By neutral vessels, which having been bribed thereto, might be scuttled and sunk in the channel; and this is a danger which can only be effectually prevented by excluding all neutral vessels in time of war.

27. The Suez Canal may be described in general terms as a water way through a chain of inland lakes which are joined together by cuttings through the intervening ridges.

28. The Canal channel through the lakes can easily be protected by gunboats from being injured by open attack.

29. But the dangerous portions are the cuttings, of which there are six, viz., enumerating from the north, Kantara, El Ferdane, El Guisar, Toussoum, Serapeum, and Chalauf. Here the width at water line is only 64 yards, while the width of the actual channel is only 24 yards.

30. The highest ground along the Canal is the centre near Ismailia, where the Canal passes through a cutting six miles long which joins Lake Ballah to Lake Timsah. The plateau of El Guisar through which this cutting was made, has an elevation of from 60 to 120 feet above the sea, and evidently formed the ancient "divide" between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea; and here is the place where the temporary obstruction of the Canal by the explosion of a few bags of gunpowder might be most easily and effectually accomplished.

31. The three cuttings between Ismailia and Suez, i.e., on the southern half of the Canal, are of comparatively minor importance, in proportion to their distance from the enemy's supposed starting point; but, in general terms, the approaches to the Canal at all the cuttings, where not otherwise covered, should be watched by detachments of light troops mounted on dromedaries, each detachment patrolling its proper front, and having its passage to the western side secured by pontoons or boats, so that the guarding detachments might be withdrawn if necessary, and concentrated by marching behind the screen of the Canal on any other point required. It is submitted that this measure ought to prevent the Canal from being injured by such small parties of an enemy as could alone find their way across the desert with such rapidity as to make the danger real.

32. For the purposes of this argument the Canal may be divided into three sections, viz. :—

1. Port Said to Kantara, 28 miles.

2. Kantara to Ismailia, 21 miles.

3. Ismailia to Suez, 51 miles.

FIRST SECTION.—Port Said to Kantara : 28 miles.

33. This is the most important section in a military point of view. The Canal runs from its northern terminus at Port Said for a distance of 27 miles through Lake Menzaleh, the width at the water line being 328 feet.

34. The portion of Lake Menzaleh, which is thus cut off by the Canal on its eastern side, has been entirely drained by the Canal, and presents a hard surface for the march of troops over the old bed of the lake.

35. Beyond this old bed of Lake Menzaleh, however, extends the ancient plain or basin of Pelusium, through which the old Pelusiatic branch of the Nile found its way to the sea. The neighbourhood of the mouth of this old Pelusiatic branch is marked by Port Tineh, and by some old ruins said to be the site of ancient Pelusium.

36. This plain of Pelusium is now a sort of salt marsh, full of shifting quick-sands, and its surface is impracticable for troops. It is separated from the Mediterranean by a strip of hard beach from 100 to 200 yards wide, over which the sea breaks in high northerly gales and washes into the swampy plain beyond.

37. Thus, unless an army were to disembark at Port Said itself with the design of marching along the banks of the Canal or over the drained portica of Lake Menzaleh, the nearest point to Port Said which would be suitable for a disembarkation is in the neighbourhood of Rommaneh, at a point distant from that place 6 miles in a due northerly direction, and about 28 miles by the coast line from Port Said. A personal examination convinced the writer that in favourable weather, and if unopposed, 50,000 men could be here landed in a few hours. For a disembarkation, November is the quietest month. The prevailing winter winds are north-north-west and north-west, but they are not often heavy. Summer winds are north-east.

38. From this supposed point of debarkation an enemy would be at the distance of only two rather long marches from Kantara, the southern limit of the section now under consideration, by a route which, leading past Rommaneh, joins the main road from Palestine by Katieh at a place called Bir el Noos.

39. Returning now to Port Said, the line of the Canal up to within two miles of Kantara, is protected on the west by the large sheet of salt water called Lake Menzaleh, which extends as far as Damietta. The lake is separated from the sea throughout its whole northern front by a narrow strip of hard beach, similar to that which constitutes the breakwater to the basin of Pelusium, in which are several openings where the sea finds passage; but the water in the lake is so shallow—in some places not more than twelve inches—as to be impracticable for boats, except in certain portions, at any season of the year.

40. Port Said itself (population about 13,000) is the safest and most easily approached harbour on the north coast of Egypt. The harbour capacity is about 450 acres, the average depth of water being only from 13 to 14 feet. It is only in the Ship Channel that the depth is 26 feet, but the channel being only 72 feet wide at the base barely affords room for two ships to pass one another. Port Said is at present undefended by any works, and is entirely dependent for its water supply on the forcing engines which have been established at Ismailia, 50 miles distant, which pump the water from the sweet-water canal through a double row of iron pipes. The entry into Port Said might be forbidden by torpedoes, but these would not probably be effective unless covered by powerful batteries. The construction of such batteries in time of peace would certainly be objected to on international grounds; and therefore the best protection would probably be afforded by floating batteries, which could be made stronger both in offensive and resisting power than sea-going iron-clads. Such a method of defence, however, supposes the floating batteries to be ready, and to be capable of being placed in the required position whenever the necessity for employing them might present itself; and in that case, even though an entrance to the Canal might be forced by a hostile fleet, the removal of the floating batteries to some convenient long reach of the Canal, in connection with a few guns placed *en cremaillère* on the Canal banks on each flank, and the sinking of a vessel in the Channel under protection of their fire, between them and the enemy's approaching ships, would constitute an effectual stoppage to the latter for a time.

41. But for some such measures, supposing an enemy to obtain an entrance to the Canal at Port Said, his infantry could march along both banks of the Canal, *pari passu* with a flotilla, and might thus gain Kantara.

42. Kantara, the southern limit of the section under consideration, is of great strategical importance.

Kantara is at the highest point of the chain of low sand hills which interpose between Lake Menzaleh on the north and the small inland Lake of Ballah on the south. The cutting between the two lakes is about one-and-a-half miles in length. The name Kantara, signifying in Arabic bridge or ford, indicates its position at the point where, from a period a thousand years before the Exodus of the Children of Israel, the lakes

and shoals that intervened between the Syrian desert on the east and the Egyptian desert on the west, were crossed. The road leading by Kantara was one of the greatest highways of the old world, and served as the route for the succeeding armies of Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and French. At the present time, a floating bridge ferries over the canal at Kantara the traveller with his camels between Egypt and Syria.

43. The strategical importance of Kantara consists in this:—

That its possession would at once fulfil the primary object of an invader in giving him power over the Suez Canal, and would afford him the means of acquiring a solid base of operations and a firm hold on the country.

44. Supposing that a hostile fleet with the invading army on board could possess itself of Port Said and penetrate to Kantara, its position there in communication with the sea would be very strong, and the line of canal from Kantara to Port Said would practically constitute its harbour. But it must be assumed that the progress of an enemy's ships through the Canal would be impeded by obstructions which it might require weeks to remove; and if their removal were left to the ships alone, the work would be endless, as fresh obstructions could continually be created.

45. It is for this reason that an invader, even supposing him to have seized on Port Said, would probably seek some convenient point of debarkation within striking distance of Kantara, such as that indicated in paragraph 37, from whence he could march to the latter place, there entrench himself, and then proceed systematically to open communications with the fleet in the direction of Port Said.

46. But the road by which an enemy coming either from the coast near Pelusium, or from Katieh, must march to reach Kantara, is crossed at the distance of twelve miles east of the latter place and nearly at right angles, by a range of heights which extend north as far as the swampy plain of Pelusium, and south as far as the eye can see, and afford one of the strongest defensive positions it is possible to imagine.

This will be adverted to further on.*

SECOND SECTION.—Kantara to Ismailia : 21 miles.

47. Between Kantara and Ismailia the Canal passes through two shallow lakes of Ballah, separated by the low sandy heights called El Ferdane, through which the cutting for the Canal is about four miles long.

48. On leaving the southernmost of the Lakes Ballah, the Canal enters the cutting, six miles long, through the heights of El Guisir, which formerly separated Lake Ballah from Lake Timsah. These heights have an elevation of from 60 to 120 feet above the sea.

49. Ismailia, the southern limit of the section under consideration, is situated on the western shore of Lake Timsah, and it is a place of great strategical importance, as is shown by the following facts:

50. Ismailia is near the junction of the Cairo-Ismailia and Suez-Ismailia Railways, as well as of the Cairo-Ismailia and Suez-Ismailia sweet-water Canals.

51. The actual railway and canal junctions are at Nefiche, about two miles west of Ismailia, from which point a short branch railway runs to Ismailia, and a branch canal runs also to the latter place and into the Maritime Canal.

52. At Ismailia also, are the waterworks and pumping engines, by means of which Port Said, and the intervening Canal stations, are supplied with fresh water, pumped through a double row of cast-iron pipes.

At all the Canal stations are reservoirs for storing the water; and at intervals of two-and-a-half miles are self-filling cisterns for the use of man and beast. At Port Said is a reservoir holding three days' consumption of water for the population.

53. Suez is entirely dependent for its fresh-water supply on the main sweet-water canal which, leaving the Nile at Cairo, runs for the most part by the side of the railway between Cairo and Nefiche, and between Nefiche and Suez. This canal is now navigable for barges all the way between Cairo and Suez, but its capacity is being enlarged, so as to accommodate a larger class of vessels.

54. Ismailia is, moreover, topographically important, because it is on the flank of any hostile force supposed to have crossed the Canal on the north or south, for the purpose of marching on Cairo.

55. The above considerations indicate Ismailia as a proper site for an entrenched camp, the works of which should embrace and protect the waterworks of Ismailia proper, and the important canal and railway junctions at Nefiche.

* See paragraphs 67 to 70 inclusive.

56. Such camp would also arrest the progress of an enemy supposing him to have landed near Pelusium, and to march on Cairo by Ismaïlia.

57. The route from Pelusium by Katieh to Ismaïlia is four marches long, and is crossed by an extension of the same range described (in paragraph 46) as covering Kantara, and as affording very strong defensive positions. But the occupation of any advanced position covering Ismaïlia, would be rendered unnecessary by the construction of an entrenched camp at the latter place.

58. The Ismaïlia camp would also intercept the march of an enemy supposed to have landed at Suez, by the most advantageous route he could select for reaching Cairo, now that the opening of the sweet-water canal has provided a good road for the march of an army alongside of the Canal, thereby giving all the advantages of the desert in respect to immunity from inundation, and all the advantages of the cultivated country in respect of supplies.

THIRD SECTION.—*Ismaïlia to Suez: 51 miles.*

59. Between Ismaïlia and Suez the Canal passes through Lake Timsah, which is joined on to the Bitter Lakes by the cuttings of Tonssoum and Serapeum, about six miles long, through sand-hills from 15 to 21 feet high. The extreme length from north to south of the Bitter Lakes is 25 miles. The Canal then passes through the Chalouf cutting (six miles long, 20 to 25 feet high) into the plain of Suez, through which it runs for a distance of ten miles before reaching its southern terminus.

60. Throughout the whole of this section the Maritime Canal is bordered by the Railway and Sweet Water Canal from Ismaïlia to Suez; and the country between the two Canals will soon be converted into a garden through the agency of the Nile water.

61. Suez, which depends entirely on the Sweet Water Canal for its water supply, is unprotected by any works, and together with its harbour and docks (a full description of which is in possession of the Intelligence Branch), is entirely at the mercy of any Power commanding the Red Sea.

62. Thus, even supposing an enemy to be master of the Mediterranean, the Suez end of the Canal would be open to English troops from Bombay, and, in that case, the entrenched camp at Ismaïlia advocated above, would become a point of paramount strategical importance.

SUEZ CANAL.—*General Method of Defence.*

63. It has been argued above that unless an enemy possessed the command of the Mediterranean or Red Sea, he could only reach Egypt by a march across the desert from Palestine, and supposing him to surmount the difficulties of organizing such an expedition, his starting point would be Gaza, and he would march by El Arish and Katieh.

64. It has also been assumed that in the event of an enemy possessing the Mediterranean, his attempt on the Suez Canal would be made by seizing the harbour of Port Saïd, in connection with a landing to be effected on open beach somewhere near Pelusium.

65. In either supposed case the general measures for the defence of the Canal would be nearly the same.

66. In either case it would be a mistake for the defenders to move far from their base of supply, which is supposed to be Kantara; and to encounter the hardships of a desert march, for the purpose of arresting the progress of the invader at a distance from the Suez Canal. The defensive army should rather occupy the nearest favorable position, covering the eastern side of the Canal generally, and Kantara in particular, that the country affords; because the labour of supplying the defensive army, as well as the fatigue of the troops, would decrease, and those of the invader would increase, in proportion to the distance of either from their base of supply; and because the latter, if defeated, would suffer during his retreat more or less in the same proportion.

Not to mention that any defensive position east of Katieh could be turned by a force landed near Pelusium.

67. The favorable position referred to in the last paragraph is afforded by the line of heights which cross nearly at right angles the route leading from Kantara to Katieh.

68. This route undulates slightly between Kantara and Googra, nine miles distant, where is a grove of palms and two wells of surface-water.

From Googra the road begins to rise over the range of heights referred to, the distance over which, as the crow flies, is not more than five miles to the plain a few miles west of Katieh; but the road which must be followed is at least nine miles over the range.

From Kantara to Googra the track is solid and broad and easy travelling for man, animals, and even carriages; but beyond Googra it becomes deep sand, very distressing to march, and preserves the same character all across the range.

69. These heights extend north to the swampy basin of Pelusium, and south as far as the eye can see, intercepting also the track leading from Katieh to Ismailia. Some of the sand-hills attain an elevation of 300 feet above the sea and 150 feet above the track. The general character of the range is that of gigantic "ridge and furrow," the eastern slopes being very precipitous, and the western very long and easy.

The range affords three parallel positions of great strength, the crests of which are from 50 to 120 feet above the foot of the eastern slope, the lowest height being always the depression over which the road passes.

Thus an enemy coming from the east to attack either of the three parallel positions, must march slowly and painfully down the long western slope in sand nearly ankle deep, exposed to the guns of the position for at least an hour before he could arrive at the foot of the steep eastern heights, which it would then be impossible for him to scale, if opposed ever so weakly, on account of the depth of sand. It is impossible to imagine stronger defensive ground, and under the present conditions of fire these positions could almost be held by artillery alone.

70. The best position for occupation by the defensive army is the one nearest to Kantara, about one and a half miles east of Googra; both because it is nearest to the base of supply, and because it intercepts the track coming from the sea-coast near Pelusium which joins the El Arish and Katieh road at Bir el Noos.*

71. A tram-road could easily be laid down from Kantara to the position; and a large part of the transport which would otherwise be required could be saved by laying water pipes from Kantara to the position, which would be connected with the double row of pipes coming from Ismailia; and thus the position would be supplied with abundant water-supply by the pumping-engines at the latter place.

72. This position could not be turned from the north except by a force landed at Port Said, and marching along the Canal banks and over the drained portion of Lake Menzaleh. But a movement over the drained portion of the lake might be rendered impossible by inundating it, as it would be easy to do; and a march along the Canal banks might be prevented by the measures indicated in paragraph 40.

73. The occupation of the position here described provides for the defence of that part of the Canal extending from Port Said to the southern extremity of the Lakes of Ballah.

74. Next let it be supposed that an enemy, coming either from Palestine or from a landing-place near Pelusium, should direct his march on Ismailia instead of on Kantara.

75. An invasion from Palestine would only be attempted by an enemy who, not possessing the command of the Mediterranean, could not reach Egypt by any other method; and, therefore, having no co-operating fleet to consider, the distance of the point from Port Said at which he might first strike the Canal would be a matter of indifference; but Ismailia is farther from Katieh than Kantara by two desert marches, which would not be a matter of indifference, and the defence of Ismailia would be secured, either by occupying an advanced position on the prolongation of the heights described above as covering Kantara, or by the entrenched camp at Ismailia, supposing it to exist.

76. On the other hand, if the enemy has landed near Pelusium, that supposes a co-operating fleet with which he would be constrained to open communication; and in this view an advance on Ismailia need not be apprehended, because at Ismailia he would be 50 miles, instead of as at Kantara 28 miles, from the co-operating fleet at Port Said.

77. The defensive measures here advocated may be summarized as follows:—

* Bir el Noos is close to the place marked on the maps of Egypt as "Ancient Magdalon," and as the supposed site of the Migdol of the Exodus. Magdalon, which signifies "fortress," must also be the site of the fortified wall referred to in a late pamphlet by Herr Brugsch ("La Sortie des Hébreux"), as "les murailles," through which, as is shown by papyrus writings and stone inscriptions, all travellers between Egypt and Syria were obliged to pass a thousand years before the Pharaoh of the Exodus. It is extremely probable that the defensive position which has been above described is on the very same site as the ancient fortified wall referred to; and that it will, therefore, again become at the present time, what it was 4,000 years ago, the frontier military post of Egypt for defence against Palestine.

(1) To occupy the defensive position 12 miles east of Kantara (described in paragraphs 69 and 70), which covers all approaches from the eastward on any part of the Canal extending from Port Said to the southern extremity of Lakes Ballah.

(2) To prevent this position being turned from the north by a force landing at Port Said and marching along the Canal banks, by measures generally indicated at paragraph 40.

(3) To protect Ismailia and the important railway and Canal junctions by the entrenched camp advocated in paragraph 55.

78. By these measures the line of the Canal would be secured from Port Said to Ismailia. Nothing but the lightest of flying columns mounted on dromedaries could approach the Canal south of Ismailia; and to guard against the attempts of such flying columns to injure or obstruct the Canal it would be sufficient to watch the approaches to the different cuttings between Ismailia and Suez by picketing the eastern bank in front of those places by light troops, having retreat across the Canal, and communication with supports assured by pontoons or boats.

79. A gunboat for service on Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes, would secure the channel through those sheets of water.

80. While it is obvious that Suez is invulnerable so long as England holds the Red Sea.

81. Next, although the Suez Canal affords the most convenient means of passage across Egypt for British troops *en route* to India, it is not the only means. If the Canal were obstructed troops landed at Alexandria could be sent by railway to Suez, and there embarked for Bombay.

82. The transit of British troops across Egypt, however, supposes absolutely that England is supreme in the Mediterranean, as otherwise the Cape route must be necessarily adopted.

83. There are two ways in which the use of the Canal might be forbidden:—

(1) By obstructions secretly effected, as indicated in paragraph 26.

(2) By an enemy who has succeeded in establishing himself on the Canal by force. It is true that this is a case of extreme improbability, because according to the stated conditions, he would be obliged to organize his invasion from Palestine and march across the desert (see paragraphs 15 to 22). Still it ought not to be left altogether out of account.

84. In either of the above two cases the railway from Alexandria to Suez would have to be employed for the transport of troops proceeding to India. And in the last of these cases the railway would have to be covered by the strategical front of the defensive army against an enemy's advance from the Suez Canal.

85. It is assumed that the enemy must debouch from Kantara. Suez would certainly be in our possession, and he could not venture to cross the Canal between Suez and the (proposed) entrenched camp at Ismailia.

86. Some favourable position should therefore be chosen in rear of the Canal, which would cover the railway system of the country, and as many important points as possible against the advance of the enemy from Kantara.

87. Such a position is afforded by the line of heights extending from near Salahieh on the left to the Wady el Toumilat on the right. This line, representing the strategical front of the defensive army, covers Cairo, the Barrage, and the whole railway system of the country, and should be entrenched when the necessity becomes apparent.

88. This line could not be turned by an invader passing to the south of the Sweet-Water Canal, supposing Ismailia to be fortified as above suggested, and occupied by a portion of the defensive army.

89. Salahieh itself is on the plateau which extends from Wady el Toumilat on the south to beyond the cultivated land on the borders of which Salahieh is situated, on the north. The elevation of this plateau above the Wady at Tel el Kibeer is from 40 to 60 feet; and the edge of the plateau sweeps round by Ras el Wady, and is found again at a distance of $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Salahieh in going to Kantara. The range of heights here slopes down from the main plateau to a lower plateau composed largely of salt marsh, the height of this range being from 30 to 50 feet above the lower plateau, direction of the range from N.W. to S.E.

90. Here is a strong defensive position. It extends to the south-east as far as the eye can see, with a tendency towards due south.

91. Two miles further east, in the direction of Kantara, the secondary plateau sinks by a step of heights, averaging 30 feet high, into the general plain which extends to Kantara.

92. Passing on, the road strikes the Canal bank a mile south of Kantara, and then runs due north to the latter place, passing between the Canal bank on the right, and Lake Menzaleh on the left, thus forming a defile from 100 to 200 yards wide which might be easily defended at its southern extremity against a very superior force.

93. The general strategical front extending from Salahieh to the Waddy is about fifteen miles in extent. The right flank has railroad and telegraph communication with Zagazig, and therefore with Cairo and all parts of Lower Egypt; also water communication with Cairo by the new Canal, and with other parts of the Nile by Zagazig.

94. The left flank also possesses railroad communication with all parts of Lower Egypt by means of the line which has recently been constructed from Abou Kibeer to Salahieh, at which place also the telegraph lines from Cairo and Damietta join. This flank is also abundantly supplied with water by several canals.

The advantages thus afforded for the transport of men and supplies to both flanks of the short strategical front alluded to are very great.

95. Before an invader could advance from Kantara against this strategical front, he would be obliged either to capture or mask the supposed entrenched camp at Ismailia.

96. If ultimately he obtained possession of Ismailia, and should be able to force the Salahieh-Wady line, the game would be nearly up. The enemy would have obtained his primary object, and the reduction of the country could be proceeded with more leisurely.

97. In marching on Cairo, he would be obliged to march by the desert, hugging the cultivated land for supplies; for the march of an army through the cultivated land would be impossible if seriously opposed, owing to the innumerable canals and water-courses crossing his line of march, which could soon be converted into entrenchments.

98. The town of Belbeis is almost a fortress in itself, if approached through the cultivated land. It is flanked on both sides by canals, and the front is covered by a large water-course extending to these canals on both sides; but there is nothing to prevent a successful enemy who has, it is supposed, beaten the defensive army back to this point, from turning Belbeis by the desert, which is here a plain, with the exception of some slight elevations extending from the bridge over the Boulak Canal at right angles to the course of the Canal at this point for a distance of about 300 yards, and obtaining a height of some 30 feet over the plain at the highest point, where a sort of mound terminates the high ground abruptly. From this mound the plain stretches away for ten or twelve miles to a range of mountains.

99. But, in truth, the defensive advantages of Egypt along the line of operations which has here been considered are so great, that unless attacked by a powerful enemy, possessing and able to maintain the command of the Mediterranean, a successful defence should be a certainty.

100. And, even though an enemy should be master of the Mediterranean, the Suez end of the Canal would be open to English troops from Bombay, which would be directed on the supposed entrenched camp at Ismailia, which would in such a case become a point of paramount strategical importance.

101. Considering the ease with which the Suez Canal might be temporarily obstructed, by design or by accident, it is desirable to organise by anticipation all details of the transport of troops by railway between Alexandria and Suez; and, in that view, the Intelligence Branch is collecting the necessary information in respect to rolling stock and general capacity of the Egyptian railways.

(Signed)

P. MACDOUGALL,

Deputy Quartermaster-General.

*Horse Guards, War Office,
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