

Muhammad ali – one
of the most
controversial egyptian
leaders in history
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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Muhammad Ali is one of the most controversial Egyptian leaders in history, and historians to this day continue to argue his significance and achievements. Many label him “ The founder of Modern Egypt,” while others consider him the first Arab nationalist. Despite this everlasting debate, one thing was clear: Muhammad Ali had a list of goals he wished to accomplish during his rule, some of which he realized, and others in which he failed.

From the modernization of Egypt to the building of a united Arab nation, his actions effectively led Egypt into the 20th century as a powerful entity, and his accomplishments bred ideas of revolution and unity within the Arab people that had not been seen since the days of the prophet Mohammed. Although he did not achieve every one of his goals, the ones he did reach have left an influence on the growth of Egypt that can still be felt to this day. One of Muhammad Ali’s main and most significant aims was to modernize the Egyptian army.

Prior to his rule, the military had been an unorganized, divided fighting-force, similar to that of the Ottoman Empire. Muhammad Ali consolidated power and directly began to organize the military. However, he noticed that it was too small of a force to accomplish any significant victories. For this reason, Muhammad used his invasion of the vast Sudanese lands to conscript Sudanese people into his army. However, these people could not adapt to Egypt, and thus Muhammad was forced to look for an alternative source for soldiers.

In a European-type move, Muhammad took drastic steps the area had not witnessed before; he began to conscript Egyptian peasants into the army.

Unemployed French commanders from the Napoleon era were then brought in to train these soldiers, and when he was finished, Muhammad Ali had an army of over 100, 000 well-trained men. They were equipped with advanced weapons, and some of the higher officers were educated in military tactics, so that the army was an organized, European-style fighting force.

Military hardware was being manufactured in Egypt, instead of being imported, and thus the Egyptians were able to secure their trade routes and expand their territory. Throughout the later stages of his reign, Muhammad Ali's army had become the most powerful military force in the Mediterranean, from which the Ottoman Empire was beginning to fear. Its precise organization and well planned tactics was the intangible in the Ottoman-Egyptian struggle, and the Egyptians gained so much power that only the stronger European countries were able to suppress Egyptian expansion.

In terms of the military, Muhammad Ali was able to achieve his goal. The army had become so modernized that it was able to overcome the dominant Ottoman Empire with its aging tactics. Victories in Greece, Syria, and the Arab Peninsula only emphasized the fact that Muhammad Ali had taken a weak, unorganized group of soldiers and changed them into a powerful, cohesive military unit that was unmatched in the region. A newly formed navy gave Egypt power over the waters, and Muhammad Ali had accomplished his goal of creating a military with which he could lead Egypt.

Although the military was unpopular among Egyptians, it nonetheless molded into Muhammad's idea of a modern army, and this led to the tool

with which he accomplished a number of his other goals. Another of Muhammad's goals was to strengthen Egyptian industry. Like the military, Muhammad began to modernize the industrial sector by optimizing its organization. He implemented numerous agricultural reforms in which Egypt was divided into provinces, districts, subordinate divisions, villages, and urban quarters.

From 1837-1875, he set up ministries corresponding to industry and agriculture, and provincial officials were appointed to maximize the industrial development. However, despite these various reforms, the new industrial policy was not successful. Approximately 12 million pounds were spent with very little return. The climate made it difficult to operate machines. The labor force was made up of unskilled members, and management was incompetent. A harmful lack of a power source limited the extent to which Egyptian industry could grow.

Overall, Muhammad Ali's goals for industrial reform seemed premature. The Egyptian people were not ready and were not equipped for such a rapid growth, and unlike with the army, Muhammad was not able to overcome certain aspects, which resulted in the restriction of any swift and profitable advancement. In this case, his plan was a complete failure. Another of Muhammad Ali's goals was to centralize the Egyptian government. In 1811, Muhammad Ali invited the remaining Mamluks to a ceremony at the citadel, in which he brutally had every one of them murdered.

With this single stroke, Muhammad Ali had become the sole leader of the Egyptian nation. Through this absolute rule, he began delegating power by

setting up ministries and districts. With this, he established a system of rule that trickled down from him. A new group of technocrats were given positions in the government based on their merits, and thus a form of bureaucracy was established. Egypt was split up into provinces and districts, which were governed by appointed individuals responsible of law and order and the collection of taxes.

Despite this delegation of power, Muhammad Ali retained the right to make all major decisions on his own. In another unprecedented event, Muhammad Ali began to give native Egyptians posts in the government and the military, which increased the sense of nationalism and maintained a group of capable individuals in contact with the Egyptian people. There is no doubt that Muhammad Ali accomplished his goal of centralizing the Egyptian administrative system.

Although he was not considered an Egyptian himself, he had unquestioned rule over the entire Egyptian land and its territories. With the elimination of the Mamluks, Muhammad Ali had no powerful opposition to his power, and he was thus able to make all major decisions concerning the military, industry, agriculture, education, and justice systems without hesitation. With this centralization, Muhammad reached his goal of becoming the sole ruler of Egypt, and a new “Egyptinization” began to grow in the administration, following with his successors.