

**GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SUAKIN  
ON ANGLO-TURKISH RIVALRY DURING THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

### GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SUAKIN ON ANGLO-TURKISH RIVALRY DURING THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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This thesis argues that the geopolitical significance of Suakin in the Red Sea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be explained through the Anglo-Turkish rivalry. The fact that Suakin is being considered as a strategic region stems from its location as an economic, administrative and a military center. Suakin, which needs to be retained to have control of the Red Sea surroundings, witnessed the Ottoman-Portuguese struggle, which ended in favor of the Ottomans. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fact that Britain pursued an expansionist policy toward Africa caused it to clash against the Ottoman Empire. Britain, which intended to capture the maritime line that is between India and the Mediterranean, along with Egypt and Sudan, wanted to include Suakin in its colonies. The Ottoman Empire, in turn, struggled for the controlling of Suakin both for the maintenance of its presence in the region and the defense of the Hejaz. The fact that Suakin was the focal point of not only the two great powers but also the local powers intending to have an influence in the region throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates its geopolitical significance.

**Key Words:** Suakin, the Red Sea, Sudan, Anglo-Turkish rivalry, the 19<sup>th</sup> century

## ÖZ

### 19. YÜZYIL OSMANLI-İNGİLİZ REKABETİNDE SEVAKİN'İN JEOPOLİTİK ÖNEMİ

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Bu tez, Sevakin'in Kızıldeniz siyasetindeki jeopolitik öneminin 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı-İngiliz rekabeti üzerinden açıklanabileceğini savunmaktadır. Sevakin'in stratejik bir bölge olarak nitelendirilmesi onun ticari, idari ve bazen askeri bir merkez olmasından ileri gelmektedir. Kızıldeniz civarının kontrol edilebilmesi için elde tutulması gerekli olan Sevakin, 16. yüzyılda Osmanlı lehine sonuçlanan Osmanlı-Portekiz mücadelesine sahne olmuştur. 19. yüzyılda ise İngiltere'nin Afrika'ya yönelik yayılcı bir politika izlemesi Osmanlı Devleti ile mücadeleye girişmesine sebep olmuştur. Mısır ve Sudan'ın yanı sıra Hindistan ile Akdeniz arasındaki denizyolunu da kontrol etmek isteyen İngiltere, Sevakin'i sömürgelerine dahil etmek istemiştir. Osmanlı Devleti ise bölgedeki varlığını sürdürebilmek ve özellikle Hicaz'ın savunmasını sağlayabilmek için Sevakin'i elinde tutabilmek için büyük mücadele vermiştir. 19. yüzyıl boyunca, Sevakin sadece bu iki büyük gücün değil, aynı zamanda bölgede etkinlik kurmak isteyen yerel güçlerin de odağında olması onun jeopolitik açıdan önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sevakin, Kızıldeniz, Sudan, Osmanlı-İngiliz Rekabeti, 19. yy

**To the ruins of Suakin...**

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## **LIST OF MAPS**

- MAP 1:** Maritime Connections of Suakin ..... 13
- MAP 2:** Suakin in the Map of the Middle East during the World War I..... 75



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
DEDICATION .....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
LIST OF MAPS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Why Suakin? .....	1
1.2 Aims and Limitations .....	4
1.3 The Methodology of the Thesis .....	5
1.4 Outlining the Structure .....	7
1.5 Suakin as a Geopolitically Vital Location .....	9
1.6 The Emergence of Suakin in History .....	9
1.7 Suakin’s Proximity to Port Cities and Maritime Trade Routes.....	10
1.8 Suakin as a Transit Hub for the Pilgrims .....	14
2. SUAKIN BEFORE THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN ADMINISTRATION.....	16
2.1 Strategic Rivalry on Suakin Between the Ottoman Empire and Portugal .....	18
2.1.1 Ottoman-Portuguese Struggle on Suakin for Trade.....	19
2.1.2 Ottoman-Portuguese Struggle on Suakin for Religious Considerations .....	21
2.1.3 Struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Funj Sultanate on Suakin .....	23
2.2 Suakin as a Part of Egypt Province during the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century.....	25
2.2.1 Reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha in Suakin .....	26
2.2.2 Control of Ismail Pasha in Suakin .....	30

2.2.3 The Strategic Agenda of Egypt on Suakin During the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century .....	35
2.3 Anglo-Turkish Relations During the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century.....	39
2.3.1 British Involvement into Suakin.....	40
2.3.2 British Existence in the Suakin in terms of Commercial Activities.....	42
2.3.3 Samuel Baker: The First British Representative of Sudan ..	43
2.3.4 The Reign of Gordon Pasha on Sudan.....	45
3. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANGLO-EGYPTIAN ADMINISTRATION ON SUAKIN AND THE OTTOMAN REACTION .....	50
3.1 The Mahdist Movement Against the Egyptian Existence.....	51
3.1.1 The Mahdist Movement in Suakin .....	52
3.1.2 The Ottoman Reaction against the Mahdist Movement in Suakin .....	56
3.2 British Invasion of Sudan and Suakin.....	66
3.2.1 The Establishment of Anglo-Egyptian Administration in Sudan .....	67
3.2.2 Suakin under the Anglo-Egyptian Administration .....	71
3.2.3 Ottoman Reaction of Anglo-Egyptian Administration.....	72
4. CONCLUSION.....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	81
APPENDICES	
A. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET .....	88
B. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU .....	98

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introductory chapter is one of the most crucial components of a thesis in terms of drawing a general outlook over the study. This introduction has been divided into four different subtitles to elucidate the characteristics of the study more comprehensively. The first section aims to explain why Suakin was chosen as the main subject of the thesis. This is essential to exhibit the strategic importance of the chosen subject matter. The second part illustrates the aim of the study, this will be addressed briefly. In addition, the limitations of the thesis will be emphasized in terms of the time period, areal limitation and sources available. This section will endeavor to produce a compact study instead of a disarranged thesis. The third part will be related to the methodology applied to the creation of this thesis, by questioning both methodology and its relevance throughout. The fourth subtopic will outline the structure of the thesis. It will contain a brief overview of the consecutive chapters providing us with a helpful summary of the content. The other parts in this introductory chapter will be related to significance of the geopolitical location of Suakin.

#### **1.1. Why Suakin?**

This thesis will aim to assess the geopolitical importance of Suakin on the basis of the rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a coastal city on the western side of the Red Sea, Suakin has a unique place in terms of its location. The geographical uniqueness of Suakin attracted attention from many great powers throughout history. These included the Ottoman Empire, Portugal, and Britain and regional powers such

as Funj Sultanate. Controlling Suakin was central to controlling of the Red Sea trade routes, including the Hejaz.

The Ottoman Empire was eager to control Suakin, not only to aid the expansion of its borders throughout East Africa, but also to strengthen its presence at the Hejaz which provided religious justification for the Ottoman Sultans. In this quest, the Ottoman Empire struggled against both Portugal and Britain to claim sovereignty over the region. They had already gained dominance throughout the eastern parts of Africa with the conquests of Selim I in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman sovereignty in this region was also strongly pursued during the period of Suleiman the Magnificent. To implement its long-running domination through the region, the Ottoman Empire was aware that it had to maintain control of this strategic location. This political awareness propelled Suakin as a primary target for the Ottoman Empire attention, a necessity in the quest for its geostrategic influence in East Africa.

When the Ottoman Turks conquered the lands in East Africa, they just integrated them into the Egyptian Province. However, with the increase of the Ottoman influence in the region, they also created a new province, *eyalet*, and named it Habesh. After the creation of the province of Habesh, the Ottoman Empire developed Suakin not just for commercial purposes but also for the administration of the newly established province. Over time, this island became one of the most important security points in the region as its position was central to both trade routes and the pilgrimages crossing Suakin to the Hejaz.

There is uncertainty about the establishment of the official Ottoman authority on Suakin. There are some archival documents about the Ottoman existence in Suakin in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, however, it is not possible to say that this presence reflects the official establishment of the Ottoman administration at Suakin. For instance, a report by Selman Reis who was the

commander of the Ottoman fleet in the Red Sea indicates that the Ottoman Empire could not have had complete sovereignty over Suakin during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> According to Peter Malcolm Holt, the official Ottoman administration at Suakin was founded in 1554, one year before the establishment of Habesh Eyalet.<sup>2</sup>

It is quite certain that controlling the Habesh region provided the Ottoman Empire with a great opportunity to reach the Indian Ocean and influence the global commercial activities outside the Mediterranean. By controlling the region, the Ottoman Navy crossed to the Bab al-Mandab and became a player in both the world of politics and commerce after 1525. In this framework, it is possible to say Suakin created a butterfly effect for the Ottoman Empire in terms of attaining global influence in the Indian Ocean, mainly due to how its geopolitical standing enabling the control of Habesh.

Like the Ottoman Empire, Britain was also acutely aware of the geopolitical importance of the Suakin region. As a result, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the Ottoman Empire spend a great deal of effort trying to maintain its dominance over Suakin against the backdrop of British interference. The Ottoman Empire knew the risk associated with the potential loss of Suakin, including the possibility of losing both the province of Habesh and its influence over East Africa. Likewise, Britain knew that without Suakin, it would not be possible to keep the Habesh region under its influence. Another factor influencing British attention was the need to provide security for the Suez Canal as controlling Suakin would have allowed entry of the Red Sea region. However, the geopolitical location of Suakin was not restricted to the security of trade and administration throughout the period of rivalry between the two great

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<sup>1</sup> Salih Özbaran, "An Ottoman Report on the Red Sea and the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean (1525)," in *The Ottoman Response to European Expansion: Studies on Ottoman-Portuguese Relations in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman Administration in the Arab Lands during the Sixteenth Century* (Istanbul: Isis, 1994), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Malcolm Holt, *A Modern History of Sudan*, 3rd ed. (London: Trafalgar Square, 1972), 37.

powers, it was also regarded as a base for the local people to fight against the Anglo-Egyptian hegemony.

## **1.2. Aims and Limitations**

This thesis aims to analyze how Suakin influenced the Anglo-Turkish rivalry during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The research question of this thesis is how the geopolitical position of Suakin affected the rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Britain. Therefore, this thesis adopts a microhistorical perspective to explore the ways in which Anglo-Turkish rivalry was influenced by the geopolitical position of Suakin as a small place. Describing the geopolitical importance of Suakin, this thesis aims to raise grand questions to analyze the rivalry between the two powers that are indicated in this study.

The Anglo-Turkish rivalry has usually been analyzed in terms of large-scale factors such as economic developments, great wars or treaties. However, I have come to realize that a microhistorical approach can provide the opportunity to develop alternative perspectives through historical phenomenon. Accordingly, this thesis aims to develop an alternative outlook in understanding this rivalry by intensively analyzing the geopolitical stance of Suakin as a small-scale investigation area. Furthermore, the Ottoman existence in Africa is a growing area of research in recent years. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to this area of research by demonstrating microhistorical skills.

Regarding the limitations, this thesis is limited in terms of time and place due to the nature of the microhistorical approach. As a coastal city, Suakin created a huge impact on the history of the region. This relatively small place became an arena of fierce power struggles that involved the great powers of the Ottoman Empire, Portugal, and Britain. In this context, the case of Suakin is very suitable for the nature of the microhistorical approach. Because reaching great questions from small events is the most important principle of this kind

of approach. In addition, the time limitation is very important in this thesis. Although the Ottoman-Portuguese rivalry on Suakin during the 16<sup>th</sup> century is mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, it aspires to describe the geopolitical importance of Suakin throughout history, not just to describe the rivalry itself. Therefore, the focal point of this thesis is the 19<sup>th</sup> century in terms of the time period. Accordingly, from the microhistorical point of view, place and time limitations are considerably significant in this study.

The availability of sources would be one of the most crucial issues in a thesis. In this respect, the research data in this thesis are drawn from both: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of the archival materials, mainly based on the Ottoman archives. Secondary sources involve published materials such as book chapters, articles, and theses. Regarding these sources, a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the data analysis in this thesis.

In addition to the archival documents, the Ottoman chronicles have been taken into consideration in this thesis during the research process as the primary sources. However, the direct references to the Suakin could not be seen at these chronicles. Nevertheless, it is possible to reach some valuable information from these chronicles related to North Africa particularly. *Tarih-i Naima*, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, *Rüstem Paşa Tarihi*, and *Silahdar Mehmed Ağa Tarihi (Zeyl-i Fezleke)* have some points related to Ottoman existence of North Africa, but irrelevant to the specific issue in this thesis. Therefore, these chronicles were not included to the thesis.

### **1.3. The methodology of the Thesis**

Scientific researchers need two kinds of skills; theoretical and methodological. While theoretical skill requires experiments to understand the “know-what” element, methodological skill focuses on understanding

“know-how”.<sup>3</sup> In terms of purposes, research can be categorized into four groups: exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and correlational.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there are also quantitative and qualitative enquiry modes depending on the type of data used to analyze.<sup>5</sup>

In this thesis, I implement methodological skills rather than theoretical because historical cases cannot be observed or experienced but can be analyzed to understand the “know-how”. Correspondingly, to analyze the geopolitical importance of Suakin by means of primary and secondary sources, I have adopted descriptive, explanatory and correlational objectives in the thesis to provide a comprehensive study. Data collection is one of the most necessary parts of a thesis, this can be conducted in terms of both quantitative and qualitative types of research.<sup>6</sup> Although the quantitative method is more suitable because of its descriptive responses to the open-ended questions, some of the qualitative method features also exist in this study. In other words, the quantitative research process is reasonably well constructed, while qualitative research is relatively unstructured.<sup>7</sup> This nature of quantitative and qualitative research methods can be interpreted as their weakness or strength. Therefore, both coexist in this study to draw a well-rounded picture.

The microhistorical approach is adopted in this study. When we consider the Anglo-Turkish rivalry during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it can be realized that it is a multidimensional issue. Although some researchers focus on the grand scheme to deduce better generalizations rather than the small areas or

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<sup>3</sup> Anol Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*, University of South Florida, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Florida: Anol Bhattacharjee, 2012), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology*, (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Kumar, *Research Methodology*, 138.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 13.



circumstances, I strongly believe that an intensive study of a place or case can lead to a better generalization. From this point of view, Suakin is intensively analyzed to reach a broader perspective regarding the Anglo-Turkish rivalry during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, a microhistorical approach is very helpful to ask large questions in small places.<sup>8</sup>

#### **1.4. Outlining the Structure**

My thesis is composed of three themed chapters. The first chapter deals with expressing the significance of Suakin and revealing the aims, limitations, and methodology alongside outlining the next chapters. The geopolitical importance of Suakin for the Ottoman Empire in the Red Sea before the 19<sup>th</sup> century will be a part of this chapter. Suakin's geopolitical location will also be elaborated in terms of its proximity to the major ports around the Red Sea and East Africa in this chapter. Moreover, the religious mission related to pilgrimage will be covered as a subsection as well.

The second chapter will elaborate the strategic rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Portugal on Suakin in the first part. Both had a requirement for trade security throughout the region and both were aware of how Suakin had a strategic location which was necessary to implement their sovereignty in the region. Suakin's geopolitical importance inevitably increased the level of confrontation between two great powers. Apart from the global powers, Funj Sultanate also had an interest in claiming sovereignty in order to maintain its existence in the region. Suakin was viewed as the door to the world for the Funj Sultanate. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the geostrategic importance of Suakin by referencing the activities of both global and regional powers before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>8</sup> C.W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), 1.

The increasing influence of Anglo-Egyptian exploits on the situation in Suakin during the 19<sup>th</sup> century will be discussed in this second chapter of the thesis. First of all, the position of Suakin under the Ottoman province of Egypt will be evaluated in the subchapters. The situation of Suakin will be portrayed under the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha and his successor Ismail Pasha. Another subsection will be focus on the British involvement in Suakin after the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After a brief analysis regarding the Anglo-Turkish relations in a general framework, the geopolitical significance of Suakin will be addressed in relation to the British involvement throughout the Red Sea region. Moreover, the activities of Samuel Baker and Gordon Pasha as British representatives in the region will be evaluated by emphasizing the strategic situation of Suakin under their rule.

The establishment of British authority on Suakin and the Ottoman response to that situation will mainly be a discussion point in the last chapter. Apart from the Ottoman reaction, the Mahdist movement also provided local retaliation to British authority both in Sudan, and specifically in Suakin. Through this chapter, the Anglo-Egyptian collaboration against the Ottoman Empire on Suakin will be emphasized to clearly identify how the Ottoman Empire had to be disengaged from Suakin.

In addition to these thematic chapters, this thesis will encompass a section showing the conclusions reached. This part will aim to exhibit the geopolitical importance of Suakin for each of the powers who shared a desire to establish control throughout the Red Sea region. This will be viewed from a historical point of view. The conclusion will also demonstrate the importance of microhistorical methodology to generate grand questions by referring to a specific region, Suakin, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Turkish period of rivalry.

### **1.5. Suakin as a Geopolitically Vital Location**

Regardless of the political dimension, Suakin, at first hand, exhibits an aerial uniqueness within the Red Sea region. Suakin's proximity to the other prominent port cities in the region promoted its development as a transit hub for commercial activities. From its origin as an ordinary port, Suakin became one of the most important entrepôts of the region mainly due to its strategic position during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from commercial activities, Suakin was also important in establishing the mobilization of pilgrims. While Suakin's proximity to the port of Jeddah made it an essential place for the safety of Muslim pilgrims, it was a central transit point for the Ethiopian Christian pilgrims to reach Jerusalem. Correspondingly, there were many geopolitical reasons for global and regional powers to wrestle for the control of Suakin.

### **1.6. The Emergence of Suakin in History**

There is insufficient evidence to clarify the pre-Islamic past of Suakin as a remarkable residential area. Therefore, the documented history of Suakin begins after the rise of Islam and the conquest of Egypt and Syria by the Arabs in 641 A.D.<sup>9</sup> It is also not possible to say something worth mentioning about it until the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The members of the Ashraf, descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, came from Hejaz to Sudan, and settled there during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and lived one part of the year at Suakin.<sup>10</sup> It is possible to affirm that the arrival of these settlers in Suakin established a link between Hejaz and Suakin. This development catapulted Suakin into a much wider network facilitating the development of trade. Subsequent to this period, Suakin gained importance and became the main port of Egypt on the African coast

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin* (Stocksfield: Oriel Press, 1976), 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

of the Red Sea until the building of Port Sudan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Suakin came to the forefront of the Ottoman-Portuguese rivalry during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On a more localized front, the Funj Kingdom, founded by Amara Dunkas at the southern part of contemporary Sudan, also had an interest in Suakin during this period. Controlling Suakin was seen as a precursor to controlling the trade routes on the Red Sea during that period. Although it was the most important reason for Portugal, the Ottoman Empire was eager to control Suakin for security reasons as well. When the Funj Kingdom occupied Suakin, their hold was never very firm enough to hold on to it because of their weak control mechanism. The Ottoman Turks had conquered Egypt in 1517 then sent expeditions south to gain control over Suakin a few years after that.

It is clear that although Suakin had been a significant port at the Red Sea before the Ottoman conquest, it gained its real identity under the Ottoman control. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Suakin became a geopolitically substantial center for the Ottoman Empire. With the help of Suakin's areal uniqueness, the Ottoman Turks controlled the region in an effective manner. In other words, the geographic advantage of Suakin burdened it with a political and military mission too. As a result, Suakin became one of the most vital locations to control the Red Sea region in terms of trade, safety and administration under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

### **1.7. Suakin's Proximity to Port Cities and Maritime Trade Routes**

The Red Sea and the Persian Gulf were the two main transit routes at the center of trade in the East. By transiting the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia, the merchandise was transported to the Persian Gulf via the ports on the Malabar Coast on the west coast of India. From this point, by means of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, the caravans of commercial goods reached the

ports of Syria. The other maritime trade route followed the Red Sea up to the Suez and then reached Alexandria by overland transport.<sup>11</sup> Correspondingly, it is possible to say that the ports at the Levant constituted the main stopping point on these long transportation routes. Therefore, Suakin had become an established destination for merchants engaged in with the Indian trade market, for which Aydhab, located to the north of Suakin, became the main port through which spices were imported to Egypt.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish merchants, Karimis, were one of the main actors in this commercial activity in Suakin during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Karimis specialized in the sale of cloth, especially robes during this period.<sup>13</sup>

What established Suakin as an important entrepot on the Red Sea was its proximity to the major port cities in the surrounding area. In this respect, it essential to know that Suakin had quite a powerful connection with the two great ports of the region: Aden and Jeddah. From the very beginning, Suakin had a healthy connection with Aden which was an international port located on the east of Bab al-Mandab. Goods from the East were usually repacked, stored and taxed at Aden; then these goods had to be priced in Egyptian dinars in Suakin to be exported to Egypt. Although the rise of Suakin was often connected with the decline of other Red Sea ports, it seems that Suakin complemented Aden rather than rivaled it, in terms of the transportation of goods from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. The Spice trade was a very important commercial activity between Suakin and Aden. Spices from the East were brought to Aden, and from there were taken up through the Red Sea via Suakin and Qusayr, where they were shipped overland to the Nile and on to Cairo.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, this route was quite unsecure, and the

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<sup>11</sup> Cengiz Orhonlu, Turgut Işıksal “Osmanlı Devrinde Nehir Nakliyatı Hakkında Araştırmalar: Dicle ve Fırat Nehirlerinde Nakliyat,” *TD*, no. 17 (1963), 77.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew C.S. Peacock, “Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire,” *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012), 29.

<sup>13</sup> Shlomo Dov Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza*, (Leiden: Brill 2008), 258.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, “Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire.” 31.

merchants took the risk associated with the treacherous Red Sea winds while crossing from Suakin to Jeddah to the Cairo.<sup>15</sup> The trading activity between Suakin and Aden was also not confined to one direction. Suakin also exported precious goods such as gold and silver to India via Aden. Therefore, it is possible to say that with the assistance of Aden, Suakin became strategically important as an international port at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Jeddah was another important port city in the region in terms of its relationship with Suakin. Although Jeddah was a well-traveled route, merchants who came from India preferred to land at Suakin, mainly due to the perception of excessive injustice at the port of Jeddah.<sup>16</sup> The commercial activity between Suakin and Jeddah were continuous, and both were among the busiest ports on the Red Sea.<sup>17</sup>

Suakin's proximity to the trade routes and important port cities opened up an opportunity for it to become an international port. Although it was not a well-trodden commercial center before the Ottoman rule, it gained functionality in a short time span with the help of its unique location on the Red Sea. It became one of the major ports of the Ottoman Empire after the 16<sup>th</sup> century until its decline at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Salih Özbaran, *The Ottoman Response to European Expansion: Studies on Ottoman-Portuguese Relations in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman Administration in the Arab Lands during the Sixteenth Century*, (Istanbul: Isis, 1994), 104.

<sup>17</sup> Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti* (Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996), 10.

**MAP 1: Maritime Connections of Suakin**



## 1.8. Suakin as a Transit Hub for the Pilgrims

East Africa hosted both Muslim and Christian followers. These people were eager to visit holy places as a part of their religious duties. There were two main destinations for these pilgrims; one was Jerusalem and the other one was Hejaz including both Mecca and Medina. Suakin was at the very center of the travel route which these pilgrims took. Not only Muslims but also Christian pilgrims such as the Ethiopians stopped in Suakin on their way to Jerusalem. It is possible to say that Christian pilgrimage trade may have even had greater importance than that of Muslims in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Following the Ottoman Empire conquest of Suakin, Ethiopian Christian pilgrims continued to plot Suakin as a central transit route during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> This situation is very important to show Suakin's unique geographical location instead of its political significance in the coming centuries.

North, and West Africa particularly, had a considerable Muslim population before the existence of the Ottoman Empire in Africa. These Muslim pilgrims paid an annual visit to the Kaaba, the Sacred Mosque, located at the Hejaz region on the western side of the Red Sea. Both northern and eastern African Muslims preferred the North Africa route crossing over Egypt to arrive at Hejaz. Although this route was long and expensive, it was preferred due to security concerns. However, when the Ottoman Empire conquered the East African coast of the Red Sea and established the Habesh province, many Muslims from central and western Africa shifted their route preferences from North Africa to central Africa by crossing over Suakin to Jeddah, then via the sea to reach the holy lands. By passing over the Sokoto, Bauchi, Kula, Chad Lake, Dikoa and Kasserri, these pilgrims arrived in Khartoum.<sup>20</sup> After this land

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<sup>18</sup> Osbert G. S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries ca. 1400-1524* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1958), p. 153.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire", 32.

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Karl Wilhelm Kumm, *From Housaland to Egypt Through the Sudan* (London: Constable, 1910), 262.



journey, they were transferred to vessels at Suakin, arriving at the port of Jeddah which was very close to their destination, Mecca. This route was less expensive, and in addition, under the Ottoman authority it became much safer to travel.

The significance of Suakin for pilgrims was not restricted solely to their transport from the western coast of the Red Sea to the Eastern coast, during the Hajj period, Mecca and Medina were overcrowded and needed vast supplies of commercial products from outside the region. In this context, Suakin played a crucial role in supplying both food and commodities to the Hejaz region. Construction materials were also needed at Hejaz to build accommodation for the pilgrims. For instance, the rush mats produced by the Bedouins were exported from Suakin to the port of Jeddah. Horses and varieties of fish were also transported by the merchants of Suakin to the holy lands to meet the consumer demands of pilgrims.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, the geopolitical importance of Suakin dates back to the pre-Ottoman period, although it gained its most prestigious position under the Ottoman authority. The geographical structure and the special location of Suakin attracted the attention of global and regional powers like the Ottoman Empire, Portugal, Britain, Egypt or Funj Sultanate after the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>21</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murrey, 1822), 397.

## CHAPTER 2

### SUAKIN BEFORE THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN ADMINISTRATION

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new stage of western expansion started in Asia, Africa, and America due to economic and political incentives. Unlike the old version of imperialism that had taken place during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the aim of new imperialism was different in terms of its demands and purposes. In other words, the expansion was no more to spread the religion or to reach the spices, but to exploit the foreign lands for oil, rubber, tin or other kinds of sources needed for the machinery because of the industrial production. Therefore, in the name of seeking cheap raw materials and markets, western powers started to take control all over the world during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

When the western powers launched expeditions for the partition of Africa, the Ottoman territories in Africa became a target for them. East Africa was exceptionally important for the colonial powers after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The colonial powers attempted to control both Bab al-Mandab and the Suez Canal to dominate a reasonable percentage of the world trade. Britain was particularly eager to control this region for the sake of the security of the trade routes from India to the Mediterranean. Therefore, Britain started to eliminate its rivals in the region. After passivizing France as another colonial power in the region, Britain focused its attention on the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>22</sup> William J. Duiker, *Contemporary World History*, 5th ed. (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning Press, 2010), 47.

Britain mainly followed the principle of association instead of assimilation to control its colonies around the world during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> Britain attempted to establish close relations with the Ottoman-Egyptian rulers in the region. Accordingly, Britain had strong relations with Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the local Egyptian authority gave guaranties for the British interests in the Suez Canal, it was not possible to secure the Red Sea trade without collaborating with the Ottoman Empire. In other words, there was a double-edged control mechanism in the Red Sea, and it was essential to control both the Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandab simultaneously to claim monopoly over the trade routes in the region.

The influence of Egypt Eyalet was not enough to control both sides, and Britain had to build healthy relations with the Ottoman Empire as well. On the one hand, Britain encouraged the Egyptian authority to expand its influence through the southern parts of Egypt including some parts of Habesh Eyalet. Muhammad Ali of Egypt was also tended to increase his influence against the central government in Istanbul. Therefore, Britain tolerated his actions against the Ottoman Empire on many occasions. On the other hand, the Ottoman existence in Aden could be a threat against the security of Bab al-Mandab in terms of British interests. Therefore, Britain did not give overt support for Muhammad Ali of Egypt or his successors to maintain its relations with the Ottoman Empire.

With the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha, Egypt had an exceptional statue in the Ottoman Eyalet system in which Egypt had a powerful autonomy. Not only in the internal affairs, Egypt also relatively had freedom in foreign affairs. Although Egypt officially was a part of the Ottoman Empire, it acted as a sovereign state from the administration of Muhammad Ali. To reinforce his authority, Muhammad Ali formed a powerful military equipped with modern weapons, and started to launch military campaigns against the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 29.

Ottoman Empire. He captured huge lands from the Ottoman Empire, and his campaigns resulted in the foreign intervention to the Ottoman Empire in several times. One of his main targets was to control the Red Sea trade routes to gain a great amount of revenue for his military expenses.

In this context, one of the main targets of the Egypt Eyalet was to have control over Suakin. Suakin would be a jumping point for further military expeditions to dominate all the Red Sea surrounding. Therefore, Egypt attempted several times to have absolute control over Suakin throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2.1. Strategic Rivalry on Suakin Between the Ottoman Empire and Portugal**

Suakin had a geopolitical importance before the Anglo-Turkish rivalry during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the power struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Portugal on Suakin is crucial to express why Suakin was such a geopolitically unique location for establishing dominance throughout the Red Sea. Suakin was at the very center of the Red Sea trade route in terms of its access to both Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Accordingly, controlling the trade routes was the main reason behind the struggle between these powers. In addition to commercial activities, Suakin turned into a central position in a religious power struggle, at that time while serving as a transit point for both Muslim and Christian pilgrims Suakin became the focus of security concern for both religious groups and their coreligionists in the region, thus leading the Ottoman Empire and Portugal to struggle for superiority.

Suakin was not only a stage of rivalry between the global powers but it also had strategic importance at the regional level. The first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century saw aggressive movements from regional powers such as the Funj Sultanate. The Funj, in particular, had tried to assert a claim of sovereignty over Suakin on several occasions, each time attempting to gain influence over

the entire region. Therefore, it is possible to say that the Ottoman Empire had to deal with both global and regional rivals to exercise sovereignty on Suakin.

### **2.1.1. Ottoman-Portuguese Struggle on Suakin for Trade**

The Ottoman Empire expanded its borders throughout the Arabian Peninsula and Northeastern Africa in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Sultan Selim I. After the conquest of the Mamluk Sultanate based in Cairo, the Ottoman Empire became the most influential power in the East Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Throughout these expeditions, the Ottoman Turks increased their authority by overwhelming their rivals in the region. The elimination of the traditional opponents brought forth new enemies for the empire such as the Portuguese.

Although the Ottoman Turks gained control over the Eastern Mediterranean in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they could not establish dominance over the entire Red Sea because of Portuguese naval strength in the region. When the Portuguese discovered the Cape of Good Hope in 1498, they began to dominate East Africa, having gained control of the trade routes. The primary concern of the Portuguese was one of economics, and they needed to control this strategic location for that purpose. One of the most important locations of global trade at the time was the Red Sea due to its important position as a passageway to the spice route.<sup>24</sup>

The Portuguese tried to establish trade centers in the Red Sea to dominate the spice route, but the Ottoman Empire was aware of this strategy and attempted to prevent Portugal from gaining full control over the trade route. To weaken Portugal in the region, the Ottoman Empire was not content with just preventing the establishment of trade centers. It actually started a campaign in 1538 towards the western part of the Indian coast to interrupt the activities

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<sup>24</sup> Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti*, 8.

of Portugal. With the help of this expedition, the Ottoman Empire took control over Aden which was very strategic to check the Bab al-Mandab. The Ottoman Empire ensured the security of the trade route between India and the Ottoman Empire by increasing its influence against Portugal over the Red Sea.

Suakin became the center of the Ottoman-Portuguese rivalry on the Red Sea trade because of its geopolitical standing. Controlling Bab al-Mandab was not enough to control the Red Sea trade. Therefore, Suakin was a show of force stage for both the Ottoman Empire and Portugal during the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the absence of Ottoman authority on Suakin in 1525, the Ottoman Empire could not benefit from the revenue taxes. The local notables took advantage of the situation and collected the taxes. However, the revenues of Suakin were included in the Ottoman accounts of Egypt around 1527-1528.<sup>25</sup> In spite of these developments, it is not possible to confirm an exact Turkish control over Suakin after 1527. The Ottoman Empire used Suakin for commercial purposes to supply the necessary needs of the Hejaz region. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire did not deploy a major military unit in Suakin. In other words, the lack of Ottoman presence in Suakin created an opportunity for Portugal to regain its superiority over the Red Sea trade by occupying Suakin.

After the conquest of Egypt in 1517 and the Indian expedition in 1538 by Hadim Suleiman Pasha, the trade activity of Portugal between India and the Red Sea was interrupted. Portugal therefore attempted to repair its dominance on the maritime spice trade. At this point Estavo da Gama, viceroy of India had prepared 2,300 men for an expedition that departed from Goa, which was one of the main port cities for the spice trade at the western coast of India. The main purpose of Gama was to destroy the Ottoman fleet at Suez, and take

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire.", 33.

control of the Red Sea trade again. Gama's fleet reached Suakin on March 1541, and stayed there for about two weeks.<sup>26</sup>

It is obvious that Suakin was one of the richest cities in East Africa because of its trade network with India, and Egypt as well as Hejaz.<sup>27</sup> Portugal was conscious of the strategic importance of Suakin, and took it back at the first opportunity. However, the Ottoman Empire did not renounce its interest in Suakin, and mobilized a fleet under the command of Sefer Reis following 3 years of Estavo da Gama's occupation. However, the Ottoman fleet could not effectively face the Portuguese existence in Suakin in 1544.

### **2.1.2. Ottoman-Portuguese Struggle on Suakin for Religious Considerations**

After the conquest of Egypt in 1517, Ottoman sultan Selim I abolished the Abbasid Dynasty under the control of the Mameluke Sultanate, and declared himself as the Caliph. With the conquest of Egypt, Hejaz also became an Ottoman territory. After all these developments, the Ottoman sultans did not only become the political rulers of the empire, they were also the Caliphs of the Muslims all over the world. In other words, the new title of the Ottoman sultans raised their profile to that of the protectorate of all the Muslims. This brought two things for the empire: prestige and responsibility.

It is obvious that the influence of the Ottoman Empire rose after declaring Istanbul as the center of the Caliphate, and the Ottoman sultans as the Caliphs in the Islamic world. Acting against the Ottoman sultan was not only counted as a mistake from the political point of view, but it was a sin from a religious perspective. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire gained religious superiority in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>27</sup> R. B. Serjeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 99.

addition to its political supremacy. However, the duties and responsibilities of the Sultans increased simultaneously after having acquired this title. As caliphs of the Muslims they became the protectors of the holy lands, including Mecca and Medina. Moreover, they had to provide security for the pilgrimage routes originating from different parts of the world and ending in the Hejaz region. Correspondingly, Suakin came to the forefront of the Ottoman Empire's quest for security on the Red Sea. Suakin became the main transit hub for both east and west African Muslims after the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, it had a strategic location to protect the overland and maritime pilgrimage routes in the region. Suakin was also a kind of an observation point against the Portuguese threat in the Red Sea.

When Portugal started to launch expeditions through East Africa after 1498, religious concerns in addition to economic targets occurred. The Portuguese were eager to enshrine Christian idealism in Africa. Therefore, they brought many Christian missionaries on these expeditions to convert the people of East Africa to Christianity. One of the main local partners of the Portuguese were the Ethiopian Christians. Suakin was a very significant transit route for Ethiopian Christians because they had to use Suakin to reach Jerusalem, a Christian place of worship.<sup>28</sup> It is possible to say that the Suakin route was more important for Christians than the Muslims who followed the North Africa route to reach the Hejaz until the Ottoman conquest of Egypt.<sup>29</sup> However, there were constant struggles between the Ethiopian Christians and the Muslims of the region, seeing both the Ottoman Empire and Portugal supported their proxies in the area. From this point of view, Ozdemir Pasha, who was the founder of the Habesh province on 5 June 1555, persuaded the

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<sup>28</sup> Osbert G. S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries ca. 1400-1524*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> Francisco Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*, ed. Lord Stanly (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), 450.



Ottoman sultan Suleyman the Magnificent to allow him to lead a jihad against Ethiopia, and made Suakin his base for these campaigns.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, the Ottoman Empire and Portugal clashed over their respective religious ambitions in the Red Sea region with both attempted to control Suakin for the sake of their coreligionists. The Ottoman Empire eventually achieved regional superiority against Portugal, and created a sustainable area for its subjects. In spite of its naval strength, Portugal could not remain in Suakin in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, and this strategic port city served as a Turkish port under the Ottoman Empire until British involvement in the region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **2.1.3. Struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Funj Sultanate on Suakin**

Portugal was not the only foe for the Ottoman Empire on Suakin. There was also the Sultanate of Funj which had made claim to Suakin. The Funj Sultanate was established by Amara Dunkas in 1504 around the city of Sinnar, referred to as Gezira and the Nile Valley regions of contemporary Sudan. Funj was an Islamic sultanate, and Islam became the dominant faith in the Nilotic Sudan under the influence of Funj. The Funj Sultanate shared common borders with the Ottoman provinces of Egypt and Habesh from eastern and northern sides.<sup>31</sup> The Ottoman relations with the Funj Sultanate shifted over time. Before the Ottoman Empire, the Funj occupied Suakin, but their control over it was extremely weak.<sup>32</sup> Following the conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Ottoman Turks launched expeditions to establish control over Suakin thus

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire.", 32.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew C.S. Peacock, "The Ottomans and the Funj Sultanate in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 75, no. 1 (2012), 103.

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Pierre Greenlaw, *The Coral Buildings of Suakin*, 13.

creating their authority in 1525. From then on Suakin was almost without interruption under the Turkish rule.<sup>33</sup> This situation brought stability to the region in terms of political and economic aspects.

Selman Reis, who was a naval commander of the Ottoman Empire, searched and reported on potential Ottoman conquests in the Red Sea region. After he had identified the Yemen and Aden, he drew attention to the geopolitical importance of Suakin as a means of providing security to the trade routes on the Red Sea.<sup>32</sup> Selman Reis also suggested to Ibrahim Pasha, the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire to conquer the Funj and Ethiopia.<sup>34</sup>

Although Funj was an Islamic sultanate affiliated to the Maliki sect of Islam,<sup>35</sup> the Ottoman Empire had two reasons to attempt to take this local sultanate under its control. One of them was the wealth of the Funj Sultanate. When the province of Habesh was established, it suffered financial shortages. It was dependent on the financial support of Egypt to meet the deficit in the budget. Therefore, Ozdemir Pasha was eager to launch an expedition to benefit from the wealth of Funj. It is possible to say that Funj was a rich sultanate in terms of gold. The sultans of Funj gave special importance to the mining and exportation of the gold in order to maintain their authority.<sup>36</sup> Gold, musk, and ivory were the main commercial products of the Funj Sultanate,<sup>37</sup> and Suakin was crucial in terms of import and export activities of the sultanate. Another reason was closely related to activities in Suakin. The trade route between

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "The Ottomans and the Funj Sultanate in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." 35.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>36</sup> Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Mehmed Zilli, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi 10. Kitap*, ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı, and Robert Dankoff, 1st ed. (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 2007), 433.

<sup>37</sup> Rex S. O'Fahey and J. L. Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan* (Sudan: Routledge, 1974), 55.

Sinnar and Suakin had vital importance for the province of Habesh, but Funj Sultanate occasionally assaulted Suakin attempting to bypass the control of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> However during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they ended the disputes between them since cooperation was the most lucrative way for both sides. While the primary concern of the Ottoman Empire was the safety of the trade routes in the region, the Funj Sultanate was dependent on Ottoman controlled Suakin to conduct business with the outside world. In other words, Suakin was an entrepot not only for the Ottoman Empire, but also for the Funj Sultanate.

## **2.2. Suakin as a Part of Egypt Province during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Suakin was a sanjak, which was an administrative division of the Ottoman Empire, under the Habesh province according to the Ottoman provincial organization until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Ottoman Empire had to rearrange the provincial organization because of the economic disruptions of the provinces. Particularly, the southern provinces of the empire suffered from economic shortages a lot during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to these economic downswings started to occur major political and administrative changes in the southern provinces of the empire with the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The most important development was the invasion of Egypt by the colonial powers. First of all, Napoleon Bonaparte of France invaded Egypt at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but Britain opposed this invasion and gave support to the Ottoman Empire. With the full support of Britain, France had to retreat from Egypt. Hence, Britain gradually started to increase its influence on Egypt and its surrounding. With the increase of the British influence, Muhammad Ali Pasha simultaneously established authority in the Egypt province. To strengthen Egypt economically, Muhammad Ali of Egypt

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<sup>38</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "The Ottomans and the Funj Sultanate in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.", 39.

attempted to control Suakin many times. Finally, he reached his goal, and Suakin officially became the part of Egypt province in 1846. However, after the death of Muhammad Ali, Suakin came under the administration of the Hejaz province in 1848. Egypt had control on Suakin for the second time during the reign of Ismail Pasha in 1865.

The rulers of Egypt were always eager to control Suakin in terms of political, military and economic reasons. Therefore, they always insisted on the central government of the Ottoman Empire having control over it. In this context, they struggled with the Habesh and Hejaz provinces by claiming authority on Suakin. Accordingly, the geopolitical importance of Suakin was a matter of struggle not only between the Ottoman Empire and Britain but also among the southern provinces of the Ottoman Empire as well. The subsequent divisions of this part will evaluate the geopolitical significance of Suakin during the reign of Muhammad Ali and Ismail Pashas of the Egypt province.

### **2.2.1. Reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha in Suakin**

The French withdrawal left a power vacuum in Egypt in 1802. Muhammad Ali Pasha used this opportunity fruitfully, and raised his charismatic leadership in Egypt. When the Ottoman Empire declared him as the viceroy of Egypt province, he started to increase his influence not only in Egypt, but also in the immediate surroundings of Egypt. He strengthened the military and helped the Ottoman Empire in many occasions like the Greek or Wahhabi uprisings. In return, he asked to have control over Syria and Palestine for economic reasons. When the empire rejected his requests, he revolted against the Ottomans. Although Muhammad Ali received remarkable triumphs against the Ottoman Empire, he lost most of his gains because of the British intervention of the conflict in 1840. When he lost Syria, Palestine, and some parts of Anatolia, the only choice for him was to expand his territories through the southern parts of Egypt.

The central authority of the Ottoman Empire was weakened during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Muhammad Ali was very aware of this situation. Therefore, he started to focus on the Habesh and Hejaz provinces to expand his territory. In addition to the diplomatic attempts made with the central government, he followed an aggressive policy towards these provinces with different kinds of instruments. While he launched some small-scale military expeditions against the northern parts of the Habesh province, he tried to stalemate Hejaz by means of economic threats.

After suppressing the Wahhabi revolt in 1821, the Ottoman Empire had conferred Suakin and Massawa to the Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali.<sup>39</sup> However, the Ottoman Empire took back these ports from Ibrahim Pasha after the uprising of Muhammad Ali against the central authority in 1840. The viceroy of Khartoum appointed by Muhammad Ali Pasha expanded Khartoum's borders through Suakin. As a result, Khartoum shared common borders with Suakin which was under the Hejaz province. As an outcome of this situation, Muhammad Ali desired to collect taxes from Hadendewa tribes who lived around Suakin. In addition, he claimed that Suakin was a port and only this port was under the control of the Hejaz province, but not to the surrounding of Suakin.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, Hadendewa tribes were forced to pay taxes to the viceroy of Khartoum who was directly affiliated to Muhammad Ali. It is possible to express that Muhammad Ali aimed not to take taxes from a small number of tribes around Suakin, but he aimed to capture Suakin gradually through diplomatic channels.

Although Muhammad Ali Pasha lost his influence on the Hejaz region after his uprising against the central government, he attempted to take control of the western coasts of the Red Sea, particularly Suakin. However, Osman Pasha, governor of Hejaz, did not tolerate the actions of Muhammad Ali or

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<sup>39</sup> BOA, *Hatt-ı Humayun*, 19660.

<sup>40</sup> BOA, *İrade Mesail-i Mühimme*, 2432.

his representative in Khartoum against Suakin, and reported the situation to the Istanbul.<sup>41</sup> As a response to the situation, Istanbul approved that Suakin was a part of the Hejaz province according to the provincial organization of the empire. In his imperial order, Sultan Abdulmajid clearly expressed the situation,<sup>42</sup> and did not let Muhammad Ali increase his influence towards the southern provinces of the empire in terms of controlling Suakin as a strategic point at the Red Sea.

Muhammad Ali Pasha did not give up claiming rights over Suakin and created new arguments to reach his goal. He was aware of the economic disruption of the Ottoman Empire, and brought forward argumentations that were related to the economy to realize his interests. He claimed that ruling Suakin and the western coasts of the Red Sea from the Hejaz province were more expensive than ruling these areas from Egypt. He added that he would increase the revenues of Suakin by appointing competent officers to rule the port and supply two times more income for the Ottoman treasury.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Muhammad Ali expressed that he needed to use Suakin port to safely transport the animals from the Taka region, referring to the eastern parts of Sudan, to Egypt or the other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Using marine transportation instead of land transportation would provide convenience in terms of time and price.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Suakin had to be under the control of the Egypt province according to Muhammad Ali Pasha.

The struggle between Muhammad Ali Pasha and Osman Pasha continued for many years. While Muhammad Ali was eager to obtain Suakin and the Red Sea costs, Osman Pasha blamed his malicious intentions against the Ottoman existence in the region. Osman Pasha warned the central government about

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2432.

<sup>42</sup> Sevakin topraqını kadim-i vech ile kamilen Cidde trafafından idaresi. Ibid., 2434.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2435.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2435.

the aims of Muhammad Ali Pasha. He wrote that the aim of Muhammad Ali was to retake Hejaz and control the important ports at the Red Sea like Suakin and Massawa. He also added that if Suakin and Massawa were given to the Egypt province, Hejaz would lose power and economic balance would perish in the province.<sup>45</sup> Although the Ottoman Empire gave importance to the words of the governor of Hejaz, the central government was also very careful to maintain its diplomatic contact with Muhammad Ali of Egypt. Therefore, the will of Muhammad Ali was not directly rejected by Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire was well aware of the danger regarding the disconnection with Muhammad Ali as an extremely powerful figure in the region. The Ottoman Empire informed the governor of Hejaz about its concerns related to Muhammad Ali Pasha. Therefore, Osman Pasha started to follow a moderate policy with Muhammad Ali during the 1840s.

From 1843 onwards, Muhammad Ali Pasha attempted to convince the Ottoman Empire several times in order to take control over Suakin. He achieved his goal with an imperial order in 1846. To use this opportunity effectively, Muhammad Ali Pasha deployed troops to Suakin to increase his efficiency through the Red Sea region and the maritime trade routes. Although he had a great advantage to control the surrounding of the Red Sea by obtaining Suakin, he could not implement full control over the region.<sup>46</sup> Because of the incompetent rulers who were appointed by Muhammad Ali, he could not establish an authority on the local residents who started to flee from Suakin.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Egyptian rule on Suakin did not welcome by

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<sup>45</sup> Osman Pasha, governor of Hejaz wrote a letter to the central government of the empire in 1884. He aimed to express that Suakin was in a good situation under the Hejaz province and giving it to the Egypt was not a good decision for the sake of Hejaz. "...Yakup Ağa kulları Sevakın cezirelerine muhafız nasb ve tayin olmuş hüsnü idare ile hasılat vakıaları Cidde Eyaleti'nin takdim olunan varidat defterlerinde mukayyad olduğu" Ibid., 2438.

<sup>46</sup> Gabriel R. Warburg, "Turko-Egyptian Rule in Sudan," *Belleten* 52, no. 207 (1989), 781–92.

<sup>47</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 516.

the local people. Therefore, with the death of Muhammad Ali of Egypt in 1848, Suakin came under the administration of the Hejaz province again.

### **2.2.2. Control of Ismail Pasha in Suakin**

Khedive Ismail Pasha, grandson of Muhammad Ali Pasha, came to power in 1865 as the governor of Egypt province of the Ottoman Empire. Like his grandfather, İsmail Pasha was also an ambitious ruler who attempted to expand the borders of Egypt through the southern parts of the Ottoman Empire. Before he came to power, he had consciousness about the importance of the southern parts of the province to increase the influence of Egypt throughout the Red Sea surrounding. Therefore, he was appointed as the commander of 18,000 troops by his uncle Said Pasha, the predecessor of Khedive Ismail Pasha.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to his reformist characteristic and modernization attempts, he came into prominence with his mega projects like the Suez Channel or building palaces. Although the Suez Channel project was started by Said Pasha, he could not have progress on the project because of financial shortages. However, Ismail Pasha increased the revenues and invested in the projects a remarkable amount of money. At that point, the eastern ports of the Red Sea gained more significance in terms of security and the financial concerns of Egypt.

Ismail Pasha requested to take over the administration of Suakin from Sultan Abdulaziz of the Ottoman Empire by means of a letter.<sup>49</sup> The pretext of Ismail Pasha was not the geopolitical significance of Suakin, but to control the taxpayers who fled to Suakin in order to not to pay their taxes. In other words,

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<sup>48</sup> Atilla Çetin, "Mısır Valisi ve Mısır'ın İlk Hidivi," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* 23 (2001), 117–19.

<sup>49</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Dahiliye*, 787.



there was the Taka district at the southern part of the Egypt province, and those people who did not want to pay their taxes preferred to flee from Taka to Suakin which was under the Hejaz province. In addition to this argument, Ismail Pasha asserted that it was essential to control the Suakin port to avoid the slave trade. Britain especially accused the Ottoman Empire and Egypt regarding slavery.<sup>50</sup> Ismail Pasha, in this regard, attempted to take the advantage of controlling Suakin by asserting the British oppression.

However, it is a fact that the real intention of Ismail Pasha was far beyond to collect taxes from a few Arab tribes, or avoiding slave trade at the southern parts of his province. He had a consciousness that Suakin was a crucial place both for the security and expansion policy of Egypt. Moreover, to control the slave trade in the eastern coasts of the Red Sea, he was eager to obtain Suakin. Accordingly, he could improve the relations with Britain by following and implementing its anti-slavery policies to the Egypt province.

To subordinate Suakin under the Egypt province, Ismail Pasha suggested a proposal according to which Egypt would compensate the Hejaz province when they handed on Suakin to Egypt to convince the central government of the empire.<sup>51</sup> Although it looks like an innocent suggestion in terms of the budget policy of the Hejaz province, it is a strategic lost for the Hejaz in terms of the geopolitical position of Suakin.

With the request of Ismail Pasha, the central administration of the Ottoman Empire discussed the issue in the Meclis-i Mahsusa, an assembly composed of 28 members who were appointed by the sultan. The main point in these discussions was the wealthy situation of the Suakin under the Hejaz province. After Muhammad Ali, Hejaz governor took back Suakin and invested a lot

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<sup>50</sup> John Marlowe, *A History of Modern Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Relations (1800-1953)* (New York: Praeger, 1954), 140.

<sup>51</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 787.

for reconstruction. In addition, Suakin promoted from a voivodship to a sub-governorship (kaymakamlık) under the Hejaz administration. Therefore, Suakin was already a prosperous port city, and it was a risk to change its affiliation from Hejaz to Egypt province in the provincial organization of the empire.

Ismail Pasha maintained his insistence to take control of Suakin. His main argument was to accuse Suakin as the main gate of the slave trade. However, Mehmet Vecihi, governor of Hejaz province, expressed in his letters that the district governors of Suakin had consciousness about the slave trade, and they did not let this kind of trade activity in Suakin.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the governor of Hejaz accused Ismail Pasha because of his speculations on Suakin and convinced the central government regarding the wealthy situation of Suakin under the Hejaz province. The governor of Hejaz wrote another letter to the central government, and mentioned his concerns about the railway project of Ismail Pasha. He claimed that if Ismail Pasha built new railways across Egypt and Sudan through the port of Suakin, Yemen and Jeddah ports, they were under the Hejaz province, would lose their strategic positions apart from a considerable amount of income.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the revenues of Suakin would dramatically increase because it would be the main port between India and Egypt in terms of commercial activities. Therefore, the governor of Hejaz warned the central government about the possible projects of Ismail Pasha.

After the long negotiations, Meclis-i Mahsusa evaluated the situation by listening to the arguments of both parts; Egypt and Hejaz. As a result, Meclis-i Mahsusa came up with three points as possible suggestions in order to be solved the problem. The first suggestion was in the direction of rejecting the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 791.

<sup>53</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," Unpublished PhD diss., (Istanbul University, 2016), 100.

request of Ismail Pasha and did not allocate Suakin to the Egypt province because of some concerns.<sup>54</sup>

Suakin was a wealthy port under the rule of Hejaz governor and it was a risk to change the affiliation of Suakin from Hejaz to Egypt province. In addition to this concern, if Ismail Pasha built the new railway through Sudan, he could use Suakin port to transport the Indian goods to Egypt and bypass the ports of Yemen and Jeddah. Therefore, there was a dangerous possibility of losing efficiency for those ports in the western coasts of the Red Sea. However, the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire did not want to confront Egypt province because of Suakin. Because Egypt was the most powerful province of the empire and the consequences of a confrontation would cause far worse results for the grand interests of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, he leant to accept the will of Ismail Pasha.

The second idea that was suggested for the Suakin issue was to save the revenues of salt-pan and tariffs under the administration of the Hejaz province while the civilian administration was given to Egypt province.<sup>55</sup> This suggestion aimed to keep Hejaz treasury powerful after the split of Suakin from the province. However, this suggestion might have led to more complex problems between the provinces of Egypt and Hejaz. The confrontation between the officials of Egypt and the taxmen of Hejaz would be inevitable. Therefore, this suggestion was not supported by the members of the Meclis-i Mahsusa.

The last suggestion promoted a gradual plan for the administration of Suakin. More precisely, Suakin would be given to Egypt for three years, and the agreement would be renewed in every three years according to income rates of the Suakin port. In other words, Suakin would not be a part of Egypt

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<sup>54</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 425.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

permanently, and the central government of the empire could take it back whenever it would decide. This suggestion had many supporters in the Meclis-i Mahsusa. After the evaluation of these suggestions, Meclis-i Mahsusa decided to give Suakin to the Ismail Pasha under some conditions. Developing the administrative structure of Suakin was one of the most important conditions. Moreover, avoiding the slave trade became the duty of the Egyptian administration as Ismail Pasha also claimed that he would avoid slave trade before he took the administration of Suakin. Egypt also had to pay 7,500 pouches for each year to the Hejaz province as a kind of compensation. In addition, the administrator who was appointed by the governor of Egypt to rule Suakin had to be approved by the governor of Hejaz before he came to power. Furthermore, the revenues of Suakin would be calculated in every three years, and Egypt would pay to Hejaz according to ratio of profit. The conditions of agreement were approved by Sultan Abdulaziz in 1865, and Suakin became the part of Egypt again during the reign of Ismail Pasha.<sup>56</sup>

Ismail Pasha forged good relations with the central government of the Ottoman Empire and the sultan as well. Sultan Abdulaziz visited Egypt in 1863 for ten days. During this visit, Ismail Pasha entertained the sultan elegantly. Ismail Pasha managed to establish close ties with the sultan. It is obvious that these strong relations played a crucial role in the issue of Suakin in favor of Egypt.

However, the Ottoman Empire followed determined politics towards Egypt and did not give absolute rights to Ismail Pasha on Suakin. Although Suakin was accepted a part of Egypt officially, Hejaz province was going to be at the center of the control mechanism of the Ottoman Empire for the activities of Egypt in Suakin. The intention of Ismail Pasha towards Egypt was still doubtful for the empire because Ismail Pasha tended to act like an absolute ruler of Egypt in his relations with the European powers, precisely with

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<sup>56</sup> BOA, *Mühimme-i Mısır*, 15.

Britain.<sup>57</sup> The geopolitical importance of the Suakin increased the concerns of the central government against Egypt because Suakin was a suitable place to be used for different purposes like invading the Red Sea area, or bypassing the other major Ottoman ports for maritime trade. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire hesitated to give an entire control to Ismail Pasha on Suakin and aimed to balance his power by promoting the rights of Hejaz governor in the region.

### **2.2.3. The Strategic Agenda of Egypt on Suakin During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The interests of Egypt in Suakin were not restricted by the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha or Khedive Ismail Pasha, hence Suakin was at the center of the agenda of Egypt as one of the main issues through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the establishment of permanent Egyptian authority in Suakin in 1873, Suakin became an integral part of Egyptian politics. After that, the links between the Hejaz province and Suakin were gradually weakened. In other words, almost all the conditions that Ismail Pasha had to fulfill regarding Suakin were lifted by the central government of the Ottoman Empire.

After 1873, Egypt did not hesitate to include Suakin in its expansionist policies through the Red Sea by means of mega projects. To expand the influence of Egypt, all Egyptian governors except Muhammad Ali Pasha, invested in Suakin to make it a transit hub for commercial activities of Egypt. Therefore, a lot of grand projects in Egypt were closely linked to Suakin because it was geopolitically important for the objectives of the Egyptian agenda.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, building railways and improving marine transportation facilities were the two main mega projects of Egypt. Either railway projects or marine transportation projects were affiliated with Suakin

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<sup>57</sup> Gabriel R. Warburg, "Turko-Egyptian Rule in Sudan," 12.

by the Egyptian policy makers. In other words, Egypt prioritized infrastructure construction for the sake of industrial development throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Improving railway access was one of the main necessities of the industrial development. In this regard, the first railway was built between Alexandria and Cairo in 1856. In the construction of this railway, Britain played an important role in its own interests through the region. Britain also encouraged Egypt to expand this railway through the Red Sea and aimed to have a short cut to India. A railway between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea would provide a great advantage for Britain in terms of security of transportation and reducing the costs. Abbas Hilmi Pasha, governor of Egypt, also shared common interests with Britain, and accepted the railway project between Cairo and the Red Sea.<sup>58</sup>

The railway project was actualized by Khedive Ismail Pasha, and was built 57 kilometers from the beginning of Wadi Halfa, placed at the North of Sudan through the Nile River. Another 47 kilometers were also projected, but it was cancelled because of the financial shortages in 1878. Although the project was not completed, Sudan benefited a lot during the construction process of the railway. Some railway stations and telegraph lines were built in some cities of Sudan including Suakin. In case of the completion of the railway project, Suakin would promote its strategic importance in terms of commercial activities. It would increase its position in the commercial activities of the Red Sea, but the project could not be completed due to above mentioned reasons. Although this project could not be completed, it was important for the region because it was the first railway attempt into Africa.

The developments in the field of marine transportation in Egypt were closely related to Suakin because it was one of the main destinations for the marine routes between Egypt and the Red Sea region. Egyptian governors paid

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<sup>58</sup> Gülden Sarıyıldız, "Mısır'da Kurulam Mecidiye Vapur Kumpanyası ve Faaliyetleri," *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri* (Istanbul, 2003), 19.

special attention to the improvement of marine transportation. They firstly established the Nile River Company in 1854. After three years, the Majidiye Company was established in 1857, and Mustafa Fadil, son of Ibrahim Pasha, was appointed as the head of the company. The name of the company was derived from the 31st sultan of the Ottoman Empire; Abdulmajid. Both the Ottoman citizens and foreigners existed at the administrative body of the company. The aim of this company was to transport both passengers and commercial products from the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Ferry transportation in the Red Sea was also provided by this company. After Majidiye Company commenced service in the Red Sea, regular transportation services started between Suez and Suakin, and from Suakin to Jeddah. In addition to these regular routes, there were also transportation services from Suakin to Massawa and Yemen ports.

Because its geopolitical location, Suakin was at the heart of the transportation activity of this company which had the operation right for 30 years. The Majidiye Company led to an increase in mobility in Suakin. The pilgrims who came from central and western Africa destined at Suakin to pass through Jeddah by means of ferries of the Majidiye Company. This route was more beneficial than following the northern Africa routes for pilgrims. Therefore, they preferred to use Suakin as a transit point, and increased mobility in the region.

During the reign of Said Pasha who governed Egypt between 1832 – 1835, the Majidiye Company had gradually lost its significance. Therefore, when Ismail Pasha came to power, he abolished the Majidiye Company and established the Aziziye Company to increase the prominence of marine transportation again. This company aimed to serve the same purposes as the abolished Majidiye Company. Therefore, it also transports passengers and commercial goods around the Red Sea and Mediterranean. The Red Sea ports increased their functionality by means of the intensive transportation schedule of the Aziziye Company.

The Aziziye Company gained accomplishment in a very short time by means of its wide network from the Indian Ocean to Persian Gulf, and from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. Ismail Pasha noticed the success of the company and purchased all the shares of it. Accordingly, Ismail Pasha became the owner of the Aziziye Company. The company had approximately 26 vessels.<sup>59</sup> After Ismail Pasha purchased the company, the vessels started to transport mails in addition to passengers and the commercial products. By means of mail transportation, Suakin became the post center of Sudan. Therefore, high ranked officers who planned to arrive in Sudan tended to prefer Suakin to establish communication in terms of telegraphs and mails. Moreover, the European merchants and tourists who aimed to reach Africa also started to use Suakin as a secured transit hub.<sup>60</sup> Aziziye Company was sold to the British investors by Ismail Pasha. With the help of this company, Britain increased its control over the Red Sea region. Accordingly, the British influence on Suakin accelerated after they bought the company. In addition to their military superiority, they also gained control over the trade routes. As a result, Britain took a strategic step by purchasing this company.<sup>61</sup>

After the opening of the Suez Canal, Suakin did not lose its strategic importance; on the contrary, it became strategically more significant in terms of the security of the Suez Canal. In other words, without controlling Suakin, it was not possible to secure commercial activities at the Red Sea, including the Suez Canal. Therefore, Ismail Pasha managed to have control of Suakin with the permission of the Ottoman sultan. Under the Egyptian authority, Suakin was used as an administrative, commercial and military base because of its geopolitical location.<sup>62</sup> With the mail and telegraph services, Suakin turned into an attraction center for every kind of people such as high-ranked

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<sup>59</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 111.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>61</sup> Orhonlu, Işıksal, "Osmanlı Devrinde Nehir Nakliyatı Hakkında Araştırmalar," 17.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "Suakin: A Northeast African Port in the Ottoman Empire," 33.



military and administrative officers, merchants, pilgrims or tourists. Accordingly, Suakin was a significant port not only for Egypt, but also for Sudan which was under the influence of Egypt.

As a result, the strategic position of Suakin attracted the attention of Britain. Therefore, the British influence on Suakin dramatically increased in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, Britain took advantage of Suakin against the Ottoman Empire by effectively controlling the Egyptian governors who were highly indebted to Britain.

### **2.3. Anglo-Turkish Relations During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The Anglo-Turkish relations reached its peak point during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bilateral relations were strengthened by new trade agreements. In this context, the Ottoman Empire signed two crucial trade agreements with Britain in 1838 and 1861. Britain supported the Ottoman Empire many times in the international arena to save its interests during this century.

The economic cooperation between the Ottoman Empire and Britain turned into political and military cooperation after the second half of the century. The Russian expansion through the Ottoman lands triggered Britain to develop political relations with the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, the French occupation of Egypt was the turning point for bilateral relations. After this occupation in 1798, the Ottoman Empire and Britain signed a military agreement for the first time. Until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain defended the Ottoman Empire against other global actors, especially Russia. However, Britain changed its policy towards the Ottoman Empire after the premiership of William Ewart Gladstone.<sup>63</sup> He expressed his enmity against the Ottoman Empire in every opportunity and defended the dismemberment

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<sup>63</sup> John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1903), p. 622.

of the Ottoman Empire. His harsh politics against Turks led an Anglo-Russian rapprochement against the Ottoman Empire. He supported all the separatist movements in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>64</sup>

Although the Britain and Russia had some disputes over the Ottoman Empire like the issue of straits, both of them agreed on the intervention of the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire by means of the minorities.<sup>65</sup> In addition to Gladstone's politics, the bilateral relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Britain broke down dramatically after the Congress of Berlin in 1878.<sup>66</sup> The British involvement in Suakin followed the same steps with the other areas of the empire. Britain firstly developed commercial affairs, and then increased its political and military influence in Suakin.

### **2.3.1. British Involvement into Suakin**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was not possible to talk about a noteworthy presence of the British influence in Sudan general, and in Suakin particular. During that period, colonial powers competed to take control of Egypt rather than Sudan or the Red Sea ports. However, their colonial needs increased dramatically, and they started to launch expeditions to every inch of Africa to meet their industrial needs. During the second of the century, the British merchants and diplomats started to arrive in Sudan. When the British merchants placed at the coasts of the Red Sea, the commercial activities in the region increased because of their strong links with India. In addition, the

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<sup>64</sup> Gladstone wrote a book about the Ottoman reaction of the Bulgarian uprising with full of hatred against the Turks. He accused of Turks for over reaction against the uprising. However, the uprising in 1876 aimed to destroy Turkish villages and participating of all Bulgarians to this uprising for the separation of the Ottoman Empire. Ömer Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1998), p. 47-48.

<sup>65</sup> Fahir Armaoğlu, *19. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1997), p. 229.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Allen Shafer, "The Congress of Berlin of 1878: Its Origins and Consequences", Unpublished PhD diss., (Portland State University, 1989), 74.

British authorities sent some special diplomats to present reports to the British government about the region.

During the reign of Khedive Ismail Pasha of Egypt, Britain gradually involved in Sudan related issues. The opening of the Suez Canal was a turning point for the British interests towards the Red Sea area. To have full control of the trade routes from India to Suez, the Red Sea ports had a vital role. They were well-aware that Suakin was the heart of the Red Sea trade. Therefore, British authorities were on the lookout for a suitable opportunity to implement their influence on Suakin. To realize this target, they encouraged Ismail Pasha against the Ottoman Empire in order to take control of Suakin under the Egyptian administration. Khedive managed to realize this request, but Britain did not let him follow a unique agenda on the port. British merchants purchased most of the transportation companies of Egypt, and became the dominant figures in the Red Sea commercial activities.

The British involvement in Suakin entered another phase with the occupation of Egypt in 1882. Britain started to have direct control over the strategic locations which were formerly under the Ottoman-Egyptian administration. At the establishment of British authority in Suakin and its surroundings, British officials Sir Samuel Baker and Charles George Gordon (Gordon Pasha) made a great effort in accordance with the British interests. Gordon Pasha particularly was the most influential figure who prepared a suitable ground for the establishment of British authority in the region.

### 2.3.2. British Existence in the Suakin in terms of Commercial Activities

When the British came to Sudan, there were Austrian, Italian and Greek merchants.<sup>67</sup> British merchants were interested in the transportation business. There was a small amount of British community at Sudan between 1848 and 1865. There was also a British consulate in Khartoum which was established to protect the rights of British merchants against the local administrators who collected a large quantity of money as taxation.<sup>68</sup>

The commercial activities in Sudan developed after 1859 with the marketing of precious goods like ivory, coffee, gold, salt, cotton, ostrich feathers, etc. On the one hand, these goods were exported to the Arabian Peninsula and India via the Suakin port, or to Europe via Egypt by the British merchants. On the other hand, British merchants imported manufactured goods from Britain like glasses and textile products.<sup>69</sup> When the Majidiye Company was established to increase the Red Sea trade activities, British merchants benefited from its opportunities. They used Suakin very actively because it was one of the main destinations of the Majidiye Company.<sup>70</sup>

John Petherick, the British consul in Khartoum, made a suggestion to the British government that Suakin port should have been more effectively to obtain the maximum profit from the Red Sea trade.<sup>71</sup> He made this suggestion in 1859 when Suakin was not a part of Egypt but the part of Jeddah in that period. This situation can explain why Britain encouraged Khedive Ismail

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Santi, *The Europeans in Sudan (1834-1878)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 169.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>69</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 129.

<sup>70</sup> Gülden Sarıyıldız, "Mısır'da Kurulam Mecidiye Vapur Kumpanyası ve Faaliyetleri," 21.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Santi, *The Europeans in Sudan (1834-1878)*, 178.

Pasha of Egypt to insist on the Ottoman Empire having Suakin under the Egyptian administration.

A large proportion of commercial activities of Sudan was made via Suakin during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Egyptian control in Suakin, the number of the British merchants dramatically increased. They were well-aware of the strategical importance of Suakin. For example, all the ivory, in Sudan including Darfur and Kordofan, was exported via Suakin and the merchants of this trade were British.<sup>72</sup> The British influence on Suakin was not restricted with commercial activities. They became the most influential people in the administration of Suakin after the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Gordon Pasha was appointed the governor of Sudan for the first time, he passed Khartum via Suakin and ordered the construction of a gate for the city. After his governorship, British influence, particularly in Suakin, overwhelmingly increased in that period.

Although the British involvement in Suakin started with commercial activities, the British, increased their efficiency in almost every field. When the British government initiated a Sudan agenda apart from Egypt, Suakin gained special importance because of its vital location in the trade activities of Sudan. Therefore, the British were encouraged by their government to invest in that region to revive trade activities on behalf of British interests.

### **2.3.3. Samuel Baker: The First British Representative of Sudan**

Khedive Ismail Pasha aimed to establish powerful relations with Britain during his reign. He tried to adopt British rules related to the abolishment of slavery to show himself a reliable partner in the region. He turned his face to the south to fight against slavery in appearance. However, his primary

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<sup>72</sup> Ignatius Pallme, *Travels in Kordofan* (London: J. Madden and Co., Leadenhall Street, 1937), 267.

intention was to expand his control through the Red Sea region. As a sign of goodwill, Ismail Pasha appointed Sir Samuel Baker as the guide of his expansion plans towards the south. Samuel Baker was the first British who was officially entrusted with a task in Sudan. He started to implement British influence in the region.

Sir Samuel Baker was appointed as the governor of Equatoria, which is a part of Sudan, by Ismail Pasha.<sup>73</sup> He was very familiar with the region because, before his appointment, he visited the region to discover the sources of the Nile. During his journey, he discovered the Albert Lake in 1864.<sup>74</sup> His plans about the region were accepted by Ismail Pasha in general. The problem was that Baker was a Christian British subject and the people who would govern the place were Muslims. This situation created unrest against the Egyptian authority and people started to question the behaviors of the khedive. Despite all the unrest created by the local people, Baker maintained his duty and became relatively successful in the name of British and Egyptian cooperation. He built several military points to avoid slave trade as a political priority of Britain.

Like all adventurers, Baker also first came to the Suakin port by route through Sudan. That was why he was well aware of the geopolitical significance of Suakin. Although he did not attempt to take control of Suakin during his duty in Equatoria, his reports guided the next British representatives in Sudan. In other words, his service in the region prepared a ground for the permanent British existence in Sudan.

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<sup>73</sup> L.A. Fabunmi, *Sudan in Anglo-Egyptian Relations: A Case Study in Power Politics 1800-1956* (London: Longman, 1958), 31.

<sup>74</sup> Sir Samuel White Baker, *The Albert Niyaza: Great Basin of the Nile* (London, 1879), 8.

#### **2.3.4. The Reign of Gordon Pasha on Sudan**

During the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain increased its pressure on the Egyptian government to take more British citizens into the state services. By means of British officers, Britain attempted to implement its existence in the region. After Samuel Baker, Britain requested from the Egyptian government to appoint Charles George Gordon to the Equatoria region as the sole governor in 1874.<sup>75</sup> Unlike Baker, Gordon was not under the service of general governor of Sudan, but he ruled Equatoria as a separate territorial unit.

As it was mentioned above, the British involvement in the region was justified by the abolishment of slavery by Britain. Although they fought against slavery in many regions, they simultaneously used it as a pretext to involve in the region on many occasions. The British government put forward this pretext against Ismail Pasha of Egypt to provide the appointment of Gordon Pasha to Sudan's Equatoria. Accordingly, Gordon Pasha aimed to show how Britain fought against slavery during his term of office. He employed some former slave dealers to fight effectively against slavery because they knew the slave trade mechanisms better than the officials. It is possible to say that he had a considerable achievement against the slave dealers in Equatoria.

Gordon Pasha entrusted the European people rather than the locals, and employed many of them in different positions at the governorate of Equatoria. He also initiated missionary movement in the region, and brought a lot of priests to convert the locals to Christianity. In other words, religion was used as an instrument by Gordon Pasha in implementing the British influence in the region. His achievements on behalf of Britain was appreciated by the British authorities. Therefore, London attempted to convince the Egyptian government to declare Gordon Pasha as the general governor of all Sudan,

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<sup>75</sup> Stephanie Laffer, "Gordon's Ghosts: British Major-General Charls George Gordon and His Legacies, 1885-1960" (Florida State University Libraries, 2010), 21.

instead of a part of Sudan, Equatoria. Ismail Pasha accepted this request and promoted him as the governor of Sudan. It is a fact that with the efforts of Samuel Baker and Gordon Pasha, Britain established a suitable ground for its future plans towards Eastern Africa. After the accomplishment of his duty, Gordon Pasha resigned from his position and returned to Britain in 1879.

After the resignation of Gordon Pasha, Britain started to realize its plans in the region. These plans consisted of separation of Equotaria region from Sudan, and controlling the Red Sea costs in general. During the reign of Ismail Pasha, some important ports like Suakin and Massawa were transferred to the Egyptian authority with the permission of the Ottoman Empire. In other words, from Suez to the East African coasts, all the Red Sea region was under the control of the Egypt government. Egyptian control over these significant coastlines was an opportunity for Britain to implement its influence through the Red Sea surrounding. The Ottoman Empire was well- aware of the British plans in the region. To avoid the British influence, the Ottoman Empire ordered Colonel Ahmet Bey, admiral of the Ottoman warships at the Red Sea to take precautions against the purchasing of territories by foreigners throughout the Red Sea coasts.<sup>76</sup>

When the Mahdist movement<sup>77</sup> started to spread through Sudan, Britain forced Egypt government to fight against the riots. Egyptian government had to act against them because the Mahdist movement had a religious characteristic and firstly targeted to Nubar Pasha who was an Armenian Christian. Nubar Pasha was the head of the Egyptian government in that

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<sup>76</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Dahiliye*, 2.

<sup>77</sup> The Mahdiya takes its name from its leader Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdullah. How this movement occurred was a controversial issue. Although Egyptian mistreatment against the Sudanese was a cause to Mahdiya, it is not the only reason for this movement. The collapse of the khedivate in 1879 after Ismail Pasha made metropolitan control over Sudanese provinces weak and hesitant. Like Ismail Pasha, Gordon Pasha of Britain was far from being an ideal leader in Sudan. Therefore, power vacuum in the region was one of the most important reasons. P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *The History of the Sudan from the coming of Islam to the Presedent Day*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), 85-86.



period because former government was resigned after the direct British occupation of Egypt. Egyptian government directly influenced Sudan because it was a part of Egypt in terms of administration. That is why the Mahdist movement was erupted not only against the British occupation, but also against the Egyptian government. Khedive Tewfik Pasha was also accused to be a puppet of Britain by the people who joined the Mahdist movement.

With the suggestion of the British authorities, Egypt recruited ten thousand soldiers to quell the Mahdist movement.<sup>78</sup> This situation was important to show the British strategy towards both Egypt and Sudan. First of all, Egypt chose the soldiers who could be dangerous for the British existence in Egypt to send Sudan. After the occupation of the Egypt, some Egyptian soldiers were annoyed by the British rule. Therefore, Britain got rid of potential danger by means of sending them a relatively remote area. Secondly, Britain used Egyptian soldiers, instead of its own soldiers to quell the upheaval. While Britain used its soldiers to save strategically significant areas, Egyptian soldiers were sent to fight against the Mahdi supporters. The British soldiers were responsible to save particularly Suakin to maintain the trade activities in the Red Sea. For example, British soldiers struggled against the Mahdi supporters in Tokar which is a very close city to Suakin. It is possible to say that Britain did not show direct reaction against the Mahdist movement, but tried to save its interests by controlling strategic locations like Suakin.<sup>79</sup>

The British government decided to reinstate Gordon Pasha in the governorship of Sudan again in 1884. The British authorities believed that Gordon Pasha was the most suitable man to realize the British plans in the region. After the British occupation of Egypt, a chaotic situation occurred in Sudan indirectly. Therefore, Gordon Pasha was the only one who knew the region and was eager to implement the British influence in the region. His

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<sup>78</sup> A.B. Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1952), 50.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Malcolm Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 77.

early successes in the region were his main references to be nominated as the governor of Sudan by the British government. His fight against slavery was also applauded by the British public. As a result, the British government increased its pressure on Egypt to accept the governorship of Gordon Pasha in Sudan.

Britain gave full authority to Gordon Pasha to exercise British plans in Sudan. Gordon Pasha would not take orders from the Egyptian authorities, and he directly linked to the British central government.<sup>80</sup> This situation was the first sign of the separation of Sudan from Egypt. The Egyptian influence over Sudan gradually decreased. Gordon Pasha played an important role in this situation. However, the Egyptian influence on Suakin remained because of some legal reasons. As it was mentioned before, Suakin was not given to Egypt permanently. Suakin was transferred to the Egyptian administration from the Hejaz province with the request of Ismail Pasha to the central Ottoman government. Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz accepted this request with some conditions. Suakin would be under the supervision of the Ottoman Empire in terms of balance of income and expenditures. Therefore, Suakin's statue remained unsolved in that period officially, although Britain had almost a full control on the Suakin port. In other words, while Gordon Pasha fought against the Mahdi supporters for the Red Sea coasts, particularly Suakin, he also gave a struggle against the Ottoman Empire for Suakin by means of diplomacy.

Gordon Pasha made a great endeavor to expand the British influence towards Eastern African coasts. He was one of the very rare administrators who were appointed to same region for the second time in British colonial history. His efforts enabled that Britain had a suitable ground to realize its colonial interest at the Red Sea coasts. At that point, he gave particular attention to the Suakin because of its geopolitical location. He saved the British interests on Suakin

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<sup>80</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 173.

port very successfully. Accordingly, he was the most influential figure who enabled the British involvement in Suakin in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As a result, Suakin rised as an area of struggle among the great powers from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman Empire had a certain sovereignty on Suakin and the Red Sea region after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, with the increasing influence of the Britain towards the region, the Ottoman Empire gradually lost its advantageous position on Suakin. The unofficial Anglo-Egyptian alliance on the region caused the loss of Ottoman control on Suakin. All these developments led a direct intervention of the Britain in Suakin during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANGLO-EGYPTIAN ADMINISTRATION ON SUAKIN AND THE OTTOMAN REACTION**

At the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire started to lose its control on the Red Sea region. The occupation of Egypt by Britain was a turning point for the Ottoman existence in the region because this event prepared the further occupation steps on behalf of the great powers throughout the Red Sea surrounding. Although Britain had entire control over Egypt, it was not enough for broader British interests. Correspondingly, Britain took further steps to expand its influence by intervening in the issues of Sudan. The British merchants located at Suakin to join maritime trade activities before the British military presence in the region. However, it was not enough for the British authorities in Egypt, and they decided to increase their military presence in the Red Sea. Suakin was quite suitable for this purpose.

The British authorities sought a pretext to intervene in Sudan in general, and Suakin in specific. The Mahdist movement started in 1881, and provided a suitable ground for Britain to implement its military forces in the region. Suakin was officially under the Ottoman administration, but its operation right was given to Egypt during the reign of Ismail Pasha as stated in the previous chapter. Therefore, Britain had indirect control in Suakin by means of the khedives of Egypt. After the advance of the Mahdist army, Britain decided to utilize an evacuation strategy of the Egyptian forces from Sudan. After these evacuations, the Egyptian influence gradually perished in Sudan. This situation affected the Ottoman Empire indirectly because Ottomans

maintained their influence on Sudan through the Egyptian presence in the region.

Although the Ottoman Empire was against the Mahdist revolt, the Ottoman authorities had to reach a compromise with Osman Digna, the most powerful figure in Eastern Sudan in the Mahdist army. As a result, the Ottoman Empire acted against Britain, and later Italy together with the local powers against the foreign interventions. After long struggles, the Ottoman Empire lost its control over Suakin which was the key to Sudan. Therefore, this chapter will evaluate the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from Suakin, and replacement of Anglo- Egyptian administration with the Ottoman Turks.

### **3.1. The Mahdist Movement Against the Egyptian Existence**

Britain made an effort to establish healthy relations with the local people in Sudan by means of British merchants, administrators, and priests. Gordon Pasha gave particular attention to having healthy relations with the local people, and travelled almost all of Sudan for this purpose. However, with the resignation of Gordon Pasha from his duty, this attempt could not become successful. After the 1880s, the Egyptian existence in Sudan caused great unrest on the public because of several reasons. Heavy taxes, mistreatment of the people and misgovernment on the region were the most important reasons for this unrest.<sup>81</sup> The local reaction against the Egyptians led to arise of the Mahdist movement which was launched by the Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi in 1881. In other words, the Mahdist movement was the biggest local reaction against the Egyptian administration of Sudan.

The Mahdist movement widened its influence on Sudan, and confronted with the Egyptian forces in many regions. However, Suakin was not influenced

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<sup>81</sup> Muhammad Ahmad (al-Mahdi) found discontent with the Egyptian administration. The simple peasants and nomads disliked the payment of taxes, which were extorted on occasion by no gentle methods. Peter M. Holt, "The Sudanese Mahdia and the outside World: 1881-9", in *the Bulletin of the school of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1/3 (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1958), 277.

deeply by this movement because of several reasons. First of all, geographically the Mahdist movement started around Kordofan which was far from the Red Sea coasts of Sudan. Therefore, its influence on Suakin was relatively less than the other regions of Sudan. Secondly, the leader of the movement, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, did never come to Suakin or its surrounding and Osman Digna, the follower of Mahdi, represented the movement in that region. Accordingly, the absence of al- Mahdi himself on the region caused a weak interest in the movement.

Britain had a powerful military existence in Suakin.<sup>82</sup> A lot of warships and British soldiers were ready to defend the British interests there. The struggle of Osman Digna against the British existence in the Suakin could not reach a decisive victory. Therefore, the local reaction against the British could not change the current situation in favor of the Mahdist movement in Suakin.

### **3.1.1. The Mahdist Movement in Suakin**

The characteristics of the Mahdi movement were different in Eastern Sudan, including Suakin. The Hadendewa tribe was the most powerful tribe in the region and they are famous for their enmity against the Egyptian authority in Sudan. They had a struggle against the Egyptian administration, and did not accept the Egyptian authority on Suakin. Egyptian rulers exercised heavy taxes and took them under the pressure. Therefore, they had a great reason to join the Mahdi movement and expel the Egyptian existence from their lands. They lived along the Red Sea littoral of Sudan and controlled the vital port area of Suakin, Sudan's only link to the outside world apart from the Nile.<sup>83</sup> In other words, they had a claim on the most strategic location of Sudan and they were ready to retrieve it.

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<sup>82</sup> Robert N. Rossi, "The Mahdist Revolution" (Unpublished PhD diss., Florida Atlantic University, 1994), 42.

<sup>83</sup> Rossi, 43.

Osman Digna was the leader of the Mahdist movement in eastern Sudan as the representative of the Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi. He met with the Mahdi in 1882. The Mahdi accepted him as his leader in this strategically vital area. He motivated Osman Digna to raise and lead the Suakin area in revolution against the government. Al-Mahdi gave to Osman Digna no support in his mission other than his blessings and letters to the people and religious leaders in the Suakin area.<sup>84</sup>

Osman Digna managed to start a revolt against the Egyptian administration in Suakin. This upheaval had the potential to sever the communication between the Egyptian government and the interior of Sudan. Osman Digna started to control strategic Suakin-Berber route which was the most important access for Egypt to the interior of Sudan. By mid-1883, the Egyptian garrisons around the region were besieged and reduced by the forces of Osman Digna. Egyptians realized that if reinforcements were not sent, and the entire Red Sea costs were going to be lost to the Mahdists.

The Egyptian government asked Britain to send a relief force against the Osman Digna. However, Britain was not willing to send forces to the Egyptian government.<sup>85</sup> Yet, Britain charged Valentine Baker, a former British army officer in India, to lead Egyptian relief force to hold Suakin and oppress the upheaval of Osman Digna in Eastern Sudan. This relief force consisted of Egyptian soldiers, not the British soldiers. British authorities in Egypt decided that they would not mix Egyptian forces with British forces in any operation launched by Britain in the region.<sup>86</sup> This relief force under the command of Baker arrived in the Suakin area in December 1883. On 18

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<sup>84</sup> Sir Francis R. Wingate, *Mahdism, and Egyptian Sudan*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1968), 92.

<sup>85</sup> Theobald, *The Mahdiya*, 70.

<sup>86</sup> Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt, I* (London: Maxmillian, 1908), 399.

January 1884, Baker marched with his troops from Suakin and arrived at Trinkitat on January 31, 1884.<sup>87</sup> He had 3656 forces composed of Turkish, Egyptian, and local Sudanese forces.<sup>88</sup> His mission was to relieve the besieged Egyptian garrisons, and terminate the Mahdist forces under the command of Osman Digna. On 4 February 1884, Osman Digna defeated the Baker forces at the Battle of El-Teb, which was place 15 miles away from Suakin, with a decisive victory.

After this defeat, the Egyptian government had no more force to send to Sudan to protect the Egyptian garrisons there against the forces of Osman Digna. Egypt had military existence in different parts of Sudan as garrisons such as Berber, Equatoria, Dongola, and Suakin. Although there were 10,000 men in general, none of the garrisons had enough capacity to launch an offensive war against the Mahdist forces. Apart from the British assistance, Egypt had two options: fighting against the Mahdi with what they had in the garrisons or withdrawing from Sudan. However, the British unwilling accepted to send military forces to terminate the existence of the Mahdist forces, and suggested the Egyptians evacuate Sudan.<sup>89</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Egyptian forces from Suakin, the British authorities took control of the city, and appointed Admiral Hewett as the governor of Suakin.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the British government decided to send British soldiers to Suakin to protect the city against any possible assault coming from the Mahdist forces. It is possible to say that Britain became aware of the strategic importance of the Suakin-Berber route after the war of El-Teb in 1884. With the help of this route, al-Mahdi managed to mobilize his supporters successfully and increase his influence throughout the region.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>88</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*, 78.

<sup>89</sup> Rossi, "The Mahdist Revolution," 45.

<sup>90</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 1141.



The British government also realized that the port of Suakin could provide global access to Mahdi. Therefore, Britain decided to contain the uprising by holding Suakin with the British soldiers. The British forged an expeditionary force under General Sir Gerald Graham to defeat the insurgents. The British government equipped this regiment with heavy machine guns and field artillery batteries. This expedition would be the first British military action against the forces of Osman Digna.

Abdullah bin Hasid and Madani bin Ali, who was the nephew of Osman Digna, led the Mahdist forces against the British forces with his 6,000 soldiers. The second battle of El-Teb started between these powers on 29<sup>th</sup> February 1884.<sup>91</sup> While the Mahdist power stood in a defensive position, the British soldiers shelled their positions with heavy weapons. The Mahdist forces lost a quarter of their men in this battle. As a result, the British overwhelmed the Mahdist forces in the second battle of El-Teb. Both Abdullah bin Hasid and Madani bin Ali lost their lives in this battle. However, the Mahdist forces, who mostly comprised of the Hadendewa tribesmen, fought with great faith against their enemy. The British were highly impressed with the bravery displayed by these local soldiers fighting for the Mahdist cause.<sup>92</sup> As a result of this battle, the British succeeded in breaking the siege on the Egyptian garrison of Tokar.

On 13 March 1884, General Graham engaged the Mahdist forces a second time at the battle Tamai after his success at the battle of El-Teb.<sup>93</sup> Mahsud Musa, the cousin of Mahsud Musa commanded the Mahdist army in this battle with his 10,000 men. Although he commanded his army very effectively against the British, he could not reach his goal against the superior British firepower. As a result, the Mahdist army lost against the British for

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<sup>91</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 205.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Barthorp, *War on the Nile: Britain, Egypt and the Sudan 1882-1898* (London: Blandford Press, 1984), 83.

<sup>93</sup> Rossi, "The Mahdist Revolution," 46.

the second time on the battlefield. Although Osman Digna lost the last two battles in El-Teb and Tamai, his existence in the Suakin area did not perish. He maintained to control the region very effectively except Suakin city. The British army did not show any other reaction against Osman Digna in 1884 because they had gained what they wanted through these battles.

The Suakin-Berber route was very crucial for the transportation between Egypt and Sudan. The control of this route by the Mahdist army was very harmful for Egypt. However, Britain did not consider controlling this route as a priority. The British priority was the Suakin itself and Britain succeeded in providing its security. The Suakin-Berber route was especially important for Egypt. After the existence of Osman Digna on this route, Egypt started to lose its efficiency in Sudan gradually.

During 1884, the British did not attempt to interfere further with military operations in the Suakin area.<sup>94</sup> After they provided the security of Suakin, they concentrated on the separation of Egypt and Sudan as two different entities. The Mahdist movement created a great danger against the Ottoman-Egyptian existence in the region because the Egyptian misbehaviors against the locals were the main starting point of the movement. During the upheavals, the British government convinced Khedive Tewfik Pasha to retreat Egyptian soldiers from Sudan. As a result, the Egyptian existence diminished dramatically after this decision and Sudan was opened to direct British influence.

### **3.1.2. The Ottoman Reaction against the Mahdist Movement in Suakin**

The Ottoman Empire faced with the religious uprisings many times through its long history. However, the Mahdist movement had a different

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 46.

characteristic than the former examples like Shahkulu or Wahhabi uprisings. The Mahdist movement was not a sectarian movement but the sentiment of Mahdism. This doctrine interestingly was not deprived of Shi'ite tradition. Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi declared himself as prophesied redeemer of the world in Sudan.

The Mahdist movement created very dangerous results for the Ottoman Empire. First of all, From Selim I, the Ottoman sultans was titled with Caliph who was responsible for all the Muslims in the globe. However, Mahdi's self-proclamation confronted with the appellations of the Ottoman sultan. In addition, During the uprisings in Sudan, Abdulhamid II was the Ottoman sultan and he was famous for his Islamism doctrine<sup>95</sup> against the foreign invasions of the Ottoman lands. Therefore, Ahmad al-Mahdi's separatist movement was also ruined the Islamic union policy of Abdulhamid II.

Abdulhamid's Islamism policy was seen extremely dangerous by the British because of their Islamic colonies all over the world, especially India. In other words, the Ottoman sultan could use his title of Caliph and affect the Muslims under the British. The effectiveness of this title can be discussed but it was certain that the British felt uneasiness because of this situation. Therefore, the Mahdi movement was actually very benefited for the British interests both in the region and in the oversea colonies. By the pretext of the Mahdist danger, Britain pressured on Khedive of Egypt to evacuate Sudan. Moreover, Britain succeeded to undermine Abdulhamid II's Islamism policy over the British colonies. Furthermore, the British occupation of Egypt and the Mahdist movement took place almost at the same time. However, the Ottoman sultan was not biased against the Mahdist movement by looking all these

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<sup>95</sup> Abdulhamid II followed Islamist policy throughout his reign. This policy did not come from his personal religious characteristic, but came from the necessities of the period. Abdulhamid saw the Islamism as the most appropriate policy to keep the empire united against the foreign interventions. Cezmi Eraslan, *II. Abdülhamid ve İslam Birliği: Osmanlı Devleti'nin İslam Siyaseti 1856-1908*, (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2019), p. 193.

connections. Therefore, he asked more detailed reports from his bureaucrats.<sup>96</sup>

From the beginning of the uprisings, the Ottoman Empire watched the situation closely with the help of its bureaucrats in Egypt and Hejaz. The governor of Hejaz especially reported the issue with details because he was very close to Suakin and had a chance to observe what was happening in the region.<sup>97</sup> These kinds of reports were helpful in Ottoman politics towards the region.

The Ottoman Empire was worried about the British invasion of Sudan because of the Mahdist movement. The Ottoman Empire had an unpleasant experience during the Urabi Revolt in Egypt which was a pretext for the British government to invade Egypt in 1882. Therefore, The Mahdist movement had also a potential to be used by British for the invasion of Sudan. The Ottoman Empire showed a quick reaction and determined its policy against the Mahdist movement. By receiving reports from all the bureaucrats in the region, including Khedive Tewfik Pasha, the Ottoman Empire named the pioneer of the uprising as bandit and never used the title of Mahdi for him. Although the Mahdist uprising was considered as a dangerous separatist movement by the Ottoman government,<sup>98</sup> the empire was deeply concerned about the British invasion of Sudan. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire did not consent any British intervention to the Mahdist movement. However, the British government decided to launch a military intervention to the Suakin.

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<sup>96</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 209.

<sup>97</sup> Mahud sahte-yi Mehdiye dair fi 23 Muharrem sen 1299 (Hicri) tarih ile varid olup tezkire-i aliyye-i sadaret penahileriyle irsal buyrulan telgrafname hidiv-i menzur-i ali-i hazreti padişahi buyuruldu. BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 1113.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 115.

Admiral Hewett was appointed as the governor of Suakin as a result of this decision.<sup>99</sup>

The expansion of the Mahdist movement through the Red Sea littoral of Sudan, the Ottoman Empire recognized the seriousness of the danger. The main aim of the Mahdist rebellions at the eastern parts of Sudan was to take control of Suakin, which was the window to the world for Sudan, because of its geopolitical location. In case of the Mahdist invasion to the Suakin, the Jeddah port of the Ottoman Empire at would be in danger too. Jeddah was the main port of the Hejaz province which includes the holy cities of Islam in its borders. Accordingly, any possible success of the Mahdist revolt in Suakin could affect the Hejaz province as well. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire had to take measures against the Mahdist forces under the command of Osman Digna.

The Ottoman Empire was in a complex situation against the Mahdist Movement. On the one hand, the success of Osman Digna in the region would create a religious danger on the Hejaz province of the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, the British invasion of Suakin would also result in the separation of all Sudan from the empire. In addition to this paradoxical situation, there was a growing Russian threat at the Balkans against the Ottomans. Because of this Russian threat, Abdulhamid II could not send his army to defend the Suakin against both Britain and Osman Digna. Therefore, he had to take soft measures against the danger at the empire's southern fronts. As a result, the Ottoman Empire decided to strengthen its military existence in the Hejaz province.<sup>100</sup> In this context, three warships were sent to the Red Sea littorals with few Arabic speaking coast guards.<sup>101</sup> This

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<sup>99</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 215.

<sup>100</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 1312.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 1365.

measure was not a solution to the problem but it aimed to prevent the expansion of the Mahdist movement or British invasion through the holy lands. The Mahdist army defeated the British forces many times. Gazi Ahmad Mukhtar Pasha, High Commissioner of the Ottoman Empire at Egypt, reported that the Mahdist army increases its efficiency after they captured the British weapons. In addition, the weapons dropped by the Egyptian forces while they were evacuating Sudan also played a great role in the advanced of the uprising.<sup>102</sup> For instance, when the British colonel William Hicks was defeated by the Mahdist army on 5 November 1883, the rebels captured a great number of weapons and other goods because Hicks' army composed of more than 10.000 soldiers. After the war, Mahdi captured all the goods belonged to them and strengthened his army. The military victories were not only beneficial in terms of obtaining more weapons or money but also, they were important to be justified the Mahdi's claims. He used these kinds of victories as a great tool to increase the numbers of his supporters.<sup>103</sup> Apart from Hicks, Baker, Graham, and Gordon were also defeated by the Mahdist army.

It can be expressed that the Ottoman Empire was more concerned about Suakin than the Mahdist movement itself. Therefore, Osman Digna, who was the representative of Mahdi at the eastern parts of Sudan, was followed more closely than Mahdi by the Ottoman officers in the region. Because Suakin was under the direct threat of him. During 1888, Osman Digna captured the lands at eastern Sudan except Suakin. He attempted to take Suakin under his control and launched many small-scale operations against the city. He seized the water-wells to cut the water of Suakin.<sup>104</sup> The efforts of Osman Digna were not sufficient to cut all the sources of Suakin and capture it because of

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<sup>102</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 222.

<sup>103</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*, 126.

<sup>104</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 223.

the British naval forces. By using the seaway, Britain could send all the necessity materials, foods, and weapons to Suakin. Osman Digna could not manage to prevent the logistic assistance of Britain because he did not have any naval forces. Both sides could not gain an advantage over each other for many years. The guerilla tactics of Osman Digna at the mountainous area of eastern Sudan was the main source of his victories against the British forces. Britain could not follow the Mahdist army even after the wars that Britain won because the mountainous are provide great assistance to the powers of Osman Digna while they decided to withdraw. On the contrary, the absence of naval forces was the biggest reason that Osman Digna could not capture Suakin for many years instead of his continuous sieges.

The long run of wars against the forces of Osman Digna affected the Egyptian economy severely. All the war expenses were provided by the Egyptian treasury, although Egypt suffered from financial bankruptcy in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Britain did not skip this chance and suggested Khedive Tewfik evacuate Suakin completely in 1888. When the Mahdist revolt raised all the Sudan during 1884, Britain managed to persuade Khedive Tewfik to evacuate all the Egyptian presence from Khartoum. In other words, Egyptian existence in Sudan was limited by Suakin in 1888.

Britain was uncomfortable with the indirect presence of the Ottoman Empire in Suakin. By means of its legitimate rights on Egypt and Suakin, the Ottoman Empire maintained its connection with the region even if it was a weak bond. This situation created a legal and practical difficulty for the British policies towards the region. Britain was eager to get rid of this complication by convincing both Egypt and the Ottoman Empire to evacuate the Suakin with the pretext of its financial burden.

During its colonial history, Britain preferred indirect rule instead of direct rule on its colonies. How Britain would follow a way to capture Suakin was a matter of question. There were several options for Britain to control Suakin

in the long run. Britain could leave Suakin to Italy, like in the Massawa where Britain let Italy have control of this port city at the Red Sea littoral in 1885.<sup>105</sup> However, it was a weak option because Britain had conscious that who controls Suakin, dominates Sudan. It was almost impossible for Britain to abandon Sudan because the Nile River which was vital for Egypt in terms of agricultural irrigation came across Sudan. Therefore, Britain would not choose this option. According to Gazi Mukhtar Pasha, Britain could leave Suakin to the Mahdist rebels until unlinking it from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>106</sup> It is possible to say that Britain was eager to give Suakin to the Osman Digna as a local administration to cut the Ottoman connection. Because capturing Suakin from the hands of locals would be easier than the Ottomans for the British administration. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire desired to maintenance of conflict between Britain and Osman Digna to save its rights in the region.

Gazi Mukhtar Pasha gave a suggestion to the Ottoman government to take Suakin under the central Ottoman administration. The Ottoman government accepted this suggestion and decided to take Suakin back from the Egypt province. The Ottoman government issued an edict about the reunion of Suakin to the Ottoman central administration from Egypt in 1888.<sup>107</sup>

The Ottoman Empire created Riza Pasha Commission to take back Suakin the Egypt administration. The aim of this commission was to search every issue on Suakin comprehensively. The commission was also charged with choosing the military personnel who would be sent to the Suakin. The commission took the reports of Gazi Mukhtar Pasha into consideration in their research. Like Gazi Pasha said the commission also decide to take all the rights of Suakin

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<sup>105</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Mısır*, 1303.

<sup>106</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 225.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.



by evacuating the British military personnel from the region. However, the British consul in Egypt, Evelyn Baring, did not give a visa to Khedive Tewfik to take a decision about Suakin. He added that the British government would negotiate Suakin issue with the Ottoman Empire directly.<sup>108</sup>

It was certain that the British government did not want to leave Suakin to the Ottoman Empire. While British authorities were attempting to evacuate Egyptian forces from Suakin, they did not mean to replace Egyptian administration with the Ottoman administration. Therefore, they did not let Khedive Tewfik take a decision on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. Although the Anglo-Turkish relations was ruined in the last decades of the century because of the occupation of Egypt by Britain, the Ottoman Empire was careful to maintain the negotiations on Suakin in a diplomatic manner.

Osman Digna had to deal with another global power in eastern Sudan after the occupation of Massawa by Italy. Although Massawa was Ottoman territory, Italy rejected to evacuate Massawa port to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>109</sup> All the components of the war in eastern Sudan knew that Italy captured this port by signing a treatment with Britain.<sup>110</sup> Italians were supposed to capture Suakin after the evacuation of Britain. However, Osman Digna decided to take action against Italy when Italy occupied Kassala after Massawa.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Nour, 230.

<sup>109</sup> Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899*, 138.

<sup>110</sup> BOA, *İrade-i Dahiliye*, 45141.

<sup>111</sup> John Flint, *The Wider Background to Partition and Colonial Occupation, History of East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 394.

Italy's expansionist policy through the lands in eastern Sudan prompted the Ottoman Empire to find alternative ways against the foreign intervention. First of all, the Ottoman Empire decided to follow a balanced policy among the great powers and attempted to compromise with France against the Italian existence in the region. France leaned to take place in eastern Sudan. Apart from a global ally, the Ottoman Empire also made effort to find a suitable ground for rapprochement with Osman Digna as a local power on the ground. Accordingly, the Ottoman Empire shifted its viewpoint about the Mahdist movement.

Hasan Hilmi Pasha, governor of Hejaz province, was the mediator between the Ottoman Empire and Osman Digna. He conducted this relation between them in strict confidence because Britain was observing Osman Digna very closely. The Ottoman Empire decided to send aids to Osman Digna in his war against Italy and Britain. In addition, some well-trained Ottoman military officers were sent to Osman Digna as the strategists against the foreign powers.<sup>112</sup> Britain was suspicious about the relation between the Ottoman Empire and Osman Digna. Therefore, the vessels who came from Hejaz were blocked by the British naval forces to land Sudan.<sup>113</sup>

Why Britain let Italy capture Massawa remained an unanswered question during that period. It can be expressed that after the intervention of Italy to the eastern Sudan littorals, Osman Digna turned his face to Italy and had to mobilize his forces through Italian captured areas around Kassala. By distracting Osman Digna's focus on Suakin, Britain took advantage of the Mahdist forces. When Osman Digna prepared to act against Italian forces, Britain captured Tokar which was a very close city to Suakin, approximately

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<sup>112</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 237.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

15 km distance.<sup>114</sup> In other words, Britain followed a smart politics against the Osman Digna by inviting the Italians to Sudan as a trouble of the Mahdist army. Britain could not manage to gain a decisive victory against the Osman Digna because of his guerilla tactics and consolidated forces around the Suakin. This strategy also prompted to Ottoman Empire to reach a rapprochement with Osman Digna. The sequence of events clearly showed that Britain would not leave Suakin to third parties including the Ottoman Empire, local forces or Italy. Because British authorities were well aware of the strategic significance of Suakin to dominant all the East African coasts of the Red Sea and Sudan.

The reaction of the Ottoman Empire to the Mahdist movement shifted in time because of the variable circumstances. Although the Mahdist movement raised against the Ottoman/Egyptian administration at the beginning, later turned into opposition to the foreign interventions to the region. It is possible to say that the Ottoman Empire was interested in Osman Digna more than Ahmad al-Mahdi, the founder of the movement because of the area of interests of the empire. From the beginning of the revolt, the Ottoman Empire mostly focused on the protection of its legal rights in the region, more than the revolt itself. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire attempted to find out the chaotic situation with demarche. However, Britain was not eager to compromise with any parties. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire established common ground with Osman Digna in the frame of their compatible interests.

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<sup>114</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*, 194.

### 3.2. British Invasion of Sudan and Suakin

After the French invasion of Egypt, Britain focused on the region to protect its interest and collaborated with the Ottoman Empire to get rid of the French presence in Egypt. Britain increased its dominance in Egypt after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1875. To provide the safety of the maritime trade routes from India to Red Sea and to the Mediterranean, Britain increased its influence through the region. First of all, Britain declared the occupation of Egypt in 1882. It was a turning point for the destiny of the region because Britain gradually started to follow its divide and rule policy in the Ottoman lands. However, it was essential to take Sudan under the control for Britain too. There were two main reasons for Britain. First one was related to Nile River which was the only source of the Egyptian agricultural irrigation. Egypt was famous for its cotton production during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and cotton was very important industrial product for British manufacturing companies. The second reason was to protect trade routes among India and Mediterranean. This reason was quite vital to the British strategy towards region because the security of trade routes was one of the most crucial necessities for the colonial powers. Accordingly, Suakin had a vital significance to realize the latter reason. Therefore, Sudan should have separated from Egypt according to British perspective.<sup>115</sup> With the eruption of Mahdi uprising in 1881, Britain increased its presence in Sudan, particularly in Suakin. After 1899, both Sudan and Suakin was occupied by Britain and Egypt lost its control over Suakin.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti* (Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996), 153.

<sup>116</sup> Ghada H. Talhami, *Suakin and Massawa under Egyptian Rule 1865-1885*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), p. 123.

### **3.2.1. The Establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian Administration in Sudan**

With the pretext of suppressing the Mahdist uprising, Britain sent its naval forces to the port of Suakin. Khedive Tewfik of Egypt appointed British admiral Hewlet as the administrator of Suakin.<sup>117</sup> With the help of these naval forces, Britain provided its trade security in the region.

The rebels did not have any naval forces and they could not interfere with the British activities at the Red Sea. Throughout the British existence in Suakin, the British administrators aimed to wipe out the Ottoman presence in there. To realize this aim, they utilized evacuation policy of Egyptian forces from Sudan because the Egyptian presence represented the Ottoman Empire in the region.

After the Mahdist expansion against the Egyptian garrisons in the inner regions of Sudan, Egypt conceded to evacuate Khartoum in 1884. As the second step, Britain attempted to convince Khedive Tewfik to evacuate Suakin by furthering the pretext of the financial burden of the expeditions against the Osman Digna. While British had this kind of request from Egypt, they did not wait an official answer from khedive and increased their military presence in Suakin. Although British authorities had a great impact on the Egyptian government, they could not reach a certain solution on the Mahdist army. the determination of Osman Digna could be a reason, but the situation was more international than the local.

Herbert Kitchener, the governor of the Egyptian provinces of eastern Sudan and the Red Sea littoral, was sent to the region to eliminate the threats. Kitchener firstly aimed to separate Sudan from Egypt and take it under direct

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<sup>117</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 242.

British rule. To realize this aim, he believed that Osman Digna should be terminated from eastern Sudan.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, firstly started to mobilize some local tribes against the Osman Digna. This effort was diminished the public support of Osman Digna in the region. British authorities started to prepare their forces in Wadi Halfa and Suakin to a final strike against the Mahdist army.

Although Sudan was under the British influence for many years, France stated to increase its presence around the Horn of Africa. When France attempted to occupy Fashoda and Lado, French showed their intention to expand through the northern parts of the Horn of Africa.<sup>119</sup> Britain was unpleasant to this development and decided to eliminate threats in the region.<sup>120</sup> The British government ordered Kitchener to eliminate the Mahdist army like the one of the biggest obstacles in front of the establishment of British administration in 1896.<sup>121</sup> The intervention decision of Britain was shared with Khedive Abbas.<sup>122</sup> According to the decision, the army officers would have consisted of British soldiers but the other soldiers would be both from Egypt and Sudan.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>119</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*, 205.

<sup>120</sup> Britain was managed to passivate French expansion throughout the Sudan. Fashoda is a place at today's South Sudan. French forces retreated from this region because of British pressure. Fashoda incident provided Britain to declare its superiority in the region against France especially. In 1898 the British "solved" the question of the upper Nile: by superior force, not by argument, they compelled the French at last to recognize their "sphere of influence". Alan John P. Taylor, "Prelude to Fashoda: The Question of the Upper Nile: 1894-5, in *The British Historical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 254 (Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1950), 277.

<sup>121</sup> Peter Malcolm Holt, *A Modern History of Sudan*, 3rd ed. (London: Trafalgar Square, 1972), 103.

<sup>122</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*, 204.

The continuous assaults of the Mahdist army could not let Britain build a railway in Sudan. After the war decision against the Mahdist army, British government launched the projects to build railways simultaneously.<sup>123</sup> In addition, the expense of the war was a discussion matter in Britain. However, British government declared that the expenses would be met by the Egyptian public debt administration.<sup>124</sup> Khedive Abbas could not disagree on this decision because of the British occupation of Egypt.

The British forces in Suakin did not actively confront against the Mahdist army after 1885. Until 1896, British forces aimed to save Suakin mainly. However, Britain decided to terminate the Mahdist movement from the entire Sudan for its further expansionist interests. Kitchener marched with his 9,000 men through the north of Sudan to secure the railway constructions and eliminate the Mahdist threat around Egypt. He had his first victory against the Mahdist army around city of Dongola.<sup>125</sup> Although the occupation of Dongola could not provide the entire security of southern Egypt, this expedition broke the resistance of the Mahdist army which had to withdraw to the Berber city.<sup>126</sup>

Kitchener planted the Egyptian flag to the occupied regions through Sudan and urged people to obey the khedive of Egypt. By means of this move, Britain aimed to eliminate the reaction of Muslim people in the region and to avoid the Ottoman Empire to take a political step against the British occupation of Sudan. To take the full support of the British government, Kitchener went to London after this victory. The British government

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<sup>123</sup> Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899*, 20.

<sup>124</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 251.

<sup>125</sup> Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899*, 206.

<sup>126</sup> Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of Its Origins, Development and Overthrow*, 215.

approved a greater expedition against the Mahdist forces.<sup>127</sup> As a result, the British forces were supplied many advanced weapons and equipment in addition to British soldiers by the central government. Kitchener managed to occupy Berber on September 1897 and Khartoum on September 1898. British forces used the most advanced military technology in these wars against the Mahdist army.<sup>128</sup> As a result of these wars, Abdullah ibn Muhammad, chosen as the caliph of the movement in 1891 after the death of al-Mahdi, gradually lost his divine authority on people. Omdurman War was the last biggest war against the Mahdist army on 2 September 1898. After this war Caliph Abdullah escaped from the city and all the Sudan was open to the British forces. After the victory, Kitchener planted British flag beside the Egyptian flag on the ruins of Omdurman. After the certain defeat of the Mahdist army, Kitchener did not hesitate to plant British flag on the occupied regions.<sup>129</sup> After one year from this war, Caliph Abdullah was found and killed by the British commander Wingate in the war of the Umm Diwaykarat in November 1899.<sup>130</sup>

When Kitchener planted the British flag at Omdurman, he showed his real intention from the beginning of the war in Sudan. At the beginning of the war, British forces justified their intervention by pretending that they fought for the name of Khedive Abbas of Egypt. However, it appeared after the war that Britain used the name of khedive only as a pretext.

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<sup>127</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 256.

<sup>128</sup> Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899*, 222.

<sup>129</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 265.

<sup>130</sup> Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions, Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (Washington, D.C.: The Brooking Institution, 1995), 51.



Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), British colonial administrator of Egypt, and Boutros Ghali Pasha, foreign minister of Egypt, signed an agreement on 19 January 1899 to the Anglo-Egyptian administration in Sudan. With this agreement, British and Egyptian flags would be side by side in Sudan. This agreement did not mention the Ottoman rights of Sudan. Therefore, it can be said that the Ottoman legal rights in Sudan were ended with this agreement. However, this agreement did not include the Suakin, because it has a special status.

### **3.2.2. Suakin under the Anglo-Egyptian Administration**

Osman Digna joined the Umm Diwaykarat war with Caliph Abdullah in November 1899. After the death of caliph, Digna was escaped from the region through the eastward of Sudan. He accommodated in the house of his trusted man Shaikh Mohammad Ali Omar for a while, but he denounced him to the British forces in Suakin. A British brigade captured him in that house and brought to Suakin on 18 January 1900.<sup>131</sup> After the capture of Osman Digna, Britain managed to eliminate its most dangerous local enemy in eastern Sudan. For the first time, Britain had an entire control on Suakin without the threat of Osman Digna.

After the terminating of the Mahdist movement, Britain signed a treaty with Egypt to rule Sudan directly. However, this agreement did not include Suakin because it was connected to the Ottoman Empire. British authorities had consciousness about the strategic important of Suakin. Without controlling Suakin, all these British efforts would be meaningless to some extent because Suakin was the main port of this huge territory. Therefore, Britain attempted to take Suakin under the Anglo-Egyptian authority by eliminating the Ottoman Empire. After 6 months of the first agreement between Lord Cromer

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<sup>131</sup> Nour, "Sevakin'de Türk İngiliz Rekabeti," 271.

and Boutros Ghali, they came together again to revise the first agreement by emphasizing the new status of Suakin on 10 July 1899.<sup>132</sup>

This agreement ignored the historical rights of the Ottoman Empire on Suakin. Suakin was directly connected to the central government of the Ottoman Empire. After the profound demands of the Khedive Ismail Pasha, Ottoman sultan Abdulaziz accepted to give Suakin to the Egyptian administration with some conditions. Although the operating right of the port was in the hand of Egypt province, the legal right of the port was in the hand of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, by ignoring the Ottoman Empire, Britain violated international law.

### **3.2.3. Ottoman Reaction of Anglo-Egyptian Administration**

At the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire did not have enough power to protect its territories at the Red Sea surrounding. Britain gains advantage to intervene the Ottoman territories by starting the occupation of Egypt in 1882. The Ottoman Empire did not accept this unilateral declaration in 1882. However, it could not show a sufficient reaction to the British occupation because of the insufficient power of the empire. Although the Ottoman Empire lost Egypt, it never accepted to pull back from the region. Therefore, the Ottoman existence in the region started to be represented by Suakin. The Ottoman authorities closely watched the developments in Suakin by means of reports sent by the Ottoman officers in Egypt and Hejaz. After the Mahdist revolt, the Ottoman Empire reinforced his naval existence in the Red Sea both to protect Hejaz and showed its presence in Suakin both against the rebels and British officers.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 293.

The Ottoman Empire and Britain had a conflict of interest in Suakin because of its geopolitical position. When British started its occupation campaign against Sudan by the pretext of the Mahdist revolt, they also desired to capture Suakin at the same time. However, Suakin had a different status and they could not deal with it at the beginning. After a decisive victory on the Mahdist army, British declared their authority over the region by ignoring the Ottoman Empire. After the establishment of Anglo-Egyptian authority on Sudan, Britain attempted to establish same authority on Suakin as well. After the agreement between Lord Cromer and Boutros Ghali to rule Suakin together on 10 July 1899, the Ottoman Empire rejected this unilateral agreement and started to seek its rights in international arena. The Ottoman Ambassador of London declared the Ottoman protest of Britain in the same year. The Ottoman Empire repeated this protest in 1902, but it could not reach any result.<sup>133</sup>

As a result, the Ottoman Empire could not stop the British occupation of Suakin and lost its one of the most strategic ports at the Red Sea. It can be expressed that the Ottoman reaction against the British occupation of Suakin had to be restricted with the rejection of Anglo-Egyptian administration. There should have been only the Ottoman flag according to Ottoman law.<sup>134</sup> After the outbreaking of the WWI, Britain declared the annexation of Sudan in 1914.

As a result, after the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian administration on Suakin, the Ottoman Empire lost its influence in the region. In spite of its limited power, the Ottoman Empire attempted to save Suakin against the direct British intervention. However, it was not possible because of the limited power of the empire. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire established an indirect relation with Osman Digna to obtain advantage against the Anglo-

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>134</sup> Ali Arslan, "Sudan'ın Hukuken Türkiye'den Ayrılma Süreci," in *Türk Dünyasına Bakışlar*, (İstanbul: Da Yayıncılık, 2003), 108.

Egyptian administration in Suakin, but the British forces managed to subdue the uprising of the Mahdist powers. Although the Ottoman Empire claimed its rights on Suakin until the World War I, the Britain maintained its unilateral decision related to Suakin.

MAP 2: Suakin in the Map of the Middle East during the World War

I



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this thesis, I have attempted to explain how the geopolitical location of Suakin affected Anglo-Turkish rivalry during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I have defined why Suakin was geopolitically an important place in the Red Sea region by emphasizing its connection with its surroundings. As I have previously discussed, Suakin was a source of conflict between the great powers, particularly the Ottoman Empire and Britain.

The Geopolitical position of Suakin attracted the interest of many global and regional powers as well as the local powers. Their common goal was to dominate the region via Suakin which had the potential to provide this capacity. As a port city with an island, Suakin had a vital role in terms of trade, security, and transportation. It was a natural port for Sudan at the Red Sea littoral. However, it was not only vital for Sudan, but it was also significant to every country that had to pass through the Red Sea because it was one of the main destinations for the merchant ships.

Suakin was also the most suitable route for Muslim and Christian pilgrims travelling through to Mecca and Jerusalem. Suakin provided a great advantage, particularly for the West African pilgrims. By using Suakin, pilgrims did not have to venture through the north Africa to Mecca they could now come across the interior of Africa to the Suakin in a shorter time span. Therefore, it can be said that Suakin was also a transit hub for the pilgrims who came from the many different regions of Africa. This transition allowed Suakin to become a vibrant city on the Red Sea.

Due to its geopolitical significance, Suakin witnessed many confrontations from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Portugal was the first great power in the region at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, after the conquest of Egypt, the Ottoman Empire increased its presence throughout the region. To benefit from the geopolitical position of Suakin, these powers started to confront each other during the first half of the century. The Ottoman Empire established its control on Suakin by eliminating the efficiency of Portugal in the Red Sea. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Suakin lived its golden era under the Ottoman administration. The Ottoman Empire used Suakin as a naval base as well as an administrative and trade center. In addition, the proximity of Suakin to the Hejaz region was also important for the Ottoman Empire to provide security to the holy lands.

Suakin had a strategic connection with the other ports throughout the region. There was a non-stop flow of traffic among the port cities of Suakin, Jeddah, and Aden. Therefore, Suakin managed to develop as a crucial center for maritime trade routes coming from India and southern Asia to the Arabian Peninsula and eastern Africa to the Mediterranean. The opening of the Suez Canal enabled this development. As a result, Suakin was transformed into an international port on the Red Sea during Ottoman sovereignty over the region.

From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Suakin attracted many European merchants as well as voyagers. Following this international mobilization, European consciousness grew in relation to the strategic importance of Suakin. The number of British merchants in particular gradually started to increase in Suakin after the British authorities adopted Suakin as their agenda, they also encouraged their citizens to settle in the region.

As a part of “the Scramble for Africa” policy, Britain attempted to seize the Ottoman territories in Africa after the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British involvement in the region began with the Egypt of the Ottoman Empire. After the withdrawal of the French forces, Britain increased its

presence in Egypt. With the opening of the Suez Canal Britain began to follow a more aggressive policy towards the region. Britain added the occupation of Egypt to its expansionist policies in the Ottoman territories of Africa. Later on, it turned its face towards the Red Sea region, particularly Sudan. British administrators were well informed that Suakin should be the focal point for British interests due to its geopolitical location.

However, Britain was not the only one who desired to take control over Suakin with the added intention of extending control over the entire region of Sudan. Italy and France also attempted to establish their authority on Suakin but their attempts remained insufficient. The most serious rivalry came between the Ottoman Empire and Britain because the Ottoman Empire had legal rights over Suakin. The Ottoman Empire could not solve their issue through military force but continued to protest the British violations of international laws.

The Egyptian Governors mistreatment of people in Sudan led to a popular uprising against the Egyptian authority in Sudan. The leader of the movement, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi appointed Osman Digna as the governor of the Mahdist movement. The main duty of Digna was to terminate Egyptian and British presence in the region and to implement the Mahdist ideology to the local people. Britain struggled against the Mahdist army using Egyptian forces in Sudan to fight against them but following a protracted conflict, Britain requested that Egypt withdraw from Sudan. As a result, Britain established its own authority in Sudan. Although Britain gained exact control over Sudan, the Suakin issue remained unresolved because of the legal rights held by the Ottoman Empire. However, Britain got impatient and violated international laws by occupying Suakin. Therefore, the protracted conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Britain over Suakin ended in favour of Britain in 1899. The Ottoman Empire lost one of its most geopolitically important locations on the Red Sea littoral, however, Suakin maintained its special geopolitical significance until the building of Port Sudan in 1905.



Throughout the history of Suakin, the great powers were eager to control Suakin to have the opportunity of controlling the whole region of the Red Sea. In addition to the great powers, the regional powers also attempted to control Suakin. The motivation of great powers and regional powers differ from each others. While the great powers aimed to control all the Red Sea region by controlling Suakin, the regional powers aimed to control Suakin for their survival. Because Suakin was the only natural port in the close environment. The claims of the Funj sultanate during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a suitable example of the attitudes of regional powers about Suakin. Egypt can be evaluated as a different case in these categorizations. The main motivation of Egypt towards Suakin was to expand its influence through the south of the country. Therefore, Suakin was a key point for the expansionist policies of Egypt during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Although the geopolitical position of Suakin provided a political and economic advantage for the sovereign powers, its significance was not limited with them. Suakin's proximity to the religious centers was very significant for the great powers. Before the raising of the nationalist sentiment, religion was one of the most important motivations for the empires. Therefore, Suakin also provided an opportunity for the sovereign powers to have a psychological superiority from the religious perspective. The Ottoman-Portuguese struggle was closely related to the religious considerations apart from the political or economic concerns. Suakin was very important to provide security for the pilgrims because of its location. Both the Ottoman Empire and the Britain attempted to have control on Suakin to provide security for their subjects in their religious activities. Suakin was a vital location for both Muslims and Christians to reach their destinations as a transit point. Therefore, the great powers aimed to control these routes by establishing authority on Suakin to gain the appreciation of their subjects.

As a result, Suakin became a center of attraction for the global and regional powers from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Its geopolitical location was the primary motivation for all these powers. Therefore, this thesis aimed to develop a geopolitical perspective to analyze the significance of Suakin. The rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Britain on Suakin during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was attempted to be assessed from this perspective. Although the Ottoman Empire lost its control on it, Suakin remained geopolitically a vital location until the establishment of the Port Sudan at the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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## APPENDICES

### A. TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

#### 19. YÜZYIL OSMANLI-İNGİLİZ REKABETİNDE SEVAKİN'İN JEOPOLİTİK ÖNEMİ

Bu tez, 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı-İngiliz rekabetinde Sevakın'ın jeopolitik önemini ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, mikro düzeyde bir bölge olan Sevakın'ı derinlemesine çalışarak, makro ölçekteki bir konu olan Osmanlı-İngiliz mücadelesi hakkında genellemelerden uzak ve tutarlı yargılara varmaktır. Bu açıdan Sevakın, 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı-İngiliz mücadelesini mikro düzeyde anlamaya çalışmak için uygun bir örnek olarak düşünülmüştür. Sevakın'ın çok boyutlu özellikleri, onu bu çalışmanın merkezine yerleştirmiştir.

Sevakın'ın denildiğinde Kızıldeniz'in batı kıyısında bir şehir, bir liman ve bir ada (daha sonra yarımada)ya dönüştürüldü) düşünülmektedir. Bunların hiçbiri diğerinden ayrılmamaktadır. Sevakın, coğrafi yapısı gereği Kızıldeniz'in batı kıyısında doğal bir liman oluşumudur. Bu liman aynı zamanda bugünkü Sudan topraklarına tekabül eden bölgenin denizlere olan tek çıkış kaynağı olarak yüzyıllarca önemini sürdürmüştür. Çok büyük bir bölgenin tek çıkış noktası olması, diğer önemli limanlarla çok önemli bağlantıları olması, Kızıldeniz hakimiyeti için stratejik bir noktada bulunması, ticaret merkezi olması ve dini açıdan kutsal alanlara ulaşmak isteyen hacılar için ana geçiş güzergahı olması Sevakın'ı jeopolitik bir öneme kavuşturmuştur. 19. yüzyıl Osmanlı-İngiliz rekabetini Sevakın üzerinden açıklamaya çalışırken Sevakın'ın jeopolitik önemi göz önünde bulundurulmuş temel unsurlardan biri olmuştur.

Jeopolitik konumu Sevakin'i büyük güçler ve bölgesel/yerel güçler açısından bir çekim merkezi haline gelmiştir. Bu sebeple Sevakin 16. yüzyıldan itibaren birçok kez güç mücadelelerine sahne olmuştur. Büyük güçler Sevakin'i hakimiyetleri altına alarak Kızıldeniz etrafını kontrol etmek isterken, bölgesel ve yerel güçler ayakta kalabilmek ve genişleyebilmek için Sevakin'i elde tutmak istediler. Bu güç mücadeleleri Sevakin tarihinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak yüzyıllarca devam etmiştir.

Osmanlı Padişahı Yavuz Sultan Selim'in Memluk devletine son vererek Mısır'da hakimiyet kurmasından sonra, Osmanlı Türkleri Mısır'ın güneyine doğru zaman içinde genişlemeye başladılar. Bu yöndeki bir genişleme yayılcı bir politikadan ziyade bölgede kesin hakimiyet kurabilmek içindi. Osmanlı Devleti bu şekilde ticaret yollarının ve Kızıldeniz'in doğu yakasındaki kutsal toprakların güvenliğini sağlayabilmiş olacaktı. 16. yüzyılda Osmanlı'nın bu bölgedeki en önemli rakibi Portekizlilerdi. Portekiz büyük bir deniz gücü olarak özellikle limanları hakimiyeti altında tutmak istiyordu. Dolayısıyla, Kızıldeniz hakimiyeti için Sevakin vazgeçilmez bir bölge haline geldi. Osmanlı Devleti Sevakin'i ele geçirerek Portekiz'e karşı bir üs olarak kullanmaya başladı. 16. yüzyıl boyunca Kızıldeniz'deki Osmanlı-Portekiz mücadelesi devam etmiş olsa da bu bölgedeki Portekiz hakimiyetinin sona erdirilmesinde Sevakin büyük bir rol oynadı. Portekiz'e karşı kesin üstünlük kurulduktan sonra, Sevakin'in altın çağı başlamış oldu. 19. yüzyıla kadar Sevakin herhangi bir dış gücün müdahalesine uğramadan Osmanlı egemenliğinde kalmaya devam etti. Bu dönemde Sevakin bölgenin en gelişmiş ve işlek limanı olarak merkezi bir konum edindi.

Sevakin, Hicaz'ın korunması için son derece stratejik bir noktada bulunduğu için buranın elde tutulması Osmanlı Devleti açısından bir ihtiyaç olarak görülmüştür. Özellikle Osmanlı sultanlarının halife unvanı almaya başlamasından sonra Hicaz'ın güvenliği son derece önemli olmuştur. Bu noktada Sevakin, Hicaz'ın hemen karşısında yer alan konumu sayesinde Kızıldeniz'de yıldızı en çok parlayan liman olmuştur. Sevakin sadece güvenlik olarak değil, aynı zamanda hac döneminde gıda tedariki açısından

Hicaz için son derece önemli bir liman olmuştur. Sevakin'in uzun yıllar Osmanlı hakimiyetinde güvenli bir bölge olarak kaldığı için istikrar sağlanmış ve hacıların güvenle konaklayabileceği bir bölgeye dönüşmüştür. Bu sebepten özellikle Batı Afrika'dan gelen hacılar güvenlik gerekçesi ile Kuzey Afrika üzerinden Hicaz'a gitmek yerine, Afrika içlerinden geçerek Sevakin limanına ulaşmaya başlamışlardı. Bu yol hem zaman hem mesafe açısından diğer yollara göre çok daha uygundu. Dolayısıyla Sevakin hacılar ve tüccarlar için önemli bir transit geçiş noktası olmuştur.

Sevakin'de üç yüz yılı aşkın devam eden kesintisiz istikrar dönemi 19. yüzyıldan itibaren değişmeye başlamıştır. Özellikle Mısır Valisi Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın güçlenmesi ve Osmanlı Devleti'ne karşı askeri saldırılarda bulunmaya başlaması Mısır'a çok yakın olan Sevakin'in de önemli ölçüde etkilenmesine sebep olmuştur. 19. yüzyılın ilk yarısında Sevakin'deki yabancı tüccarların yerli tüccarlara oranla çok daha etkin bir rol oynamaya başlaması Sevakin'deki dengeleri Osmanlı aleyhine bozan bir diğer unsur olmuştur. Özellikle İngiliz tüccarların bölgede varlık göstermeye başlaması ileriki dönemlerde İngiliz hükümeti tarafından bölgeye müdahale için bir altyapı oluşturmaya başlamıştır. İngiliz tüccarların bölgeye daha fazla giderek ticari faaliyetlerde bulunması ve kendi içlerinde örgütlü bir yapı oluşturmaları İngiliz idareciler tarafından sürekli olarak teşvik edilmiştir.

19. yüzyılda Osmanlı Devleti'nde otorite zayıflamaya başlayınca özellikle merkezden uzak bölgeleri idare etmek oldukça zor bir hale dönüştü. Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa bu durumun farkında olduğu için özellikle Habeş ve Hicaz eyaletlerinin topraklarını diplomatik ve askeri yollarla Mısır'a katmaya başladı. 1821'deki Vahhabi isyanını bastıran Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın oğlu İbrahim Paşa'ya Osmanlı sultanı tarafından Sevakin ve Musavva limanlarını ödül olarak verildi. Böylece Mısır idaresi ilk defa Sevakin üzerinde hak sahibi olmuş oldu. Fakat daha sonra Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın Osmanlı Devleti'ne karşı isyana kalkışması bu limanların İbrahim Paşa'dan geri alınmasına sebebiyet verdi. Fakat Mehmet Ali Paşa Sevakin'in Hicaz idaresinde değil Mısır

idaresinde olması gerektiğine dair ısrarlarını Osmanlı Devleti'ne iletti ve 1846'da amacına ulaşmış oldu. Fakat Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın 1848'de ölmesi üzerine Sevakin tekrar Hicaz'a bağlanmış oldu.

Mehmet Ali Paşa, Sevakin'in jeopolitik açıdan ne kadar önemli olduğunu kısa sürede kavramıştı. Özellikle güney yönünde yayılma gösterip Kızıldeniz ticaretinde egemen olabilmek için Sevakin'in mutlaka Mısır kontrolünde olması gerektiği bilincine sahipti. Dolayısıyla Sevakin, Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın yayılmacı vizyonu açısından son derece önemli bir merkezdi. Hicaz eyaletinin etkinliğini kırabilmenin en kolay yolu da yine Sevakin'e sahip olmaktan geçiyordu. O sebepten özellikle Hicaz Eyaleti ile Mısır Eyaleti arasında büyük çekişmeler yaşanmıştı. Mehmet Ali Paşa'nın ölümünden sonra onunla benzer bir anlayışa sahip olan torunu İsmail Paşa, Sevakin üzerinde yeniden hak iddia etmeye başladı.

Mısır Hıdivi İsmail Paşa, yenilikçi ve yayılmacı bir politika izlemeye başladı. Mısır için birtakım mega projeleri hayata geçirirken, İstanbul Hükümeti ile arayışta çok iyi tutmaya özen göstermişti. Bununla birlikte, Sevakin'in Mısır'a yeniden bağlanması için ricada bulunmuştu. İsmail Paşa, Mısır idaresi altındaki Taka bölgesindeki bazı vergi mükelliflerinin bu vergilerden kurtulmak için Mısır idaresinde olmayan Sevakin'e kaçtıklarını ileri sürerek Sevakin'in kendisine verilmesini ısrarla istiyordu. Fakat İsmail Paşa Sevakin'i böyle basit bir sebep yüzünden değil, özellikle Hindistan ile denizaşırı ticarete kullanabileceği bir liman olarak istemekteydi. Fakat Hicaz Eyaleti, Mısır'ın bu isteklerinin yersiz olduğu konusunda İstanbul hükümetini uyarıyordu. Çünkü Sevakin'de çok güzel bir vergi ve idare sistemi kurulmuştu ve bu istikrarı bozmanın büyük zarara sebebiyet vereceği düşünülüyordu. Buna karşın İsmail Paşa, Hicaz'ın Sevakin'den aldığı vergi miktarını sürekli olarak Hicaz'a ödeyeceğini vaat etti. Buna rağmen Hicaz Valisi bu teklife yanaşmadı. Bununla birlikte İsmail Paşa Meclis-i mahsusa nezdinde girişimlerini artırarak Padişah'ı da ikna etmeyi başardı ve Sevakin'in şartlı olarak Mısır idaresinde olmasını onaylattırdı. Osmanlı hükümeti, maddi

konuların dışında Sevakin'in stratejik açıdan önemini bildiği için Mısır'a tam yetki vermemiş ve düzenli olarak Hicaz tarafından denetleneceği şartını getirmişti. Bu maddenin altında yatan en önemli sebeplerden bir tanesi Osmanlı Devleti'nin İsmail Paşa'ya güvenmiyor olmasıdır. Son zamanlarda İsmail Paşa'nın mutlak bir yönetici gibi davranması ve Avrupalı devletlerle çok yakın ilişkilere girmesi bu kuşkunun kaynağını oluşturmuştur.

Süveyş Kanalı'nın açılması, Hindistan-Kızıldeniz-Akdeniz hattının güvenliğini zorunluluk haline getirmişti. Bu hattın kazancından önemli bir pay elde etmek isteyen Mısır idarecileri Sevakin'i elde ederek önemli bir adım atmıştı. Çünkü Sevakin, bir ticaret limanı olduğundan ve Kızıldeniz'den geçen hattın güvenliğini sağlayabilecek bir konumda bulunduğundan Mısır için jeopolitik açıdan çok değerli bir hale gelmişti. Mısır, bir taraftan Avrupalı devletlerle yakın ilişkiler kurup, hukuki olmadığı halde Osmanlı Devleti'nin izni ve haberi olmadan dış ilişkilerini güçlendirirken, diğer taraftan Kızıldeniz'de kurduğu taşımacılık kumpanyalarına Mecidiye ve Aziziye gibi Osmanlı sultanlarının isimlerini vererek devlete bağlı oldukları yönünde mesajlar veriyordu. Tüm bu süreçte Mısır'daki İngiliz etkisinin artması ve Mısır'ın özellikle İsmail Paşa döneminde çok büyük borç içine düşmüş olması, Mısır idaresinin dolaylı olarak İngilizlerin eline geçmesine sebebiyet vermişti.

Mısır'da artan İngiliz etkisi, kısa bir süre sonra Sudan'ı da etkisi altına almıştı. Çünkü Sudan topraklarını büyük bir bölümü resmi olarak Mısır idaresindeydi. Sevakin'de de bu şekilde İngiliz idaresinin temsilcileri bulunmaya başlamıştı. Daha önceden var olan İngiliz tüccarların da etkisi ile İngiltere Sevakin'deki idari olaylarda etkin rol oynamaya başlamıştı. İçinde bulunduğu borç batağı yüzünden İngiltere ile ilişkilerini daha çok artırmak isteyen İsmail Paşa, Sudan ve Kızıldeniz etrafında kölelikle mücadele etmek istediğini ve bunun için bir İngiliz rehber eşliğinde bölgede faaliyet yürütmek istediğini İngiliz otoritelerine iletmişti. İngilizler Samuel Baker'i bu göreve getirerek İsmail Paşa ile hareket etmesini istemişti. Sudan'a atanan ilk resmi İngiliz bürokratu

olan Baker, Sevakin üzerinden Sudan'a girerek İsmail Paşa'nın askeri güçlerine rehberlik etmeye başlamıştı. Burada tuttuğu raporlarla İngilizlerin bölgeye müdahil olması için gerekli bilgileri sağlayan Samuel Baker, bu bölgedeki İngiliz siyasetinin temellerini atmıştı.

Gordon Paşa (Charles George Gordon) döneminde ise İngiltere Sudan'da çok büyük kazanımlar elde etmeyi başarmıştı. İngiliz nüfuzu bölgede güçlü bir şekilde yerleşmeye başlamıştı. Gordon Paşa'nın başarıları İngiliz hükümeti tarafından takdirle karşılanmıştı. İngiliz idareciler Mısır üzerinde baskı yaparak Gordon Paşa'nın sadece küçük bir bölge olan Ekvatorya'nın değil, bütün Sudan'ın genel valisi olmasını istemişti. İsmail Paşa'nın bu isteği kabul etmesi sonucunda İngilizlerin bütün Sudan'a ve Sevakin'e doğrudan müdahalesi de başlamış oldu.

1882'de Mısır'ın İngiliz tarafından işgal edilmesi ile birlikte Osmanlı-İngiliz ilişkileri bozulmaya başladı. Bu hukuksuz girişimi hiçbir şekilde kabul etmediğini her platformda ifade eden Osmanlı Devleti, işgalin ardından bölgedeki hakimiyetini büyük oranda kaybetmiş oldu. En azından Hicaz'ın güvenliğini sağlayabilmek için Sevakin'in elde tutulması gerektiğini bilen Osmanlı Devleti İngiltere'ye karşı dolaylı bir mücadeleye başlamış oldu. Burada tam bir İngiliz hakimiyetinin tesis edilmesini engellemek için bir taraftan diplomatik girişimlerde bulunurken, diğer taraftan İngiltere karşıtı birçok yerel ve küresel blokla işbirliği yapma yoluna gitti. Sudan'da çıkan Mehdi hareketi Osmanlı Devleti'nin İngilizlere karşı bölgedeki politikasında bir dönüm noktası oldu.

Mısırlı idarecilerin Sudan halkı üzerinde kurduğu baskı politikası Sudan'da zaman içinde büyük infiale sebebiyet vermişti. Bu durum Mehdi hareketinin özellikle Mısırlı idarecilere karşı ortaya çıkmasında önemli bir unsur oldu. Fakat bu durumu Mehdi hareketinin ortaya çıkmasındaki tek unsur olarak göstermek yanlıştır. Birçok siyasi, ekonomik ve dini altyapısı bulunan bu hareketin ortaya çıkmasındaki en önemli unsurlardan birisi de bölgede oluşan

güç boşluğudur. Osmanlı Devleti'nin merkezden uzak bölgelerdeki kontrolünün zayıflaması ve İsmail Paşa sonrasında Mısır hıdivliğinin de etkisiz bir makamdan ibaret olarak kalması Sudan'da büyük bir güç boşluğunu doğurdu. Mehdi hareketi her ne kadar yabancı güçlerin bölge halkı üzerindeki baskıcı politikalarını ön plana çıkartarak dini bir şemsiye altında insanları harekete geçirmiş olsa da mevcut şartlardaki güç boşluğunu göz ardı etmemek gerekir.

Osmanlı Devleti'nin Mehdi hareketine karşı ilk tepkisi son derece olumsuzdu. Hareketin kurucularını başıbozuklar olarak niteleyen Osmanlı Devleti, Muhammed el-Mehdi'ye hiçbir şekilde itibar edilmemesi için bölge halkına memurları aracılığı ile uyarılarda bulundu. Fakat daha sonra İngilizlerin bölgedeki müteceviz tutumuna karşı Mehdi hareketi ile dolaylı olarak işbirliği yoluna gitti. Muhammed el-Mehdi'nin sağ kolu olan ve Sevakin'i içine alan Doğu Sudan'daki Mehdi hareketinin liderliğini üstlenen Osman Digna ile Osmanlı Devleti'nin memurları yakın temasa başladılar. İngiliz komutasındaki Mısır ordularına karşı çok büyük başarılar elde eden Osman Digna, uzun yıllar İngilizlerin bölgede yayılmalarının önünde bir engel olarak durmayı başardı. Osman Digna ile Osmanlı devleti doğrudan ve resmi bir irtibat halinde bulunmamış olsa da Mehdi ordusu birliklerini eğitmek için bazı subaylarını bölgeye sevk etmiştir.

İngilizler uzun süre Sevakin'deki varlıklarını sürdürmüşler fakat Tokar bölgesinden ileriye geçmemişlerdir. Osman Digna ise Sevakin'deki İngilizlere karşı doğrudan saldırı yapmaya fazla teşebbüs etmemiştir. Bunun en önemli sebebi son teknoloji silahlarla donatılmış olan savaş gemilerinin Sevakin limanına demirlemiş olması ve oradaki İngiliz birliklerine tam koruma sağlamasıdır. Ayrıca Sevakin'i abluka altına almak da Osman Digna için mümkün olmamıştır. Çünkü İngilizler deniz yolu sayesinde sürekli olarak ikmal yollarını açık tutmayı başarmıştır. İngilizlerin deniz üstünlüğü, Osman Digna'ya karşı Sevakin'i koruyabilmelerindeki en önemli unsur olmuştur. Fakat deniz gücünün etkisiz kalacağı mesafelere İngilizler özellikle kendi



askeri birliklerini göndermeyerek onları risk altına atmamışlardır. Diğer bir ifadeyle, Osman Digna'nın Sevakin'i alamamasının sebebi hiçbir deniz gücüne sahip olmaması iken, İngilizlerin de Osman Digna'yı uzun yıllar etkisiz hale getirememesinin sebebi, gerilla savaşı tarzı taktiklerle kırsal alanda İngilizlerin sevk ve idare ettiği Mısır ordularına karşı kurduğu üstünlüktür.

İngilizler'in Mehdi hareketine karşı uzun yıllar pasif bir politika izlediği söylenebilir. Bunun sebebi olarak da İngilizlerin güçsüzlüğü veya bölgeye ilgilerinin olmadığını söylemek gerçek dışı olur. İngilizler, her ne kadar Mısır idaresini ellerinde bulunduruyor olsalar da Sudan'ı Mısır'dan ayırmayı politik bir öncelik olarak görüyorlardı. Bu durum geleneksel İngiliz politikası olan böl-yönet politikası ile doğrudan uyuşmaktadır. Sudan'ın Mısır'dan ayrılması sadece Mısır'a değil Osmanlı Devleti'ne vurulan büyük bir darbe olacaktı. Bu amaçlarını gerçekleştirmek için İngilizler Mısırlı askerlerin Sudan'da savaşmasını sürekli olarak teşvik ettiler ve Mısır ordularının başına da İngiliz komutanları yerleştirdiler. Mehdi ordusuna karşı yapılan tüm savaşları Mısırlı askerler kaybetti ve Sudan içindeki bütün garnizonlardan çekilmeye başladılar. Bu durum Sudan'daki Mısır varlığını tükenme noktasına getirdi. İngilizler Mısır güçlerinin erimesini iki yönden faydalı buluyordu. Bunlardan birincisi bahsettiğimiz böl-yönet politikası iken, bir diğeri de Mısır'da İngilizlere karşı oluşabilecek herhangi bir direnişin önüne geçmekti. Dolayısıyla bu süreçte İngilizler sadece Sevakin üzerinde hakimiyet kurmakla yetinerek Mısır ve Mehdi güçlerinin birbirlerini tüketmesini izlediler.

Osman Digna'nın İngilizler için son derece inatçı bir rakip olması, İngilizleri küresel bir politik manevra yapmaya yönlendirdi. İngilizler, Kızıldeniz kıyısındaki bir diğer önemli liman olan Musavva'yı İtalyanlara vererek onların da bölgeye girmesini temin ettiler. Bu şekilde hem Fransızların bölgede etkin olma emellerini sekteye uğratmak hem de Osman Digna'nın dikkatini başka bir tarafa çekmek istediler. Musavva'dan Sudan topraklarına giriş yapan İtalyanlar Kassala yönünde ilerleyerek topraklarını genişletmeye

başladılar. Mehdi hareketinin doğu bölgesinden sorumlu olan Osman Digna buradaki İtalyan işgallerine karşı birliklerini topladı ve İtalyalarla savaşmaya başladı. Osmanlı Devleti de İtalyanların bölgeye girmesinden rahatsızdı. Fakat bu durum Osman Digna'nın gücünün bölünmesine ve İngiliz askerlerden oluşan ordular karşısında tutunamamasına sebebiyet verdi. Sonuçta İngilizler Osman Digna'yı tamamen etkisiz hale getirerek Mehdi hareketinin son umudunu da kırmış oldu ve Sudan İngiliz işgali için son derece uygun bir hale dönüşmüş oldu.

1899'da İngilizler tarafından Sevakın dahil bütün Sudan işgal edilmiş oldu ve bu tarihten sonra Sevakın'de İngiliz-Mısır idaresi kuruldu. Osmanlı Devleti bu işgale karşı uluslararası kamuoyu nezdinde sert tavır gösterdi. Osmanlı'nın Londra Büyükelçiliği de olayı kınadığını duyurdu ve birçok diplomatik girişimde bulundu. Fakat bunların hiçbiri İngilizlere yönelik bir yaptırıma dönüşecek güçte değildi. Diğer bir ifadeyle, Osmanlı Devleti'nin İngiliz işgaline karşı tepkisi askeri yetersizliği yüzünden sözlü ifadelerin ötüşüne geçememiştir. Fakat tüm bu işgallere rağmen Sevakın'ın Osmanlı Devleti'ne hukuki bağılılığı 1. Dünya Savaşı'na kadar devam etmiştir. Bu tarihten sonra İngiltere Sudan'ı ve dolayısıyla Sevakın'i ilhak ettiğini resmen duyurmuştur.

Sevakın, 20 yüzyılın başlarından itibaren jeopolitik önemini kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Bunun en büyük sebebi ise 1905 yılında Port Sudan'ın inşa edilerek Sudan ile yapılan ticari faaliyetlerin tamamının buraya kaydırılmış olmasıdır. Sevakın'ın işlevsizleştirilmesinden sonra İngilizler de burayı terk etmeye başlayarak ticaretin yapıldığı alanlara yönelmeye başlamıştır. Dolayısıyla, Osmanlı Devleti ile altın çağını yaşayan Sevakın, Osmanlı Devleti'nin tarih sahnesinden çekilmesi ile jeopolitik önemini büyük ölçüde yitirmiştir.

Yüzyıllarca jeopolitik konumu dolayısıyla birçok yerel ve uluslararası güç tarafından elde edilmek istenen Sevakın, Kızıldeniz jeopolitiğinin en önemli unsurlarından biri olmayı başarmıştır. Bölgeyi hakimiyet altına almanın

anahtarı olarak görülen Sevakin, Portekiz, Osmanlı Devleti, İngiltere gibi birçok ülke tarafından elde tutulmak istenmiştir. Özellikle Hindistan'dan gelen mallar sebebiyle Kızıldeniz'de denizaşırı ticaretin yapıldığı nadir limanlarda olan Sevakin, Süveyş kanalının açılması ile daha da önem kazanmıştır. Özellikle ticari kapasitesi ve Kızıldeniz'den Süveyş'e doğru devam eden denizyolunun güvenliği açısından stratejik bir konumda olan Sevakin Osmanlı devleti ile İngiltere arasında uzun bir mücadelenin merkezinde yer almıştır. Sevakin üzerinde oluşan bu mücadele daha geniş ölçekteki Osmanlı-İngiliz mücadelesinin de ipuçlarını vermektedir. Sevakin'de elde eilecek çıkarımlar uzun yıllar devam eden Osmanlı-İngiliz mücadelesinin karakteristiği hakkında çok önemli analizlere ulaşmanın da kapısını aralamaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu tezde yapılmaya çalışılan, küçük bir bölge üzerindeki mücadeleyi betimlemek değil, yüzyıllarca süren çok daha geniş bir mücadele hakkında daha tutarlı analizlere ulaşmak olmuştur.

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