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**Parliament and Empire:
British Policy in Egypt, 1882-85**

【民主政治與帝國政策：英國對埃政策，1882-85】

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I. Introduction: British Democracy and the Egyptian Question

The importance of Egypt to the British in the nineteenth century can not be exaggerated. It was often, probably too often, argued that Britain had a very special interest in Egypt, because the Suez Canal was the road to India and the Australian colonies. Whether that argument held good or not¹, it attracted so much attention that it overshadowed every other reasoning about Egypt's importance. Curious enough, all the British held Egypt to be very important, but few could tell why and their explanations differed significantly. Only the most realistic Englishmen and those who had a stake in Egyptian affairs took care to clarify the question and square their concern with their interests. The New Imperialism in the late nineteenth century was a game of nationalist enthusiasm and power politics; the policy-makers were very likely to be spurred on by popular excitement, which became common with the coming of the mass society. Diplomacy according to democracy is undiplomatic, yet powerful. The British policy towards Egypt might not be politic, but it flattered much the British self-image or public ego, and made a good outlet for the clamour for popular domination; it reflected quite literally the political concerns of the British people, if not their material interests.

The Egyptian question was a complicated one, partly due to the involvement of British democratic needs. As Mr. Gladstone, the Prime Minister who ordered the occupation of Egypt in 1882, wrote in an essay, the phrase 'the Egyptian question' did not signify, as usual, the question how Egypt should be handled for her own interests, but the question whether, and how, her political condition was to be determined by Britain's interests.² 'What is the Egyptian Government? Is it independent, or does it act according to the wishes of the English Government?' asked Lord Salisbury, the Conservative leader in the House of Lords, two and a half years after the British had

¹ Not only scholars today but also contemporary British politicians disagreed about the opinion that Egypt was important to the British Empire because it is situated on the most direct maritime route between England and her Indian possessions. While Mr. Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, sometimes refuted it, his Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville, argued for it no less often. See W. E. Gladstone, 'Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East,' *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. II, no. VI (August 1877); and Public Record Office (PRO), FO407/21/160, Lord Granville to Earl of Dufferin, 11 July 1882.

² W. E. Gladstone, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

occupied the country,³ revealing Britain's awkward position in regard to Egypt. Although that matter had never been treated clearly by the Gladstone Government, every question in Parliament concerning Egypt was dealt with effectively – 'impertinently' it might be said, but not 'superfluously' – because Egypt was actually ruled from London.

Nominally a vassal state of the Porte but under British effective control, Egypt constituted a great puzzle in Gladstone's policy, and an exception to the principles of English politics. Mr. Gladstone once complained to his Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville, in 1885: the Egyptian question lay outside the proper business of a government and was beyond its powers.⁴ It defied conventional solutions and provoked much misunderstanding and controversy among the politicians. Gladstone's action in Egypt contradicted his liberal opinions, made many of his followers uneasy, and alienated some of them.⁵ What was worse, Egyptian affairs became in time a question about which every kind of political manoeuvres in party politics was played to achieve ends other than foreign success. Confronted with incessant attacks from the Opposition with respect to Egypt after the tragic death of General Gordon, a national hero, at Khartoum in early 1885, Gladstone protested, not unfairly, against the distortion of the Egyptian question by the Conservative Party, who threatened to topple down the Government for appeasing the public. Indeed, the Egyptian question had become the main point of party struggle in Parliament since 1882, and it occupied MP's mind like no other foreign issues. 'There never has been a complicated and difficult foreign policy in my collection which has been kept so incessantly under the view of Parliament as the Egyptian question,' the Prime Minister sighed in the House of Commons in August 1884,⁶ like he had done several times before and so he continued to do until his second administration (April 1880-June 1885) was brought to an end by his blunder in the Gordon mission. The Egyptian question proved to be a touchstone of the maturity of British liberal politics in the 1880s: it called into question the traditional attitude of keeping foreign policy detached from the public, and put to the test the government leaders' wisdom in reconciling democratic demands and diplomatic requirements.

II. The Occupation of Egypt: the Formation of the Liberal Government's Forward Policy towards Egypt

Gladstone's opinions about Egypt were set forth in his essay entitled 'Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East', published in *The Nineteenth Century* in August 1877, when he was in opposition. In that article he argued against the idea

³ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 3rd Series, vol. 294, 'Egypt – Employment of English Officials,' Lord Salisbury, 5 December 1884, p. 840.

⁴ Mr. Gladstone to Lord Granville, 22 January 1885, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (London: Macmillan, 1903), vol. III, p. 171.

⁵ See *Quarterly Review*, vol. 154, no. 308, 'The Justification of Lord Beaconsfield's Policy' (October 1882), pp. 564-65.

⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 292, 'Egypt – Instructions to the Earl of Northbrook,' Mr. Gladstone, 11 August 1884, p. 477. Also cf. *ibid.*, vol. 286, 'Egypt – Policy of Her Majesty's Government,' Mr. Gladstone, 3 April 1884, p. 1534.

of occupying Egypt (strongly proposed by Edward Dicey in the same journal), and, in general, against enlargement of the British Empire. 'Every scheme for the acquisition of territorial power in Egypt...is but a new snare laid in the path of our policy,' he said.⁷ Writing to W. S. Blunt, a famous political writer and champion for Egyptian (and Indian and Irish) independence, in early 1882, the Prime Minister reasserted his standpoints expressed in his essay of 1877 in regard to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ Yet, referring again to his article one year after the aggression upon Egypt, Gladstone indicated his great embarrassment over the publication of his liberal opinions about the Eastern question six years ago.⁹ That evidenced the change in the Liberal Government's policy towards Egypt through the year 1882.

On the other hand, the British Government made a public declaration of Egyptian policy in Lord Granville's despatch of 4 November 1881, addressed to Sir Edward Malet, the British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt, which was presented to Parliament.¹⁰ The letter had been written with the object of dispelling the doubts entertained by the Powers and the English people as to the intentions of the British Government towards Egypt; therefore it was published with careful arrangement in the *Parliamentary Papers* as well as the annually distributed *State Papers*. In the document the Foreign Secretary emphasized, in addition to the traditional policy of upholding Egyptian prosperity and liberty, Turkish sovereignty over Egypt, important as it served 'a valuable safeguard against foreign intervention.' But he also warned that the occurrence of anarchy in Egypt would force Britain out of the course she had long been happily following.¹¹ This was to declare that intervention or a forward policy, either by Britain or the other Powers, was out of the question and inadvisable so long as Egypt was able to keep her feet. The British Government made many assertions through the year before mid-1882 about its position on Egyptian independence from the European Powers. Days before the outbreak of riots at Alexandria on 12 June, Lord Granville still assured the Turkish Ambassador at London, Musurus Pasha, that, as the papers just published and laid before the British Parliament had shown, the British Government was not desirous of changing its Egyptian policy, and that if recourse to force became necessary in Egypt Britain would advocate the employment of Turkish troops.¹² Ironically, on the very day the British carried out the bombardment of Alexandria (11 July 1882), Granville wrote to Lord Dufferin, the British Ambassador to Turkey, stressing that, whatever rumours or

⁷ W. E. Gladstone, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁸ Mr. Gladstone to W. S. Blunt, 20 January 1882, quoted in H. C. G. Matthew ed., *The Gladstone Diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), vol. X, p. 199.

⁹ Mr. Gladstone to Madame O. Novikov, 8 August 1883, quoted in *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XI, p. 15. Gladstone said: 'It would be hard for me to eat that article; even had I an appetite, I should have no digestion for it.'

¹⁰ See *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1882 LXXXII, Lord Granville to Sir Edward Malet, 4 November 1881, pp. 86-87. To increase its publicity, the document was also published in *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1881-82 LXXIII, pp. 1160-62. For similar statement of policy, see PRO, FO407/19/26, Granville to Lyons, 10 January 1882.

¹¹ *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1882 LXXXII, Lord Granville to Sir E. Malet, 4 November 1881, p. 87.

¹² *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1882-83 LXXIV, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 8 June 1882, p. 438. For similar points see PRO, FO141/152, same to same, 26 January 1882; FO407/20/558, same to same, 25 June 1882; and FO407/ 19/82, Granville to Lyons, 30 January 1882.

impressions might exist, the British Government had no desire to take any steps towards an English occupation or annexation of Egypt.¹³ On the next day, the Foreign Secretary intimated to his friend, Lord Amphill, that he was as decided as ever against a dual armed and political intervention of the English and French in Egypt.¹⁴ ‘The policy of the British Government at the time may or may not have been mistaken, but it was certainly sincere,’ said Lord Cromer (Sir Evelyn Baring),¹⁵ who succeeded Sir E. Malet in 1883 and ruled Egypt until 1907. By this Cromer maintained that Lord Granville was true in deprecating a British or Anglo-French armed intervention in Egypt; in Cromer’s opinion, the occupation of Egypt was not due to any action taken in 1881 and 1882. Therefore, the reasons for the change in British policy in the summer of 1882 must be explored further to make the occupation explicable, if not justifiable.

With regard to Egypt, there were always two opposite schools of opinion in Victorian England: one for liberalism, one for control; and after the occupation, one for evacuation, one for continued presence. Many of the Cabinet meetings were devoted to Egyptian affairs before the British invasion, without a compromise agreement. According to Mr. John Bright, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster who resigned in protest against the occupation, the Egyptian question became heated in the Cabinet in late May 1882. In his diary he recorded Cabinet talk on Egypt on 20 May: ‘Warm discussion and great difference of opinion;’ and the following day, ‘Discussion less warm, but much difference of opinion.’¹⁶ There was no sign of reconciliation between the two wings. As Bright observed, the Prime Minister was moderate, as usual, in regard to Egypt, opposed to strong measures proposed by some jingoistic members. The Foreign Secretary was not so firmly positioned as Gladstone: Granville made efforts to avoid offending either party. Though in favour of preserving the *status quo*, Granville waited patiently to be persuaded into a forcible solution. He did not object to the occupation of Egypt, if necessary; what he guarded against was a drift into military intervention unconsciously. The Cabinet was solemnly divided over Egypt, with threats of resignation from each side (including Gladstone himself and Lord Hartington, the Secretary for India and the leader of the forward group) to push on with their own standpoints. And that disagreement was intertwined with and complicated by the simultaneous divisions on Ireland.¹⁷ With the conversions of the two prominent Radicals, Joseph Chamberlain (the President of the Board of Trade) and Sir Charles W. Dilke (the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs), the interventionists gathered strength further by drawing the support of the ‘men on the spot,’ such as Malet, and of the Opposition. They were anxious to enhance British

¹³ PRO, FO407/21/160, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 11 July 1882.

¹⁴ Lord Granville to Lord Amphill, 12 July 1882, quoted in Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson Gower, Second Earl Granville* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1905), vol. II, p. 267.

¹⁵ Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), *Modern Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1908), vol. I, p. 248.

¹⁶ R. A. J. Walling ed., *The Diaries of John Bright* (London: Cassell, 1930), p. 482.

¹⁷ E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Democracy and Empire: Britain 1865-1914* (London: E. Arnold, 1985), p. 154. For related discussion see D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 266-67; and E. D. Steele, ‘Britain and Egypt 1882-1914,’ in K. M. Wilson ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East: the Anglo-Egyptian Experience 1882-1982* (London: Mansell, 1983), p. 1.

interests and prestige, and, no less important, the Government's image, to which the recent events in Afghanistan, South Africa and Ireland had caused harm. Gladstone at last surrendered himself to the powerful tide and sanctioned the moves that led to a true occupation and the establishment of British exclusive influence, after he had finally failed in effecting a concert of Europe in Egypt. (Gladstone had been trying to avoid a unilateral intervention on the part of Britain as late as 22 July.) In the end John Bright was the only Cabinet member and Radical official who resigned over Egypt, with little impact on the Liberal Party. He was isolated when he offered his resignation, as the whole government now swung to interventionism.¹⁸

As Lord Cromer put it, the Gladstone Government had, in fact, been led much against their will into the occupation of Egypt.¹⁹ But by what? Commercial interests lay at the centre of many observers' arguments. In Gladstone's opinion, apart from the Suez Canal, Britain had no interest in Egypt proper that could warrant a military intervention. With hindsight, he wrote in September 1882 that Parliament and the nation would not have sanctioned – almost unanimously – the Government's military proceedings in Egypt, had it not been for the Canal.²⁰ Indeed, Egypt was important because a large amount of British capital was invested there, and a large British community was resident in the country. Its prosperity and orderliness were therefore essential to the material welfare of many British subjects. The other class of British interests was that of various Egyptian bondholders living in the home country. Stockholders' interests were counted as a small thing by the press and some critics in Parliament and elsewhere who were not owners of bonds. 'A war fought for the bondholder' was one of the loudest accusations made against the Gladstone Government's action in Egypt. It was reasonable. When talking about the Government's duties in regard to Egypt, Gladstone stated in the House of Commons that the Government seriously recognized, among others, the interests of Egyptian stockholders. It was, as a Government's opponent said, the first time the bondholders' interests had ever been mentioned in the country as 'having a title to consideration' in foreign policy.²¹ Gladstone, himself a substantial holder of the Egyptian Loans,²² explained in Parliament the day after the bombardment that 'undoubtedly it is not for the exclusive or special interest of the bondholders of Egypt – and indeed it is almost wholly without reference to them – that the proceeding of yesterday was taken.'²³ That emphasis revealed a story to the contrary. The bondholders' interests certainly counted, though not to the exclusion of other considerations. Nearly a half of the Egyptian debt at that time was held by the British, and another half by the French.

¹⁸ On 11 July 1882 John Bright wrote in his diary: 'There seems not a single friend of mine with whom I can consult.' See R. A. J. Walling, *op. cit.*, p. 486. So strong was the cry for a bold solution of the Egyptian crisis, much to the Prime Minister's chagrin, that, before one Cabinet meeting, Granville had to implore 'his colleagues to remember who Mr. Gladstone was.' Quoted in Maurice Shock, 'Gladstone's Invasion of Egypt 1882,' *History Today*, vol. VII, no. 6 (June 1957), p. 354.

¹⁹ Lord Cromer, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 363.

²⁰ Mr. Gladstone to Lord Ripon, 6 September 1882, quoted in *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 327.

²¹ *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 156, no. 320, 'The Egyptian Rebellion' (October 1882), p. 559.

²² For estimation of Mr. Gladstone's investment in Egypt, see H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 135-36.

²³ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 272, 'Egypt (Military Affairs) – Proceedings of the Fleet at Alexandria,' Mr. Gladstone, 12 July 1882, p. 173.

And according to a contemporary observation, the debt was held in Britain not by a few large capitalists, financiers or speculators, but chiefly by a class of small investors all over the country.²⁴ The Corporation of Foreign Bondholders was active in mobilizing the press (particularly *The Times*) and the investors in both Houses, to create some kind of public opinion in favour of governmental protection. Even so, Parliament as a whole was, in contrast to the military authorities, opposed to the use of force for securing British commercial interests. After the occupation the British Government was obviously hampered by the financial difficulties in Egypt, and, from fear of Parliament, it attempted as far as possible to avoid dealing with them immediately. As Granville told the Lords in mid-1883, the Government were not inclined to commit themselves to industrial, commercial or economic enterprises in Egypt, as the very fact of Britain's peculiar position there made such enterprises less, rather than more desirable.²⁵ It was obvious that the interests of the bondholders could not justify the military intervention. The Gladstone Government's decision on bombardment might be popular, but not at all parliamentary, although shortly afterwards the House of Commons almost unanimously approved the Government's military measures.

In public, the Prime Minister was sensationally accused by some critics of breaking his own principles put forth in the Midlothian campaigns, but he easily found sympathizers in the country and the English community in Egypt. As *The Times* reported after the bombardment, there was not any sign of a backlash against the measures adopted by the Government.²⁶ While the Opposition reserved the right to criticize the Liberals' policy in the past, they knew they would commit 'political suicide' if they tried to cripple the Government by party struggle at the moment of excited patriotism. Afraid of rendering oneself unpopular, very few politicians ventured to take exception to coercion in Egypt. In Parliament the Government won a large vote of credit (277 to 21) for the Wolseley expedition, which was composed of British as well as Indian troops. Although criticisms were, as before, formed upon the employment of Indian forces for British imperial ends, they were not severe. The victory over Arabi Pasha, the leader of the nationalist movement in Egypt, and his mutinous soldiers at Tel-el-Kebir (13 September) gained by Sir Garnet Wolseley was generally popular in England, and more so with the Tories than with the Radicals. For many observers – and the British press tried to make the public believe – the British Government had shown all its forbearance since the risings occurred in Egypt in early 1881, and now it was time to show its strength. Even Queen Victoria was very urgent that Britain should keep a strong hold on Egypt – 'not exactly annexation, but evidently as near to it as possible.'²⁷ The prevailing sentiment that Britain was bound in honour to maintain the Khedive of her own choice was finally satisfied by

²⁴ *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 159, no. 326, 'Egypt' (April 1884), p. 589.

²⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 282, 'The Suez Canal – Constitution of the Board of Directors,' Lord Granville, 17 July 1883, p. 1666.

²⁶ *The Times*, 24 July 1882, p. 9.

²⁷ Sir William Harcourt to Lord Spencer, 16 September 1882, quoted in A. G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt* (London: Constable, 1923), vol. I, p. 458. See also Queen Victoria to Sir Henry Ponsonby, 30 May 1882, in G. E. Buckle ed., *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III (London: John Murray, 1928), p. 301. According to the Queen, the Foreign Secretary also felt that Britain should take Egypt if she could not have the free passage of troops to India secured.

Gladstone's action in 1882. The Government's policy commended itself to the judgement and approval of the whole nation, except a few tough dissidents. The manner in which the vote of credit for war expenses was received in Parliament, and the enthusiasm, with which the troops were cheered when embarking for Egypt, were signs of a national support of the Government's decision.²⁸ And the result had not fallen short of the people's hopes and expectations.

Writing on the day following the British bombardment of Alexandria, Lord Granville told the Queen that the British fleet's operations had 'greatly simplified the position,' and increased the power of Britain to 'influence the views of Europe.'²⁹ Two months later, Sir Edward Malet congratulated the Foreign Secretary on the British victory at Tel-el-Kebir, saying: 'It has given the Liberal Party a new lease of popularity and power.'³⁰ Indeed, during Mr. Gladstone's long career in politics nothing had gained him greater popularity than his adoption of this vigorous external policy. At a time when nothing else mattered much, the Egyptian campaigns pushed Gladstone's popularity to a degree he was not to see in the rest of his political life. In Gladstone's eyes, the only defect in the victory of 13 September was the escape of Arabi personally, while some of his colleagues were inclined to look upon this success as conclusive of the whole matter. Anyway, with limited purpose in mind, Gladstone earnestly hoped at first that the evacuation of Egypt might commence 'in a week or two.'³¹ But on account of national prestige and popular demands the British Government was actually moving towards military occupation step by step, although it was universally agreed in Britain that the occupation was not permanent but temporary. The British occupied Cairo two days after the Tel-el-Kebir victory and Arabi Pasha was later tried and banished to Ceylon. On 9 November the Dual Control of Britain and France was abolished, in deference, to a great extent, to British public opinion.³² And, in contrast to the traditional policy of upholding Turkish independence and integrity, the Gladstone Government was now determined to exclude the Porte from positions of authority in Egypt in order to allow the British of a complete control.

²⁸ *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 156, no. 320, 'The Egyptian Rebellion' (October 1882), p. 558. John Bright was certainly ignorant of the prevailing opinion of his countrymen on the Egyptian war when arguing that 'perhaps the bondholders, and those who have made money by it, and those who have got promotion and titles and pensions, will defend it, but thoughtful and Christian men will condemn it.' See John Bright to Rev. Thomas Rippon, 25 September 1882, in H. J. Leech ed., *The Public Letters of John Bright* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1895), p. 23. The Rev. Thomas Rippon, of Warrington, reminded Bright that it was his unadvised policy of 'peace at any price' that led him to give up office.

²⁹ Lord Granville to Queen Victoria, 12 July 1882, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 309.

³⁰ Quoted in E. D. Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³¹ Mr. Gladstone to his wife (Catherine), 15 September 1882, in A. T. Bassett ed., *Gladstone to His Wife* (London: Methuen, 1936), p. 239.

³² Ostensibly it was the Egyptian Government who proposed, on grounds of expediency and in view of recent events, the abolition of the Dual Financial Control. See PRO, FO407/24/76, Sir Edward Malet to Lord Granville, 21 October 1882. To propitiate the Egyptian nationalists, the British proposed a set of free institutions for the natives. See PRO, Cab37/9/94, Draft of Despatch from Lord Granville to Sir E. Malet, October (?) 1882; and Lord Cromer, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 342.

III. The Foreign Office Domesticated: the Egyptian Question and the 'Parliamentarization' of Foreign Policy

After 1854, when a parliamentary commission recommended the standardization of requirements for admission to the civil service, the British Government began to adopt competitive examination as a means by which appointment and promotion were to be made. The British civil service hence became much more professionalized and open to talent, with, however, the exception of the Foreign Office, which was allowed to opt out of this regulation and remained largely an aristocratic preserve. The Foreign Office was thus still inaccessible to the educated middle classes, and its corps fairly free from public scrutiny and parliamentary supervision, as was its business. It is no wonder that of all the governmental departments, the Foreign Office was the least 'democratized' and most resistant to the call for publicity of policy, which grew with the trend of reforming the British Parliament since the early nineteenth century.³³ However, things were becoming very different and difficult for the untamed diplomatic officialdom in dealing with the Egyptian affairs through the 1880s.

III-1 Parliamentarism vis-à-vis Diplomacy

In accordance with the customary practice, all the privilege that the British Parliament had in regard of foreign treaties was to discuss them. The House of Commons certainly could not make a treaty or conduct negotiations. The making of a treaty rested with the Sovereign, acting through the executive government. The government had a strict constitutional right to refuse information while negotiations were under way. Members of Parliament, however, could dismiss a ministry that made a treaty they disapproved of; and, besides, no financial proposals could be entered into without the consent of the House of Commons. Therefore, the government must have the confidence of Parliament when conducting negotiations with foreign states. The government was bound to make known transactions of this kind as soon as they were completed, and then to refer to Parliament any matter requiring its authority, whereby the Houses could pass judgement on the conduct of the responsible government. In this way British foreign policy was under public control, not tight though.

The peculiarity about the Egyptian question was that, although Egypt was a province of the Turkish Empire, its relations with Constantinople were the subject of international agreement, defined in the Treaty of 15 July 1840.³⁴ The settlement of the affairs of Egypt involved matters closely connected with the whole Eastern question. The control over the affairs of Egypt was therefore, a European question. Egypt, as Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, said, was 'politically part of Europe.'³⁵

³³ For more discussion see Valerie Cromwell and Zara S. Steiner, 'The Foreign Office before 1914: a Study in Resistance,' in Gillian Sutherland ed., *Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth-Century Government* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 167.

³⁴ PRO, FO407/21/160, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 11 July 1882.

³⁵ Sir William Harcourt to Mr. Gladstone, 8 September 1891, quoted in A. G. Gardiner, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 129. At the end of 1882 the British Government dispatched Lord Dufferin, the Ambassador the

Successive firmans of the Sultans had granted to the Khedive a considerable measure of autonomy. There were, henceforth, two classes of questions in connection with Egypt: those which related to Egypt alone, and those which the European Powers were concerned with. The Gladstone Government had, from the first, asserted that it always wanted to communicate with the other Powers in dealing with the Egyptian affairs which involved international interests.³⁶ So long as the Powers acted in agreement with British publicly-avowed policy in regard to Egypt, the British Government could not separate from them and make a move at its own will. Stood pledged to other countries, the British Government could not act by itself on the Egyptian question, leaving even less room for parliamentary manoeuvres. It was only after the Egyptian question was transformed from that of an international (or Anglo-French) transaction to that of an Anglo-Egyptian (or Anglo-Turkish) relationship that the House of Commons could increase its influence on the Foreign Office. In order to diminish the French power in Egypt, the British Government was disposed to treat Egyptian affairs as an international, rather than as an exclusively Anglo-French question. But this scheme did not fare well due partly to MPs' fear of losing control over the already outgrown foreign ministry. (Many Englishmen, in and out of office, were averse to the occupation of Egypt because it trapped Britain into continental politics, making her what she was not supposed to be – a continental power.) However, the necessity of keeping a good understanding with the European Powers, and of maintaining allied with France (particularly before the Dual Control was abolished), had obviously influenced the whole policy of the Gladstone Government, and afforded an adequate defence of its action in Egypt, disabling the Opposition in Parliament from time to time. But it was fully understood that Britain was after all free to obtain the objects of her policy if she could not attain her target in co-operation with the other Powers.

As Lord Granville instructed the British Ambassador to Turkey, Lord Dufferin, the British position in Egypt was 'that of a principal tenant of a house on fire, who would not hesitate to put it out without waiting for the assent of the owner or other tenants.'³⁷ It was obvious that the Government could not always find shelter from parliamentary examinations in the 'Concert of Europe.' Under severe public criticisms on the Egyptian policy in the summer of 1882, the Prime Minister once acknowledged privately: 'The only point made, and so far justly made, with some effect against us is that by yielding to the French we have aggravated the Egyptian difficulty.'³⁸ Parliament gained a bigger say in the management of Egyptian affairs as

Constantinople, to Cairo for the settlement of the Egyptian crisis, on account of his familiarity with European policy. See PRO, FO141/153, Lord Granville to Sir E. Malet, 29 October 1882. Also cf. FO407/20/215, Granville to Paget, 23 May 1882.

³⁶ See PRO, FO407/19/104, Proposed Draft (by Lord Granville) to Her Majesty's Representatives at Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, and Rome, 11(?) February 1882; FO407/20/358, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 12 June 1882; FO407/60/296, Lord Granville to Sir E. Thornton, 5 March 1884; Cab37/9/107, Draft of Proposed Despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome and St. Petersburg; *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1882 LXXXII, Lord Granville to Viscount Lyons, 30 May 1882, p. 428; and *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 269, 'Egypt (Political Affairs) – The Existing Crisis – Observations,' Mr. Gladstone, 26 May 1882, pp. 1718-19.

³⁷ PRO, FO407/24/13, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 5 October 1882.

³⁸ Mr. Gladstone to Lord Granville, 26 July 1882, in Agatha Ramm ed., *The Political Correspondence*

Britain was securing for herself an exclusive influence in Egypt, with her policy in that country being turned from a foreign policy to an imperial policy.

During Gladstone's second ministry, three international conferences were arranged for the settlement of the Egyptian question. The Constantinople conference of ambassadors was held in June 1882 to discuss the modalities of Turkish intervention under the supervision of the Powers; the London conference of 1884 and the Paris conference of 1885 were devoted to the solution of Egypt's financial problems. In regard to the conference of Constantinople, the British Parliament was completely denied information about its agenda, as the conference itself passed a resolution that its proceedings should be kept secret. Little was achieved in the conference, and the leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords, Lord Salisbury, complained that its principal achievement was 'to silence the British Parliament.'³⁹ And then, on the strength of the international negotiations which Britain had commenced immediately after the Egyptian war was closed, the government refused to enter upon the subject of Egypt or make any new statement of policy to Parliament. Yet on the other hand, the government was trying harder than ever to strengthen its policy by meeting with the Houses' approbation. In July 1883, when the negotiations were carried on between the British Government and M. de Lesseps⁴⁰ with reference to the Suez Canal Company, Sit Stafford Northcote, the Conservative leader in the House of Commons, brought forward a motion with the view of obtaining security for the independence and freedom of the judgement of Parliament.⁴¹ While still rejecting MPs' request for information and debate on the provisional agreement, the Prime Minister publicly acknowledged that the utterances of the government could not bind the Houses; and he avowed that no engagement would be entered into by the Government in regard to the Suez Canal except subject to the sanction of Parliament.

With reference to the London conference of 1884 (28 June-2 August), Gladstone, taking a step further though reluctantly, promised that the Government's arrangement with France would be submitted to Parliament before the other Powers were notified of it. But although the Prime Minister engaged that the privileges of Parliament would not be infringed by the Government's acts, he hesitated to assure, as some requested him to do, that Parliament should be *consulted* before the arrangement was ratified; neither did he succumb to the Opposition's demand for the communication of the financial proposals, which in his view was meant to 'put one of the greatest and one of the most responsible functions of the Executive Government into the hands of Parliament.'⁴² 'It has been a matter of public notoriety,' Gladstone complained in the Commons before the opening of the conference, 'that the proceedings of the Government in relation to Egypt would be subject to the decision of Parliament.'⁴³ This was to say, and the Powers understood, that the international

of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville, 1876-1886 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), vol. I, p. 406.

³⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 274, 'Egypt (Political Affairs),' Lord Salisbury, 26 October 1882, p. 158.

⁴⁰ Ferdinand Marie, Vicomte de Lesseps (1805-94), French diplomat and engineer who supervised the building of the Suez Canal.

⁴¹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 282, 'Suez Canal Company (Future Negotiations),' Sir Stafford Northcote, 30 July 1883, p. 1048.

⁴² *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 289, 'Egypt - The Proposed Conference,' Mr. Gladstone, 23 June 1884, p.1145.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Mr. Gladstone, 24 June 1884, p.1243.

decisions arrived at in the conference were to be imperative only after they were sanctioned by the British Parliament. Indeed, the presentation in June of some of the papers related to the proposed conference in advance was altogether an exceptional act in British parliamentary history, more so in view of Gladstone's assertion in his Midlothian speeches of the right of the Crown to make treaties without consulting Parliament.

When the preliminary Anglo-French agreement was submitted to the Houses, it met with considerable criticism, and even votes of censure were threatened.⁴⁴ The conference of London turned out to be a failure, explicable in the light of the incompetence of the Liberal negotiators under parliamentary scrutiny. In late July the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Childers) stated that the Government could not expect or ask Parliament to agree to a joint guarantee of all the Powers that was proposed by France. Explaining away the failure of the conference, the Foreign Secretary said that there was hardly any question, political or administrative, which might not be considered as indirectly connected with finance.⁴⁵ Gladstone's engagements and the exclusively financial nature of the arrangements had put the Liberal Government in a vulnerable position in Parliament. In conformity with popular wishes, the British Government finally gave up the negotiations, which they said would lead to a mastery of the European Powers over Egypt.

When the London conference on Egypt was held there was great alarm in London about international interference and complications; and there was a feeling of relief when the Government released the *Blue Books* showing Britain's firm position in regard of the joint guarantee. The Liberal Government won credit with the country for having been persistent on that particular point, but at the cost of aborting their programme to solve the financial crisis in Egypt. On 17 March 1885 an international conference at Paris approved the French proposals to reduce interest on the debt and raise a loan for Egypt under international guarantee. This would in effect increase international control on Egypt, giving France more room for obstructing British policy. The Gladstone Government was, however, obliged to accept it as its own scheme had failed last summer. With no alternative, the Prime Minister held it highly necessary that the convention should be carried out; and he urged Parliament to agree to it, in a way some members, both Liberal and Conservative, were considerably not accustomed to it.⁴⁶

With regard to the bases of the convention, the Houses were referred to the Granville circular of 1883, which they had never been able to discuss. And the confidential correspondence and papers relating to the convention had not been communicated to Parliament before all the parties ratified it. In protest, an amendment was moved in the House of Commons to the effect that, taking into consideration the terms of the Great Powers' declarations of the 17 March, the House declined to

⁴⁴ A notice of amendment, in Sir George Campbell's name, was put forth, saying 'that the European Conference have failed to give to Her Majesty's Government the means of good administration in Egypt, and the continued expenditure of the money and use of the forces of this country in Egypt cannot be justified.' *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 292, 'Egypt – The Conference – Failure of the Policy of Her Majesty's Government – Observations,' 9 August 1884, p. 378.

⁴⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan,' 27 March 1885, p. 879.

⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan, 26 March 1885, p. 714.

discuss the details of the Egyptian Loan Bill until the convention to be concluded in respect of the Suez Canal was presented to Parliament.⁴⁷ But the question was brought forward for the purpose of holding parliamentary control over the Government's proceedings in Egypt, rather than frustrating the convention itself. On this matter, Gladstone insisted on the jurisdiction of the Government; he used the word 'ratification' in its diplomatic sense when he appealed for the consent of Parliament. The members' discontent was intense in this case, for there was no instance lately of a treaty about which public opinion was so strongly excited and in which British commercial interests were deeply involved, being concluded without a full discussion in Parliament. The Egyptian Loan Bill finally passed through committee on 16 April 1885 after a somewhat discursive debate on the position of Parliament in foreign negotiations. The amendment was ultimately withdrawn at the instance of Sir Stafford Northcote, who declared himself satisfied with the assurance – more definite and satisfying than ever – given by the Government that, before the final act (contemplated by the conference, and now being drawn up by the commission sitting in Paris) was adopted by the British Government, the draft project and the protocols would be communicated to Parliament so that members would have an opportunity of expressing opinions on it before its signature. The Opposition had thus pledged the Government not to give way under external (French) pressure on the matter of the Suez Canal. In view of the abortive conference Britain had summoned in London last year and the 'melancholy' agreement she was now asked to vote, the British Government's diplomatic failures, as A. J. Balfour said, 'eclipsed their legislative and their military failures' in Egypt.⁴⁸

III-2 Publicity in Parliamentary Politics

The presentation of diplomatic papers during Gladstone's second ministry was remarkable in terms of quantity, mostly due to acute concerns of the public about Egyptian affairs. Massive publication of parliamentary papers, the so-called *Blue Books*, came after each of the sessions from 1882 to 1885. Nevertheless, omissions, on sensitive points in particular, were great for all the categorical completeness;⁴⁹ and sometimes serious postponement in producing papers, especially in 1882, made them of little avail for the Houses' reference. The official correspondence with regard to Egypt had been strictly withheld for the first half of 1882, and when it was finally released, important documents were suppressed. For instance, when the Anglo-French Joint Note (the Gambetta Note) of 8 January 1882 was under consideration, the British Government held back Sir Edward Malet's despatches concerning it, although they were widely known to be unfavourable to the note. The French opposition accounted partly for the British Government's hesitation in producing Egyptian papers,⁵⁰ despite the strong demand of Parliament for information and the Opposition's criticisms on incomplete documentation. Publicity of policy or the publication of documents was usually regarded as dangerous or unnecessary by the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Sir Richard Assheton Cross, 16 April 1885, p. 1885. Also cf. *The Times*, 17 April 1885, p. 9.

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan,' A. J. Balfour, 26 March 1885, p.727.

⁴⁹ Harold Temperley and L. M. Penson eds., *A Century of Diplomatic Blue Books 1814-1914* (London: Frack Cass, 1966), p. 294.

⁵⁰ See PRO, FO407/65/184, Lord Granville to Lord Lyons, 29 May 1885.

Foreign Office, who worked aristocratically. From the beginning of 1882 the Government had incessantly withheld information in regard to Egypt on the ground that the production of papers might not be to the public advantage. There were, in such circumstances, many inaccurate statements appearing in the newspapers, and it became very difficult for the Houses to express their opinions on Egypt. Motions for further correspondence upon Egypt were rejected repeatedly by the Foreign Office, although Granville was very anxious to dispel various conflicting rumours concerning the Government's policy in the country. 'Publicity may do immense mischief,' the Queen wrote to the Foreign Secretary, discouraging his thought of making clarifications.⁵¹ The Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Charles W. Dilke, was criticized from time to time for being reticent on questions raised in Parliament with regard to the affairs of Egypt; yet the blame was in no way due to him individually, as the Prime Minister once apologized for him.⁵² Before the military occupation the British Government was not in a position to make full statements regarding Egypt without having obtained the assent of the other governments in advance. The situation of affairs was certainly delicate. But meanwhile there was an evident reluctance on the part of the Gladstone Government to communicate information to the Houses, or to encourage discussion there. As such, it was difficult for the Government to make a defence of their policy; and as the rule required that any official document cited by a minister in debate should be laid before the Houses,⁵³ it made the government officials even more scrupulous to make remarks on Egyptian affairs.

Due to lack of intelligence from official sources, members of Parliament were forced to consult the newspapers for information, and quotations were very much often read to the Houses by some to initiate their inquiries. Others simply moved adjournments in protest. It was obvious that the official language concerning Egypt before the invasion was barely instructive, revealing very little about the state of affairs in Egypt and, particularly, the policy of the Government. In the interest of the Public Service, both the Conservative leaders in the two Houses, Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote, did not think it advisable to be very urgent with the Government for papers to be 'laid on the Table;' and the speaker of the House of Commons ruled (15 June 1882) that ministers were entitled to ask notice in advance of questions put to them on Egypt, and to decline to answer 'on public grounds.'⁵⁴ But independent members were not made quiescent, though there seemed no effective way of obtaining the information they wanted.

During the crisis following the outbreak of riots in Egypt and the bombardment of Alexandria, it was well accepted that the public could not have much information. The absence from the *Blue Books* of any detailed contemporary record of the anti-foreign events in mid-June at Cairo or Alexandria was very significant; and *Parliamentary Papers* were carefully reserved on all matters directly concerning the

⁵¹ Queen Victoria to Lord Granville, 26 July 1882, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, P. 313.

⁵² *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 269, 'Egypt (Political Affairs) – The Existing Crisis – Observation,' Mr. Gladstone, 26 May 1882, p. 1714.

⁵³ According to the rule of the Foreign Office, when papers were presented to the one House of Parliament, they should also be presented to the other at the same time.

⁵⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 270, 'Egypt – The Political Crisis,' 15 June 1882, p. 1258.

Khedive, the Porte or the other Powers.⁵⁵ The Egyptian papers issued after the military operations placed emphasis upon the difficulties besetting Britain in pursuit of her policy and the great dangers to British interests overseas; they helped to rebuke criticisms based on party perspective. The debate on 24 July 1882 in the House of Lords opened the question of the former Conservative Government's responsibility for British policy in Egypt, when Lord Granville explained his measures in recent events.⁵⁶ From then on the Egyptian question became a subject of much mystification and controversy, more so because of the Government's persistent refusal to afford information. In October the Egyptian Government tendered a note to Britain, proposing the abolition of the Dual Financial Control; in the place of which Egypt planned to substitute an English Financial Councillor. Granville instructed Malet to prevent the presentation of the note, and to prevent the publication of it at all events.⁵⁷ Soon afterwards, on 9 November, the Dual Control of Britain and France was abolished, to many observers' surprise. As Salisbury said, the Ministry had a constitutional right to refuse information while negotiations were in progress, yet by the peculiar sequence of events in 1882, the Government undoubtedly had severely strained, if not abused, that right.⁵⁸ As a result, the questions asked about Egypt in Parliament during the 1882 sessions were not very numerous, or of a searing kind; and they were met by replies often merely formal. In such circumstances, the Opposition, though growing dissatisfied with the reticence practised by the ruling party, were content simply to register their protests against the silence of the Government. Complaints about the Government's unwillingness to give information on the subject of Egypt continued to be lodged by MPs through the years 1883-1885. As a means to conciliate Parliament, the Government made promises frequently that papers would not be published in the newspapers until they had reached the hands of the members. Hence the ignorance of the general public, too.

The Gladstone Government began to make preparations for the evacuation of Egypt soon after they had occupied the country. Instructing Lord Dufferin in 1883 to draft a scheme for leaving Egypt, Gladstone told the British Commissioner to Cairo that the Government was to give to Parliament only a very slight outline on the main points of the scheme (on army, police, judiciary and legislative machinery).⁵⁹ With the tone of the public papers always evasive, private members began in 1884 to freely avail themselves of the right of moving the adjournment of the House to urge the Government to clarify their Egyptian policy. On the evacuation and abandonment of the Soudan (the Gordon mission) decided on by the Government at the beginning of 1884, the Houses were so short of official intelligence that they were obliged to rely on the statements that appeared in the newspapers. Since the Government censored all the telegrams sent by newspaper correspondents for the purpose of preventing intelligence from being revealed, the communication of certain details of event was

⁵⁵ PRO, Cab37/11/44, 'Papers Substantiating and Justifying the Charges against His Highness the Khedive of Egypt Made by Lord Randolph Churchill in the House of Commons on 11 May and 12 June 1883.' Memorandum No. IV and No. V.

⁵⁶ Harold Temperley and L. M. Penson, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

⁵⁷ PRO, FO407/24/76, Lord Granville to Sir E. Malet, 21 October 1882.

⁵⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 274, 'Egypt (Political Affairs),' Lord Salisbury, 26 October 1882, p. 158.

⁵⁹ Mr. Gladstone to Lord Dufferin, 3 August 1883, quoted in *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XI, p. 13.

not probable. The reports were not sound or complete. The papers presented to Parliament in February on the subject were thoroughly cleared of opinions unfavourable to the policy of the Whitehall. Party warfare heated as the situation of the Soudan worsened in the course of 1884. Parliamentary attack and defence necessitated frequent reference to Cairo for information, which, Lord Cromer complained, caused great trouble and waste of time, without making clear the line to take with the Mahdi.⁶⁰ The publication then of the correspondence on Egypt in the *Blue Books* had caused great disputes and a far-reaching vote of censure in Parliament. Persistently applying the privilege that belonged to every member of declining to give an answer, the Prime Minister had made Parliament and the public confused about British policy in Egypt. The press, such as *The Times*, started to question Mr. Gladstone's leadership and sincerity.⁶¹ All the dissatisfaction with the Liberal Government's management of the Egyptian question flared up at the news of the fall of Khartoum and the death of General Gordon in early 1885. Government critics concluded, with hindsight, from the *Parliamentary Papers* published after the events that the rescue of Gordon had been for a long time past impossible. Ironically, at the time when Gordon was sent to the Soudan MPs had much difficulty in understanding the conditions under which he was sent, because Gordon's despatches were carefully pruned and edited before publication; and only after his tragic death it became possible for them to have the full information about the Egyptian affairs during the whole year past. Lord Hartington, now the War Secretary and the leader of the conservative faction of the Liberal Party, proposed to present to Parliament all the principal despatches and telegrams in reference to British policy in the Soudan, in order to invite the judgement of Parliament upon it.⁶² The result was immensely damaging; and the Gladstone Government never recovered from the blow.

III-3 Public Statement of Policy

To dispel the universal doubts as to the intentions of the British Government towards Egypt, the Foreign Secretary made a public declaration of Britain's Egyptian policy in his despatch to Malet on 4 November 1881, published in the *State Papers* of 1881-82 and the *Blue Book*.⁶³ In April 1882, when the situation of affairs in Egypt became alarming, Granville suggested that, to calm the Egyptians, the English and French governments should state in their respective parliaments that there existed an agreement between the two countries on the policy to be pursued in case of crisis, and that they were soon to reach an arrangement with the Khedive.⁶⁴ As such statements were to be made with the object of creating a moral effect in Egypt, they were not meant to be a serious explanation of policy. So Granville confined himself to the

⁶⁰ Lord Cromer, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 419-20.

⁶¹ See *The Times*, 29 April 1884, p. 9; and *Quarterly Review*, vol. 161, no. 321, 'The Gladstone Ministry: A Retrospect,' (July 1885), p. 264. Also cf. Harold Temperley and L. M. Penson, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

⁶² Lord Hartington to Queen Victoria, 19 May 1885, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, P. 648.

⁶³ See Earl Granville to Sir E. Malet, 4 November 1881, *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1881-82 LXXIII, pp. 1160-62; or *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1882 LXXXII, pp. 86-87. Also cf. FO407/19/26, Lord Granville to Lord Lyons, 10 January 1882.

⁶⁴ PRO, FO407/20/41, Lord Granville to Lord Lyons, 24 April 1882.

announcement of the existence of the agreement, without giving any public definition of the policy decided on. Just like the way they handled Egyptian intelligence, the Gladstone Government resisted incessant calls for proclaiming their measures in Egypt. In 1882 the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary continuously declined to explain their policy with regard to the sovereignty of the Porte, and the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire, while the Egyptians rose in revolt against the Turks as well as the Europeans. Parliament and the public, though discontented with the Government's silence, did not press hard for an enunciation of policy. On the day of the bombardment of Alexandria (11 July), Granville still repeated his old principles – cordial co-operation with France, maintaining the *status quo*, upholding the Sultan's right, respecting the autonomy of Egypt, no desire for an English occupation or annexation, and opposition to the establishment of an exclusive influence by any other Power.⁶⁵ It is remarkable that the Government upon this occasion did not bring forward any vote or ask for funds, which would necessarily lead to their explaining the nature of the action contemplated. The policy of the Liberal Government in Egypt was, Lord Cromer complained, vacillating and uncertain.⁶⁶ The 'restore, reform and retreat' principle appeared ambiguous and unrealistic to the public.

Only after the armed resistance in Egypt had altogether ceased, the British Government began to consider the settlement of the country seriously.⁶⁷ But the ministers still cautiously abstained from indicating, except in a vague tone, the steps to be taken in the near future. Granville instructed the Foreign Office in November 1882 that all measures regarding the reorganisation of the Egyptian Government should be submitted to Lord Dufferin before they were adopted or made public.⁶⁸ As a result it became even more difficult for the Houses to extract from officials their views on Egypt. Just one striking example is enough. On 10 November Lord Randolph Churchill asked the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the House of Commons,

'If it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to take any steps towards the re-establishment of the Dual Control in Egypt?'

Sir Charles W. Dilke: 'In reply to the noble Lord's...Question, I can add nothing to the statements which have already been made by the Prime Minister and myself.'

Lord Randolph Churchill: 'There have been no statements.'

Sir Charles W. Dilke: 'Oh, yes. There have been many statements as to the impossibility of making a statement.'⁶⁹

Complaining of the elusive way in which the Under Secretary answered questions with regard to Egyptian policy, one member said scornfully that Dilke had acted in perfect agreement with the saying that 'language was invented for the purpose of enabling a man to conceal his thoughts.'⁷⁰

⁶⁵ PRO, FO407/21/160, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 11 July 1882.

⁶⁶ Lord Cromer, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 334.

⁶⁷ See PRO, Cab37/9/83, 'The Settlement of Egypt,' 15 September 1882.

⁶⁸ PRO, FO141/167, Lord Granville to Lord Dufferin, 3 November 1882.

⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 274, 'Egypt – The Dual Control,' 10 November 1882, pp. 1187-88.

⁷⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 270, 'Egypt – The Political Crisis,' Mr. Joseph Cowen, 14 June 1882, p. 1156.

On 3 January 1883 the Foreign Office issued a circular note on Egypt to the British representatives abroad; and its text was published in *The Times* a fortnight later.⁷¹ The Granville Circular to the Powers declared Britain's desire to withdraw her troops from Egypt, and proposed an international agreement on the position of the Suez Canal and other questions. But the demands for further explanation of policy were still rejected in parliamentary question time. Queen Victoria intervened to prevent the Foreign Office from making more declarations that would limit Britain's freedom or power. She wrote to the Foreign Secretary on 8 February: 'Nothing should be said to fetter or hamper our action in Egypt; we must have a firm hold on her once for all.'⁷² Decision on a forward policy towards Egypt would inevitably preclude the Liberal Government from making public statements of their position. But it was very dubious whether the Cabinet were agreed on that course of action. More likely was that their indecision and vacillation in regard to Egypt disabled them in professing a policy. Having failed to give satisfactory explanation of their future policy in Egypt, the Government found it difficult to secure Parliament's sanction to their proposals for military grants following the previous expenditure of £6,000,000 in the Egyptian operations. Motions for adjournment were put forward continually as a means of eliciting the policy of the Government: by taking advantage of the forms of the Houses and raising irregular debates, MPs tried to induce the ministers to break their long-preserved silence. That was to no avail.⁷³ Military actions were launched again in 1884 – now in the Soudan, which remitted the Government's duty of notification to Parliament.

Apart from the Reform Act, the Egyptian question was the chief preoccupation of the Houses and the British public in 1884. Nearly half of the sittings in the first session of 1884 were, wholly or partially, devoted to debates on Egypt. The Prime Minister began to complain that Parliament talked too much about Egypt, while he thought the Government had exhausted that subject. On the other hand, the Opposition considered they had shown the Ministry the greatest indulgence as to Egypt, but they simply could not allow the things to develop without a clear explanation of British policy in that country. In the declarations to Parliament and in the diplomatic communications to the other Powers, the British Government emphasized that the occupation was only temporary; but the presence of British forces in Egypt, and the part which Britain was taking in the administration of the country remained to be clearly defined. This puzzle baffled even the British Consul-General in Cairo, who found himself often at odds with his Liberal superiors.⁷⁴ The difference of

⁷¹ See *The Times*, 17 January 1883, p. 10.

⁷² Queen Victoria to Lord Granville, 8 February 1883, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 407.

⁷³ In reaction to the members' tireless inquires, Gladstone once complained: 'If we have any change to announce in that policy, we shall not wait for the question...and for the repetition of the Motion for Adjournment, which, I confess, appears to be a clear and sheer abuse of the Privileges of Parliament.' *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 286, 'Egypt – Policy of Her Majesty's Government,' Mr. Gladstone, 3 April 1884, p. 1535.

⁷⁴ See PRO, Cab37/12/16, Draft Despatch from Lord Granville to Sir E. Baring, 28 March 1884; also Memorandum by Mr. Gladstone, 2 April 1884, in *The Political Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. II, p. 175; and Lord Cromer, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 499. Queen Victoria wrote in her journal (13 May 1884): 'Sir E. Baring had enormous difficulties to contend with, owing to the Government

opinion over Egypt existing between the Ministry and the Queen became acute during 1884, which added more difficulty to public statement of British policy.⁷⁵ Besides the question of evacuation, the most interesting topic on Egypt at the time was General Gordon's mission to the Soudan. Doubts prevailed as to the scope and the methods of the mission, but the Government kept taciturn upon all its essential parts. And no explanation to Parliament of the measures to be adopted in Egypt, in consequence of the failure of the London conference of 1884, was made. Nevertheless, the Houses were not very demanding on this, as things in Egypt did not seem to fare ill for the present.

It was the death of General Gordon at Khartoum in January the next year that obliged the Government to explain their Egyptian policy, only too late. And their defence in parliamentary debates did not make it more intelligible, partly due to the dissension among the Cabinet members. The Liberal leaders still seemed to be short of a clearly defined Egyptian policy: what they were sure of was what they would not adopt as British policy. All the Foreign Office talked about was only the general objects of their Egyptian policy, rather than a particular set of measures for the attainment of those objects. The Opposition launched severe accusations, in retrospect, against the Government of mismanagement, inactivity, inconsistency and, above all, want of policy in Egypt. The Gladstone Government were discredited, fatally. Despairing of the Liberals, the Opposition members started to press their own leaders instead for the declaration of Conservative policy towards Egypt.⁷⁶ Succumbing to the strong tide of public opinion, the Government declared in February a vigorous policy in the Soudan, though still without a clarification of their general policy. The fact that the Cabinet soon recommended the abandonment of the offensive operations in the Soudan indicated how great the pressure of the public had been when the Government changed their policy towards the Mahdi, and how unwilling they had been to yield to the popular demand. Just less than a year ago Granville had utterly repudiated Sir Evelyn Baring's suggestion for a forward policy further south; and Gordon had been despatched, not to occupy, but to evacuate the Soudan. And now, for the first time and all of a sudden, the Foreign Office was forced to change tack at the dictate of Parliament and the public. Writing to the Prime Minister on 17 April, Queen Victoria complained that the Government had made the total reversal of policy without giving her any intimation in advance.⁷⁷ A few days later she registered another complaint with the Foreign Secretary when the Government suddenly (21 April) announced the abolition of the recovery action.⁷⁸ Owing to many difficulties the policy was given up, not in collision with the popular feeling. (The enthusiasm of the people had subsided

having no decided policy and changing it continually.' See *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 494.

⁷⁵ For example, the Queen insisted that if the Government must make a declaration on the question of evacuation, it must be with the provision she drafted - 'Provided the state of Egypt is such as to enable us to leave the country without the danger of anarchy and confusion.' See Queen Victoria to Sir Henry Ponsonby, 17 May 1884, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 555.

⁷⁶ Hatfield House Library (HHL), D/10-14/156, Lord Salisbury to Hugh McCalmont Cairns, 20 February 1885.

⁷⁷ Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, 17 April 1885, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, pp. 638-39.

⁷⁸ Queen Victoria to Lord Granville, 28 April 1885, *ibid.*, p. 643.

then.) In both Houses Gladstone and Granville made the announcement of the withdrawal from the Soudan in careful language. Although there was a general expression of feeling that the abandonment of the Suakin-Berber Railway was undesirable, yet only in the brief debate in the House of Lords were calls made for more consideration on the part of the Government of its effect on the British position in the East generally. The Foreign Secretary told the Lords that the Government had been strictly consistent in regard to Egypt, though they, in the public interest, had been rather reticent on the Soudan question; and since military concerns were disappearing after they had decided to evacuate the Soudan, he would soon be able to give further explanations of the British policy there.⁷⁹ This he failed to accomplish. Doubts in the Houses as to the Government's intention with respect to that country had hardly been dissipated before the Conservative Party took office in June.

III-4 Parliamentary Debate and Discussion on Foreign Policy

From the start of 1882 great anxiety over Egypt grew, but the Government successfully avoided discussing the subject in Parliament. Premature discussion, they convinced many, was harmful to the nation and unjust to the Administration. Granville refrained from saying anything that might lead to a debate on Egyptian affairs; the discussion on the conduct of the Government, he repeatedly emphasized, should take place as a whole, and not piecemeal, which was not possible at the time. Sir Charles W. Dilke fended off a number of awkward questions for the Government by saying that he was not qualified for answering them. The question of affording opportunities for discussion, for instance, was one for the Prime Minister rather than for the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, who answered on behalf of the Government many requests for debate. Frustrated by persistent refusal in this way, members occasionally diverted their speech from the topic of Egypt to the question of parliamentary politics to display their discontent. 'I quite agree in that,' one member said after Dilke's invariable reply in the negative to an invitation to discussion, 'I do not want to discuss the affairs of Egypt; I want to discuss the affairs of England.'⁸⁰ While discouraging any attempt at discussion, the Government had really started many topics that were of a very controversial character. Anyway, with the Houses only partially informed, adequate debate was in effect not possible. And the Opposition leaders were not very importunate with the Government.

As the situation in Egypt was becoming critical in mid-1882, more and more members began to ask the Government to fix an early day for the discussion of the Egyptian question. The Liberal spokesmen explained as before that they had to decline to enter on a fragmentary discussion. It was no doubt arguable that on so grave a subject as Egypt, piecemeal debates arising out of an official answer to a question were not beneficial and could be dangerous; and it was true that the Government could not defend their Egyptian policy separately. But the paradox was that, until the Houses were in possession of full information on which a sound discussion could be based, the members could only discuss the question in a desultory

⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 297, 'Egyptian Loan Bill,' Lord Granville, 23 April 1885, p. 454.

⁸⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 269, 'Egypt (Political Affairs) – The Existing Crisis – Observation,' Sir Wilfrid Lawson, 26 May 1882, p. 1711.

manner. It seemed that unless a motion of no-confidence in the Government in relation to foreign policy was proposed, they were not prepared to go into a debate, even when the papers were fully presented to Parliament. Motions for adjournment did not work with them on this.

When the bombardment of Alexandria took place, the Prime Minister only promise a discussion on the papers dated no later than the end of May. The officials carefully abstained from stirring up a debate by challenging any opinion that was like to raise differences in the Houses. The Conservative leaders were acquiescent, thinking it was unpatriotic and impolitic to examine closely the Government's policy at the critical moment. Speaking after Granville in the Lords, Salisbury referred to a dilemma facing all objectors to the Government's policy – to comply with his conscience or to support his nation. 'No one in the present state of affairs possesses the freedom of speech,' the Conservative leader said.⁸¹ It became apparent that however inevitable a general discussion might be later on, it would not vitally affect the Government's policy in Egypt. A long debate on Egypt took place in the Upper House on 24 July, but all speeches were confined to the consideration of the existing state of affairs, without reference to future policy. Indeed, one of the difficulties in raising questions on Egypt with the Government, who were reluctant to discuss it, was how to narrow the issue; and the one danger to them was that once the discussion opened, it would extend itself to a general review. As such, it was easy to understand why the policy of the Government in regard to the Chamber of Notables, a crucial issue at the root of the Egyptian question, had never been touched in Parliament.

Many people outside the Houses considered discussion on Egyptian policy disadvantageous to the national interest. In October 1882 the Queen, through the Prime Minister, asked all the ministers to keep silent on the affairs of Egypt; and she demanded that Gladstone and Granville should 'give only very general answers and insist on no partial discussion' before any plan was agreed on.⁸² The Queen's request constituted a good excuse for the Government to prolong their silence. When the crisis began in the early summer, a conference on Egypt (the ambassadorial conference at Constantinople) was announced almost simultaneously, making the Houses dumb on Egyptian affairs. Therefore, the matter was not the subject of great discussion. Then the British forces were engaged in the country; and it was still impossible for the members to discuss it. Next came the Queen's intervention. A peculiar position gradually emerged thereupon, in which Parliament stood with respect to the decision of the Government on the Egyptian question. 'Look at the position in which the House [of Commons] is placed,' Lord Randolph Churchill, the leader of the 'Fourth Party', complained, '[the] Government have taken up all the time of Parliament. It is absolutely impossible for any member...to bring forward motions on any subject without the consent of the Government...The Government had absolutely refused to meet the House of Commons on their Egyptian policy.'⁸³

⁸¹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 272, 'Egypt (Political Affairs) – Policy of the Government,' Lord Salisbury, 24 July 1882, p. 1497.

⁸² Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, 23 October 1882, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 352.

⁸³ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 274, 'Egypt – Surrender of Arabi Pasha to the Agents of the Khedive,' Lord Randolph Churchill, 13 November 1882, p. 1319.

Aware of the power of the Government to decline to discuss the subject, the Houses, in order to discharge their own responsibilities, could only call the attention of the public out-of-doors to the ministers' obstinacy.

From 1883 onwards general questions on Egypt were raised frequently during the discussion on the Estimates, unlike the previous sessions, during which budgets had been passed without much digression. The objective was not so much an instant and satisfactory answer as a promise from the Government to give opportunities for full discussion thereafter. Still the Government had no desire for this. After 1883 one of the questions that the English public concerned gravely was about the evacuation of Egypt. When asked in a brief debate in August on the British occupation whether Parliament would be consulted before any action was taken in relation to the withdrawal, the Prime Minister gave a negative answer in a very roundabout way.⁸⁴ The long forbearance, or rather restraining under compulsion, on the part of Parliament over the years finally gave way to numerous fits of argument about Egypt in early 1884. On the seventeenth night the House of Commons was engaged in Egyptian business since the 1884 sessions had started, Gladstone burst into angry speech, complaining about the members' unrelenting scrutiny of the Government's action in Egypt. 'Why in the world is this pressure exercised?' he protested,⁸⁵ revealing the maladjustment of the officials to the demand, still inchoate, for the 'parliamentarization' of foreign policy. In mid-1884 Granville made a statement in the Lords, which Salisbury hailed as the most important pledge the Foreign Secretary had ever given. Granville besought the members to reserve their opinion on the Government's Egyptian policy until the full statement promised was laid before the House with all the circumstances of the case. 'I see no danger in such a course,' he added, 'because it is clear that that full statement will enable Parliament to take action to prevent the country being committed to any course of policy which Her Majesty's Government may intend to adopt.'⁸⁶ This was much of a turning point for the relations between the Government and Parliament in regard to foreign policy. The Foreign Office in effect undertook not to enter into any engagement with respect to Egypt before the Houses expressed their opinion. The Prime Minister was, on the other hand, not so positive about parliamentary direction of foreign policy as Granville. He continued to blame the House of Commons for aggravating the Government's difficulty by excessive discussion on Egypt. Although Gladstone assured the members of an opportunity for discussing his Egyptian policy, yet he never found an opportune occasion for it. Anyway, during the 1884 sessions, Egypt had become the prominent subject of parliamentary business, and the Houses had found it much easier than ever to approach it.

⁸⁴ Hansard, 3rd S., vol. 282, 'Egypt – Withdrawal of Army of Occupation,' Mr. Gladstone, 2 August 1883, p. 1341. The Prime Minister's circumlocutory reply was: 'I have to say that if an engagement of that kind were given this might happen – a period might arise when, in view and conviction of the Government on its own responsibility, the presence of our troops was no longer required, and yet they would have to stay on in order that the House might express an opinion on the subject...It would be totally contrary to the principle of the responsibility of the Government.'

⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 286, 'Egypt – Policy of Her Majesty's Government,' Mr. Gladstone, 3 April 1884, p. 1539.

⁸⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 288, 'Egypt (The Proposed Conference) – Negotiations with France,' Lord Granville, 9 June 1884, p. 1730.

The fall of Khartoum at the beginning of 1885 made Gladstone's line of argument indefensible; and accordingly the Government and Parliament met on wholly fresh ground. Discussions on the general policy of Britain in Egypt went on day after day for the vote of censure in both Houses. However, Gladstone kept firm on some points during and after the storm. In particular, he had no intention of inviting MPs to express their opinion on foreign negotiations in reference to Egypt. In mid-1884 the Houses were, owing to the late period of the session, actually deprived of any opportunity of discussing the questions submitted to the international conference on Egyptian finance at London. Now, with regard to the convention that was to be made in the Paris conference, they were referred to the Granville Circular of January 1883; but in fact the Houses had never discussed that document. Again Parliament did not obtain an opportunity of discussing the bases of the convention. And the Government earnestly induced the Houses to endorse the resolutions of the conference. A debate on the international agreement was entered into, prematurely, at the close of the session. On the day (9 April 1885) the House of Commons re-assembled after the Easter Recess – a day commonly supposed, by the ordinary practice and custom, to be one on which no business of importance was proposed – the second reading of the Egyptian Loan Bill was brought forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Opposition then fought, successfully, for a right to freely express their opinion on the matter. Parliament had so far appeared prepared to assume its new responsibilities in British imperial enterprise.

IV. Public Opinion, Popular Politics and Britain's Egyptian Policy

Debating on Egypt in the Lords, Granville proudly claimed that his circular despatch of 4 November 1881, which set forth the policy of the British Government, had met with general approval both at home and abroad. It was doubtful, however, that the Government's policy in Egypt after 1882 had the support of the public, since the situation in that country had changed significantly from then, and the British Government had continually refused to give full information to Parliament concerning Egypt or to make a clear public statement of their policy in response to the new circumstances. What was clear was that the Foreign Secretary kept emphasizing public opinion as a principal driving force for the course of British policy. Needless to say, the Egyptian policy was governed far more by the traditions of British imperial policy than by the will of individual ministers. Many eminent politicians in England, for example, who had expressed their aversion to the Ottoman Empire early in 1882, were compelled to uphold the sovereignty of the Porte over Egypt later in the year.⁸⁷ Public opinion, if any, was (and is) changeable and indefinable; it was frequently used in political justification or rationalization. It was controversial whether the English public was in support of the military occupation of Egypt; but since there had not been strong objection in Britain, the Government tended to convince themselves that their policy had had the approval of the people. On the other hand, the press (and the

⁸⁷ See *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 156, no. 319, 'A Retrospect of the Session of 1882' (July 1882), p. 285.

Queen) expressed strong opposition to the convention arrived at in the Constantinople conference of 1882; but Granville, convinced by the military commanders of its advantages, held that in a political point of view, the balance of argument was in favour of it.⁸⁸ The use of public opinion demanded the art of interpretation. And certainly the Government did not want the general public to decide British policy in Egypt.

Debates on Egypt in Parliament, accusation or defence, necessitated careful notice of the public mind, especially when the nation took acute interest in the subject during mid-1882, 1884 and early 1885. In May 1883 Granville proclaimed that the Government, whose policy was to limit rather than to extend the sphere of British responsibilities in Egypt, was in no way responsible for the operations in the Soudan led by General William Hicks under the authority of the Egyptian Government. The English public generally welcomed the Hicks expedition, and there was no voice against it in the Houses.⁸⁹ In the battle of El Obeid on 5 November 1883, Hick's army was completely defeated by the Mahdi Mohammed Ahmed of Dongola. Popular feeling in England rose sharply at the news. On 6 January 1884 the Whitehall forced the Egyptian Government to agree to abandon the Soudan. As early as in December 1883 *The Pall Mall Gazette* took the lead to suggest that General Gordon, an esteemed military leader with great personal influence in that country, should be sent to Khartoum to extricate the Anglo-Egyptian garrisons. Echoed by the press instantly, it soon became a national demand that the Government could not afford to ignore. Despite some reluctance and discontent, the Government, in view of the public clamour and the necessities of parliamentary situation, announced Gordon's appointment on the first day of 1884, sparking an outburst of patriotic enthusiasm. A great cry was raised by some of the newspapers that Britain should proclaim a protectorate over Egypt, in sharp contrast to the scornful response of the press to Bismarck's statement only a short time ago in favour of the annexation of Egypt by the British.⁹⁰ 'Practically all classes and sections are agreed in calling upon the government to recognize and to give effect to that responsibility,' *The Times* claimed in its leading article. The newspaper asked the ministers to take into account seriously the unanimous and powerful public opinion, which, it said, could not be defied 'even by the phalanx of a parliamentary majority.'⁹¹ Some politicians in and out of Parliament voiced their support of this view. The Foreign Secretary was attracted, for a moment. He wrote to the Prime Minister: 'If we announce a protectorate it may help us in the [parliamentary] debate;' but he immediately spoke of the diplomatic difficulties such an act would necessarily cause.⁹² A protectorate in Gladstone's eyes was even worse than annexation; and the Government certainly did not want to utilize the atmosphere at home to change the British position in Egypt. Nonetheless, the

⁸⁸ Lord Granville to Mr. Gladstone, 6 September 1882, in *The Political Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. I, p.414.

⁸⁹ PRO, Cab37/12/7, Memorandum on the Egyptian Debate by Edmond Fitzmaurice, 1 February 1884.

⁹⁰ Lord Amphill to Lord Granville, 9 February 1884, quoted in Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 324.

⁹¹ *The Times*, 11 February 1884, p. 9.

⁹² Lord Granville to Mr. Gladstone, 10 February 1884, in *The Political Correspondence of Gladstone and Granville*, vol. II, p. 157.

appointment of Gordon and the good omens when he arrived at Khartoum on 18 February helped the Gladstone Government out in the week-long debate on the motion of censure in both Houses.

At the same time a great danger loomed that, while the Government despatched Gordon to carry out their policy of repose in the Soudan, the public and the Conservative Opposition thought, or expected, that they were bracing themselves up to adopt a vigorous Egyptian policy. Repudiating the 'bloodthirsty declarations of the public press,' Henry Labouchere, a famous Radical in the Commons, was obviously wrong in arguing that the Gordon mission had been warmly applauded because it had been supposed it would prevent war.⁹³ The jingoists ignored the passive nature about Gordon's assignment and cried for the annexation of Egypt, while the government committed a sin of omission as they profited from the popular fantasy and Parliament's moderation in time of foreign operations. Some, including the Queen and the British representative at Cairo, warned the Government of the danger of following public opinion in pursuance of their responsibilities in Egypt. Implementing a policy of 'Rescue and Retire,' the Government did not actually live up to the popular expectations; but on the technical level they were ready to reconcile.

In March, in consideration of the anti-slavery feeling of the English public and the Houses, the Government repeatedly turned down Gordon's request for sending for Zebehr Pasha, a former notorious slave dealer who had great influence in the Soudan, to help him.⁹⁴ To force the issue or not, Gordon, who was not desirous of confining himself to the work of evacuation, then asked for reinforcements from home. Persisting in a limited policy towards the Soudan, the Government frustrated Gordon's plan time and again. 'The sending of English troops to Khartoum... would be the most vital and radical change that could be made in our policy,' Gladstone told his War Secretary.⁹⁵ Granville believed that public opinion could not possibly countenance an expedition to Khartoum that would incur great expense and loss of life. Hence all was left to Gordon at Khartoum, and the Government kept to themselves at London. Gordon, though concurring in the abandonment of the Soudan, complained that his mission had become an utter waste of money and life due to the indecision of the British Government.⁹⁶

The Gordon expedition resulted in an ignominious defeat for Britain. On 26 January 1885, just before the relief force from Wadi Halfa reached Khartoum, the Mahdi took the city, massacring Gordon and the garrison. The news of Gordon's death outraged public opinion in England. The Government faced severe condemnations from all quarters, not to mention the motions of censure that were proposed as soon as Parliament met. The public then strongly demanded revenge by

⁹³ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 284, 'Egypt (War in the Soudan),' Mr. Labouchere, 25 February 1884, p. 1891.

⁹⁴ For details see John Brook and Mary Sorenson eds., *The Prime Minister's Papers Series, W. E. Gladstone, IV: Autobiographical Memoranda 1868-1894* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1981), p. 65. In recollection, Mr. Gladstone said: '...Though it was perfectly true that the decision arrived at was the judgement of the Cabinet, it was also no less the judgement of Parliament and the people.' Quoted in John Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 160. Also cf. *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1883-84 LXX, Lord Granville to Sir E. Baring, pp. 766-67.

⁹⁵ Mr. Gladstone to Lord Hartington, 13 April 1884, quoted in *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. XI, p. 135.

⁹⁶ C. G. Gordon, *The Journals of Major-General C. G. Gordon at Khartoum* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1885), p. 150.

crushing the power of the Mahdi. The Government responded, not without hesitation, with a fresh expedition, led by Sir Gerald Graham, to Suakin and an order to Lord Wolseley to forcibly consolidate the British position on the Nile. From February a forward policy replaced the former plan of retreat, until mid-April, when great difficulties and the opposition of the Powers,⁹⁷ and probably the demand of the Liberal conscience, forced a back-down. At this time the popular excitement had already subsided, but the reversion to the Gladstonian view of Egypt invited scathing criticisms from the Queen and the members of Parliament. In fact, there was a great number of politicians, Liberal and Conservative, who advocated the abandonment of the Soudan, a place they thought worth no effort to fight for. What they considered impolitic about the Government's policy of withdrawal was its public announcement (on 21 April). It was dangerous, immoral, and demoralizing. But seeing how actively the British press and Parliament were engaged in discussing Egyptian affairs, it seemed unlikely for the Government to keep secret such a general decision on British policy.

In Gladstone's opinion, although the people were greatly concerned about Egypt, they were ignorant of, and cared very little about the Egyptian question. Lord Salisbury showed better insight than the Prime Minister into the national mind when he said: 'I do not think that after all the effort that has been made [the] English people will be at all content to scuttle out of Egypt, or to let France share what we have won.'⁹⁸ The Foreign Secretary was more realistic than Gladstone on the subject of Egypt. The evacuation of Egypt was in Granville's eyes a political question that could only be solved politically. He realized that public opinion, upon which the British Government was dependent, would not permit the evacuation without a proper return for the sacrifices England had incurred. Thinking far more of glory than of truth and right, the public was very much attracted to the talk about national prestige involved in the Egyptian question in various articles of the newspapers and in some of the speeches delivered in Parliament. Many Conservatives saw that, in dealing with Egyptian affairs, the Gladstone Government had always taken no effective measures until the pressure of public opinion forced upon them the movement. The Opposition, therefore, often acted in chime with popular feeling, or tried to create some sort of public opinion to effect a change in the Government's policy. The Government, on the other hand, asserted that every step that had been taken since the occupation of Egypt followed necessarily from the very first proceeding, which had met with popular support in Britain. Public opinion seemed to be suited to varied assumptions.

Public opinion with regard to the Gladstone Government had apparently become unfavourable in 1884 and 1885 because of their mismanagement of the Soudan business. Ironically, it was, at least Gladstone believed so, public opinion that had driven the Government into the course of policy they had pursued in that country. At the end of his second ministry, the Prime Minister told his War Secretary, Lord Hartington, about the 'two grave errors' in their policy in the Soudan: the first the

⁹⁷ It has been pointed out that the operations in the Soudan roused more opposition among the Great Powers than the British military occupation of Egypt in 1882. See Harold Temperley and L. M. Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy, from Pitt to Salisbury* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 421.

⁹⁸ HHL, D/31/105, Lord Salisbury to Lord Carnarvon, 1 February 1885.

expedition to Suakin, the second the mission of Gordon, or rather the choice of Gordon for that mission. 'They were approved by the public opinion of the day and by the Opposition,' Gladstone emphasized,⁹⁹ expressing his regret for the concessions the Government had made under public pressure. *The Times*, which was steadily opposed to Gladstone's policy in Egypt and had been constantly calling for a more vigorous and resolute line of action, imputed the British failure and misfortunes there to the Government's neglect of its advice. Some might blame the disaster in the Soudan on the Gladstone Government's indecision or weaknesses, while others might blame on the fickleness of public opinion and irresponsibility of popular movements. After all, one of the grim realities about politics is that, as the saying goes, 'Enthusiasts are troublesome to politicians and diplomatists, but the world would be dull without them.'

V. Party Politics and the Egyptian Question

There was little room for manoeuvre for independent members in Parliament, especially on matters on which the two major parties were agreed. Parliamentary practice was in fact party politics. When, for example, in 1882, the Government declined to give information or have a debate about Egypt, and the leaders of the Opposition acquiesced, the speeches of individual members on the back bench became helpless and powerless. Generally speaking, the Conservative leader in the Commons, Sir Stafford Northcote, was more temperate than his counterpart in the Lords, Lord Salisbury, with the Government on Egypt. On the day following the bombardment of Alexandria, Northcote entirely abstained from raising any question with regard to Egypt, and he appealed to his colleagues not to express any opinion on the subject at the moment. Within a week there had not been a speech of attack on the Government from the Opposition front bench in the House of Commons. While on the other hand, after stating his determination to support the Government, Salisbury in the House of Lords then proceeded to criticize the conduct of the ruling party in Egypt. However, party politics was not much affected by the Egyptian war; and Wolseley's victory over the Egyptian forces of Arabi Pasha at Tel-el-Kebir was greatly cheered by the Tories.¹⁰⁰ When the Radical wing of the Liberal Party was campaigning for the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt, the Opposition called for Britain's assumption of governing power. 'Our object has been not to embarrass the Government, still less to give the slightest assistance to Arabi,' Salisbury wrote to the Queen in November.¹⁰¹ Although discipline was not strict then in the Conservative rank and file, they as a whole supported the Liberal Government on the ground of national interests. The Conservatives' criticisms were mainly about the miscarriages and shortcomings of the Government's policy, rather than the policy itself. In fact,

⁹⁹ Mr. Gladstone to Lord Hartington, 30 May 1885, quoted in John Morley, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 196.

¹⁰⁰ Gwendolen Cecil, *The Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931), vol. III, P. 90. See also *Quarterly Review*, vol. 155, no. 309, 'The True Position of Parties' (January 1883), p. 278.

¹⁰¹ Lord Salisbury to Sir Richard Cross (submitted by Cross to the Queen), 14 November 1882, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 358.

what worried the Conservative Party was the uncertainty in Gladstone's foreign policy. Generally, in 1882 the Government had been allowed freely to take their measures in Egypt with very little interference from the Opposition.

The long silence of the Conservative Party in regard to Egypt was finally broken by Salisbury in late 1882 outside Parliament. Although they had urged firm action in mid-1882, the Conservatives began from the 1883 session to condemn, slightly, the Government's conduct of the war half a year ago. On the Soudan question the Opposition advocated again a firm policy, which the Government came to adopt in early 1884. Hence another truce in Parliament. Northcote showed great abstention during the Soudanese war of early 1884. He did not press the Government at all for information. In order to make the Conservative Party properly responsible for the policy in the Soudan, he only asked for further explanations to be made afterwards. When the Government rejected Gordon's request for the appointment of Zebehr, the Opposition also set themselves against the Pasha. The Conservative conception of Egyptian policy, which had greatly gained in clearness and coherence since the debate on the vote of censure in February 1884, was placed in comparison with that of the Liberal Government after Gladstone's Cabinet had seemed to revert to indefinite aims in Egypt since March. On the part of the Opposition there was an evident determination to assume dominant power in Egypt; but to Gladstone and his followers Egypt for the Egyptians or Egypt under the British were ideas equally repugnant. It was significant that when questions of military expedition or expenditure in connection with Egypt were brought forward by the Government, they usually received a large amount of support from the Opposition, although references were sometimes made sarcastically to Gladstone's Midlothian speeches.¹⁰²

The tension between the two parties heightened again in mid-1884. In June the Conservatives made a forceful charge in both Houses against the course which the Government had pursued in the settlement of the Egyptian question. But while criticizing the Liberals' action, the Opposition did not present clearly their own policy instead. There was still plenty room for compromise. The most serious confrontation between the Government and the Opposition over Egypt took place in the debates on the vote of censure after Gordon's death. Even on that occasion, Northcote's opening speech was not particularly severe in attack. After the failure of the Government's measures, a universal demand for a clear statement of the Conservatives' policy in Egypt arose, to which both Northcote and Salisbury failed to respond in the Houses. The Conservative Party had in fact no desire at the moment to turn the Liberals out on the vote of confidence, in consideration of the difficult state of situation in Egypt and the imminent election to be conducted according to the new Reform Act of 1884. The motions made by the two Conservative leaders in both Houses at the end of February 1885 were plainspoken and uncompromising, but they were not intended to topple the Government from power. Their appearance was, as the Liberal ministers were able to perceive, that of a demonstration rather than of a battle. They raise the Egyptian question fairly, without even touching the point at issue – the question whether it had

¹⁰² Lord George Hamilton, *Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections 1868-85* (London: John Murray, 1917), p. 226.

been right in the first instance, to go to Egypt at all.¹⁰³ The Opposition only meant to discharge their duty technically.

Throughout the period of Gladstone's second ministry the Conservatives were weak as an opposition, lacking in discipline, consistent policy and a strong leadership in the Lower House. They were not an effective opposition especially in reference to the Egyptian business, due partly to the gross disparity of voting power. They were slow to expose the Government to criticism when things went awry in Egypt, and they had not been able to place an alternative policy before the public until the Liberal Government came to a close in the summer of 1885. A tell-tale instruction was issued by Northcote in mid-April, when the Egyptian Loan Bill was under discussion. He advised his fellow members not to make feeble and ineffective attacks upon the Government, because, he reminded them, the result always was to give the Government a larger majority than it really deserved, and thus induced the public to believe that the Liberals were enjoying a great amount of parliamentary confidence.¹⁰⁴ The comparative incompetence of the Conservative Party in Parliament and their unwillingness to take office in early 1885 gave a short lease of life to the Gladstone Government after the Soudan disaster; but the Government with so little credit was undoubtedly at the mercy of its antagonists during the last months of its tenure, while the Conservatives preparing to rule. The Radical members in Parliament were now in a difficult position, fearing that if the Opposition were in power and had their will in Egypt, they would take steps to annex the country. However, in the final stage of the Liberal Government, the Conservative leaders remained temperate as usual with respect to the critical matters of imperial policy. Gladstone had always felt gratitude to Northcote for his moderation in the House of Commons during the time of Egyptian difficulties.¹⁰⁵ In the other House, Granville faced a much greater challenge from Salisbury, the former Foreign Secretary. But, overall the Opposition had not been very demanding with the Government on Egyptian affairs, and there had not been many acute differences of opinion between the two sides in parliamentary debates.

In fact, the line separating the Egyptian policy of the Liberals and that of the Conservatives was not clear. The Gladstone Government frequently emphasized, especially in 1882, that the course they were taking in Egypt was the logical consequence of the policy of the former Conservative Government. This was to say the Conservative Party had to bear some responsibility for the British actions in the country since 1880. That was true, and recognised by many members of the Opposition. Although, inevitably, the Government was exposed to constant parliamentary attacks, most of them were carried out for party purposes, not in the light of political conviction. Likewise, considered from a party point of view, the omissions in the Egyptian papers which the Foreign Office had made were those to the disadvantage of the Government, but not necessarily to the disadvantage of the nation. Indeed, it was not easy to infer from British polity in Egypt which party was in

¹⁰³ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 294, 'Egypt and the Soudan – Vote of Censure – Resolution,' Lord Derby, 26 February 1885, p. 1380.

¹⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan Bill,' Lord Randolph Churchill, 16 April 1885, p. 1896.

¹⁰⁵ See Mr. Gladstone to A. E. West, 24 June 1882, quoted in *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. X, p. 287; and *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan Bill,' Mr. Gladstone, 16 April 1884, p. 1884.

power. Only after 1884 did the two parties clash on the question of Egypt and the Soudan, with several battles on the vote of censure. Party feeling and partisanship were carried much far on both sides. The condition was broken that foreign affairs should be taken out of the arena of party politics. On Egypt the Government was assailed not merely by the Conservatives, who were dissatisfied with the vacillations of British policy, but by the left wing of the Liberal Party, the Radicals, who demanded immediate withdrawal. (It was estimated that there were at least 35 Liberal members who were opposed to the original Egyptian adventure.¹⁰⁶) The Government's position in Parliament became very difficult as the pressure from the Opposition and the Liberal rebels built rapidly in the course of 1884. But, curious enough, thanks to party spirit, the Gladstone Government was able to survive a number of no-confidence votes, because the Radicals had the least desire to put the Conservative Party in office. After expressing without reserve their dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Government, the Liberal defectors, who did not want to join the Conservatives, usually declined to record their votes or to support the Opposition. What they intended was to pass censure upon the ministers without precipitating a change of government or a dissolution of Parliament. Despite losses at by-elections over the years, the predominance won in 1880 by the Liberal Party in the House of Commons (a majority of more than a hundred over the Tories) was still unchallenged and incontestable. The steady supporters of the Government – Liberals of all shades – numbered no less than 360 out of the 650 members in the House of Commons at the start of 1885.

The bitter failure of the Gordon expedition led to further defections from the Liberal Party: some prominent Liberals joined the attack on the Government's policy in Egypt. The dissension in the Cabinet grew also. Absurd or not, the Conservative leaders had to be careful not to bring down the Government by their criticisms at this difficult time, because many felt that to take office under the existing circumstances would be 'an act of patriotic self-sacrifice.'¹⁰⁷ The time was not good for a new government, and they were afraid of being suspected of profiting from national disaster. But many Conservative members did not share this opinion: a great deal of dissatisfaction was exhibited with the 'mild' language Northcote had used in his motion censuring the Government. Radical and independent members, on the other hand, accused the Opposition of a sin of omission for their approval to all the measures the Government had taken in Egypt. In regard to Egypt, the moderate Liberals were truly nearer in feeling to the Conservatives than to the Radicals. But for party purposes they certainly would not vote in favour of the Opposition. As for the Radicals, they were deeply distrustful of Salisbury's foreign policy. At last, the Government was saved, perhaps not to the Opposition leaders' disappointment, by party considerations and party ties.

After the crucial divisions at the end of February the Conservative Party

¹⁰⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 285, 'Egypt (Eastern Soudan),' Mr. Joseph Cowen, 15 March 1884, p. 1685.

¹⁰⁷ Mr. David Plunket (Lord Rathmore) to Lord Cranbrook, 28 February 1885, quoted in A. E. Gathorne-Hardy ed., *Gathorne Hardy First Earl of Cranbrook: A Memoir* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1910), vol. II, p. 208. Also cf. Sir Michael Hicks Beach to Lord Randolph Churchill, 10 January 1885, quoted in Victoria Hicks Beach, *Life of Sir Michael Hicks Beach* (London: Macmillan, 1932), vol. I, p. 227.

continued to support the action of the Government in Egypt. It was said that the Government was able to secure a majority for any measure they might bring forward, even if it did not represent the views of most Liberals. It was true and well understood. The construction of the Suakin-Berber Railway was stepped up in March with the Opposition's countenance. And the Egyptian Loan Bill met with the approval of independent Liberal members who had a stronger dislike for Conservative rule than for Gladstone's new proposal. 'It was now not uncommon for supporters of the Government to bring forward strong arguments against the policy of the Government, and yet announce their intention of voting for the Government,' a member in the Commons observed.¹⁰⁸ Whether the Liberal Party was divided was a question confusing all. And many began to believe, from the votes recorded on Egyptian affairs, that it was the House of Lords, where political organizations occupied a far less influential place than in the Commons, that truly represented public opinion and the mature judgement of the country.

With a great majority in the House of Commons, the Government was seldom defeated in the divisions on Egypt throughout Gladstone's second ministry. But the change in the votes registered indicated a continuous loss of the Government's strength in Parliament and a decline in its popularity in the country, which culminated in the fall of the Liberal Government in June 1885 despite its praiseworthy achievement in extending the franchise just a year ago. In 1882 only one abortive motion for censure was raised by an independent member in the Commons more than one month after the bombardment of Alexandria. And his words were generally temperate.¹⁰⁹ The next vote of censure on Egypt was carried out in February 1883 in a small house of 323 (from which the Prime Minister was absent), with a majority for the Opposition of 35. The division deeply disappointed Granville, but it actually did not signify at home. The Conservatives simply grasped the opportunity to lodge their complaint that the Government had not tried every possible means before they went to war. The real test for the Government came in 1884. On 12 February, in the shadow of two military catastrophes in the Soudan, a motion condemning the vacillation and inconsistency of the Government's policy in Egypt was put forward in the two Houses respectively. In the Lower House, it was, after five night's debate, rejected by a majority of 49 (262:311); in the Lords it was adopted by a majority of 100 (181:81). Though technically defeated, the Opposition scored a moral victory over the Liberals, who had been supposed to win by around 100 votes in the Commons. However, the Opposition had not intended to change the course of British policy by the motion, as their attacks were aimed not at the recent decision on the evacuation of the Soudan, to which they consented as a rule, but at the Government's past transactions. The vote was possibly a discredit to the Government, but no more. In fact the government had been able to assure themselves of the 'good working majority' before the division.

¹⁰⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan,' Mr. Marriott, 27 March 1885, p. 902.

¹⁰⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 273, 'Egypt (Political Affairs) – Policy of her Majesty's Government, Mr. E. Ashmead-Bartlett, 15 August 1882, p. 1875. He moved that 'This House condemns Her Majesty's Government for their neglect and mistakes which have bright about the War in Egypt, and especially for the Bombardment of Alexandria without a landing force sufficient to save life and property, and considers that the Foreign Policy of the Government has alienated the Allies, and weakened the influence and power of the country.'

After the vote of censure in February 1884, there had been a series of motions for adjournment and special resolutions, although the state of affairs in Egypt had not changed materially since then. Made as a demonstration of popular feeling, these motions often corresponded with the publication of some excited articles on Egypt in the press. Vote of censure increased in an unprecedented frequency – about once in three weeks. The ministers' complaint of parliamentary action grew sharply. On 13 May the Government beat the Conservatives in the division upon Sir Michael Hicks-Beach's motion, which attacked British policy in the Gordon mission, by just 28 votes (275:303). The moral defeat, which the Government had suffered on the question of confidence in the House of Commons dominated by the Liberal Party, was spoken of as the beginning of the end. As soon as the London conference on Egyptian finance (28 June-2 August) opened, the Opposition in both Houses proposed a motion of censure on the preliminary agreement between the Governments of Britain and France. In the Lords the motion went beyond criticizing the convention and gave bold utterance to the public's feeling about the British occupation of Egypt. It points out: 'The terms of the agreement...will fail to produce results adequately corresponding to the sacrifices which England has made and may be called upon to make in that country.'¹¹⁰ In such circumstances it was not surprising that the Government was given a large majority (174:14) in early August on the vote of confidence, which enabled the expedition for the relief of General Gordon at Khartoum.

The passage of the Reform Bill of 1884 released the Liberal members from the influences that had made them vote against their conviction on Egypt. The bonds of allegiance among the Whigs to their Government was loosed, as their desire to keep Gladstone in power until the franchise controversy ended had already been realized. And Gordon's death made the Government's case too weak to defend. Granville in the House of Lords could hardly fight. The motion of Salisbury (26 February 1885) was couched in strong language condemning the mistakes of the Government; and he warned against the policy of abandoning the whole of the Soudan after the conclusion of military operations. Salisbury did not criticize the conduct of the campaign, but the policy of the British Government. The discussion took place under very unusual circumstances. The emptiness on the ministerial benches and the silence of Government supporters were remarkable. Scarcely any peers but those who were members of the Government attempted to make a response. The debate ended in a large majority for the Opposition (189:68).

On the other hand, Northcote put forward his motion – much milder than the one in the other House – on 23 February, followed by three other amendments. His motion, described by *The Times* as a 'disappointing' one,¹¹¹ was general and loose, and he left some of the most important points untouched in his opening debate. This might be due to the fact that Northcote had tabled his motion a few days before further Egyptian papers were released and the statements of the Foreign Secretary were made. Anyway, if the resolution in the Commons was carried, it would be impossible for the government to hold the office. So in meaning and scope the difference between the

¹¹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 289, 'Egypt (Terms of the Agreement with France) – The Vote of Censure,' Earl of Carnarvon, 1 July 1884, pp. 1770-71.

¹¹¹ *The Times*, 24 February 1885, p. 9.

motion of Northcote and that of Salisbury was little. For reasons mentioned above, however, the division in the House of Commons was another victory for the Government; and the three amendments were rejected at the same time. Yet the Government won only in numerical sense: its majority dropped drastically to 14 (288:302). The outcome could not be regarded as expressing confidence in the Government. Most of the speeches in defence of the Government in the debate were feeble and wanting in unanimity. The more independent members of the Liberal Party seemed to have shifted from idle abstention to active opposition. It was considered that after the damaging division a number of Radicals would soon defect to the Opposition and the Gladstone Government could last only some more months before the next general election on the extended franchise was due.

British foreign policy henceforth had to be strengthened, and conducted along the Conservative line. A vote of credit was brought forward on 21 April to cover the extraordinary expenses incurred by the British in the Soudan and Afghanistan, where the situation was getting difficult. The sum proposed was not less than 11 millions sterling, the largest ever raised for military purpose. And the House of Commons passed the vote a week later ‘without a dissentient voice and amid enthusiastic cheering;’¹¹² even the Radical members raised no voice of challenge. The passage of this vote of credit implied, ironically, that the Liberal Party was greatly demoralized. What was amazing was that the Liberal Government should step down in just one and a half months.

VI. Conclusion: Parliamentarism and Imperialism

Before Gladstone came into office in 1880, complaints were frequently made by the Liberal Party that the Disraeli Government (1874-80) did not take Parliament into their confidence on questions of foreign affairs. Complaints were renewed, no less often, by the Conservatives about the same thing after the Liberal Party was in power. From the beginning of the Egyptian crisis, the Gladstone Government obviously endeavoured, in their constitutional power, to keep Parliament off the subject. They requested the Houses to refrain from discussing foreign policy, and withheld information about Egypt. Declarations were made on occasion to Parliament out of strategic consideration – to make known to the outside audience (particularly the Powers, Turks and Egyptians) British position on certain issues. Official statements did little to diminish popular doubts and anxiety that prevailed in regard to Egypt. The attitude of the Government was ‘to act in accordance with *what they believed to be* the deliberate views of Parliament and the country.’¹¹³ There was, in Gladstone’s opinion, no need for them to publicize their policy or to learn public opinion through parliamentary discussions, because, in this case, they believed that their views on Egypt were not at variance with the opinion prevailing in the country, and that they knew perfectly well what the general sense of Parliament was. Silenced by the Prime

¹¹² *The Times*, 28 April 1885, p. 9.

¹¹³ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 269, ‘Egypt (Political Affairs) – The Existing Crisis – Observation,’ Mr. Gladstone, 26 May 1882, p. 1716.

Minister's assurance and obstructed in the debates inside the walls of the Houses, the Opposition took to extra-parliamentary action for demonstrating their feelings.

The Government took all the important measures in connection with the occupation of Egypt without consulting Parliament beforehand or giving explanations of policy afterwards. The intervention of the Queen, who intervened to prevent Parliament and public opinion from intervening, made the Government more self-reliant in respect of Egyptian affairs. For example, Gladstone was disposed to withdraw the British force from Egypt in a few months of the occupation, in consideration of financial question and Parliament's pressure. But that was not practical. And then, in October 1883, the Cabinet decided to evacuate Cairo and reduce the garrison to 3,000. When informed of the decision, Queen Victoria instructed her Prime Minister that she approved of it on condition that the British troops remained indefinitely in the country and no promise of definite withdrawal or further reduction was made in Parliament.¹¹⁴ Gladstone agreed not to make any declaration in the Houses, and the Government's Egyptian policy remained largely undefined.

From 1884 the Government began gradually to comply with parliamentary commands on the matter of Egypt, in order to justify and draw support from the public for their Soudanese policy in a difficult time. The Government became more willing than before to release information, state their policy, discuss the issue, and, more importantly, follow public opinion on Egypt. The Government's sincerity in recognizing their duties and obligations to Parliament was emphasized from time to time, particularly when foreign negotiation was entered into. A great deal of time was devoted to debate on the Egyptian question, and parliamentary manoeuvre on both sides was active. 'The instructions and the actions of Her Majesty's Government will be conformable to their views and intentions, subject to the *correction* of Parliament,' the Prime Minister declared in a debate on British policy in the Soudan in February 1884.¹¹⁵ Gladstone's phraseology in this speech indicated a new relationship developing between the executive government and Parliament in respect to foreign policy. The frequency of parliamentary debate on Egypt increased to an extent unseen before in any case of foreign affairs. And unlike the usual practice, questions on foreign affairs were often asked without notice in advance to the ministers. Of all the various classes of questions the most difficult were those concerning the relations between Parliament and the Government in time of war. So intensive was the examination of the Opposition on the Government's course of policy in the Soudan campaigns that the Prime Minister retorted that it was impossible for the House of Commons to conduct a war. Nevertheless, the Government was now prepared to try to take counsel with Parliament.

On the eve of the London conference in mid-1884 Gladstone took an unusual course for earning national confidence in his Egyptian scheme. He declared that if the Government failed to meet the judgement of the Houses on the matter, they would resign.¹¹⁶ In spite of his ardent desire to reach a compromise with France, the Prime

¹¹⁴ Queen Victoria to Mr. Gladstone, 27 October 1883, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, pp. 449-50.

¹¹⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 284, 'Egypt (Events in the Soudan),' Mr. Gladstone, 11 February 1884, p. 445.

¹¹⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 289, 'Egypt – The Proposed Conference,' Mr. Gladstone, 23 June 1884, p.

Minister insisted on the subsequent approval of the British Parliament as a *sine qua non* for the international agreement to be effective. This was a proof either of the Government's desire to define their Egyptian policy along parliamentary line, or of the strength and intensity of the popular feeling about the convention, or both. The despatch of General Gordon was just another proof of its kind. After the fall of Khartoum many critics imputed the faulty decisions of the Government on the Soudan to popular politics as well as parliamentarism. In the debate on the motion of censure several members pointed out that as the Government did not have a determined and consistent policy, they vacillated according as parliamentary exigences required. 'At the present [the] Government seem to act entirely according to the dictates of Parliament irrespective of any settled policy,' Queen Victoria said at the end of Gladstone's ministry.¹¹⁷ She then tried to postpone the Government's programme of evacuating the Soudan by means of parliamentary influence. This, however, did not mean that Parliament had seized effective control over foreign policy, but that the Government was resigned to the demand for accommodating foreign policy to parliamentary democracy.

In the process of democratization, the Foreign Office was inevitably drawn into mass politics, and foreign policy parliamentarized. In the early 1880s the Egyptian question was to a certain degree involved in two domestic affairs: the Irish Home Rule and the Reform Bill, both of which attracted much of Gladstone's attention. It was probable that British action in Egypt was checked and weakened by Ireland. The Home Rulers, numbered about 60 in the House of Commons, were sympathizers for Egyptian nationalists, and tended to vote against the Government on Egypt. They produced an impression abroad very unfavourable to the British Government. The Irish members were especially in support of the cause of the Mahdi, who led the Soudanese people struggling for independence from the Lower Nile regime. Therefore their votes were a factor the Government could not count on in the divisions on the Soudan. In a broad sense, the Irish politicians identified themselves with the Egyptian people, who were attempting to free themselves from the British. Intertwined with foreign issues, the Irish question became very complicated. And English patriots were provoked by Irish nationalists into assuming a jingoistic attitude towards Egypt and regarding the Home Rule call with antagonistic indifference.

The Egyptian crisis caused a series derangement of the plans laid down by the Government for domestic reforms. Until the interest of the English public in Egyptian affairs waned at the end of 1882, the matters of important internal policy had not much chance of being dealt with in a decisive manner. The Egyptian business in Parliament affected the passage of the Reform Bill of 1884 in different ways, and *vice versa*. When the question of the Soudan absorbed the Houses and the Government was discredited by the strengthening of the Mahdi's force at the cost of the Anglo-

1114. See also 'Memorandum on Egypt' by Sir William Harcourt, 16 November 1884, quoted in A. G. Gardiner, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 604.

¹¹⁷ Queen Victoria to Marquis of Hartington, 15 May 1885, in *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2nd S., vol. III, p. 645. Reflecting on the Government's policy in Egypt, sir Michael Hicks-Beach said in 1885: 'I have often thought during the past three years that the Government have attempted to hold power in Egypt and avoid responsibility. They now seem to be aiming at responsibility without power.' *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 296, 'Egyptian Loan,' Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, 27 March 1885, p. 859.

Egyptian bases, Gladstone and many Liberals started to worry that the Reform Bill might be strangled, not by the Lords, but by Egypt. The incrimination that the Conservative members tried to make use of foreign questions for frustrating Liberal legislation was unfounded. As a matter of fact, the interest of the public in domestic affairs and in the progress of the bill had been greatly overshadowed by the British operations in the Soudan and the increasing dangers to the British position in Egypt. Anyway, debates on Egypt had effectively interposed to obstruct public business in Parliament; and some members suggested that discussion on the bill should be suspended. Regarding achievement in extending the franchise as the chief compensation for their failures in Egypt, the Government pressed on with the Franchise Bill, and delayed Egyptian resolutions. By the end of June the bill received its third reading without a division. While charges were (and are) made occasionally that governments endeavoured to divert popular attention from their errors in internal administration by undertaking vigorous foreign policy, the Gladstone Government was accused, even by Liberal members themselves, of adopting the opposite course.¹¹⁸ (The new electors created by the Reform Act – the working classes – were believed to be comparatively indifferent to British imperial enterprises, and pro-Liberal in character.) The Radical supporters of the bill even cried out: ‘Perish, Egypt! Perish, Gordon! Nothing must imperil the franchise!’¹¹⁹ However, as has been mentioned above, members in favour of the bill generally voted with the Government in the divisions on Egypt due to distrust of the Conservative Party’s attitude towards extended suffrage. This helped the Government to sustain until it was doomed as soon as the news of Gordon’s death reached London in January 1885.

Although the general election of 1880 took place with foreign policy at the centre of party controversy, the first years of the Gladstone Government were happily free of parliamentary dispute over foreign affairs. The subject then occupied a small place in the press or party warfare. From the summer of 1882, however, public attention was attracted suddenly to the critical situation in Alexandria. Parliamentary struggle over foreign affairs (Egypt) started again, and raged until the Government was beaten (morally) and resigned in mid-1885 (though Gladstone still commanded a majority in the House of Commons). Over the years the way in which the British Government managed its foreign affairs had undergone a transformation in accordance with the advance of popular politics, which all the countries in Western Europe saw in the late nineteenth century. The active interference of the Conservative Opposition in the action of the Gladstone Government in Egypt was based on the thought that Liberals or democrats would never succeed in being imperial. Sir Stafford Northcote, for example, said that if the Liberals were in power for twenty years, ‘at the end of that period there [would] be very little of the British Empire left for them to govern.’¹²⁰ Ironically, as the Conservatives could exercise influence on the

¹¹⁸ For further discussion see *Quarterly Review*, vol. 157, no. 314, ‘The Policy of the Government and the Opposition’ (April 1884), pp. 559-60. Lord Salisbury doubted, in a cynical sense, that the Government might expect a defeat on the Franchise Bill in the House of Lords first – hence the dissolution, so as to escape dissolving on Egyptian affairs. See British Library (BL), the Balfour Papers, Add MS 49688, Lord Salisbury to A. J. Balfour, 15 June 1885.

¹¹⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd S., vol. 294, ‘Egypt and the Soudan,’ Sir Frederick Milner, 26 February 1885, p. 1465.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Andrew Lang, *Life, Letters and Diaries of Sir Stafford Northcote First Earl of Iddesleigh*

Liberal Government's policy in Egypt only through Parliament or the press, local and national, they helped to promote the element of democracy in diplomacy. As a rule, the method worked: foreign policy with popular will behind it tended to be adventurous. But it could be blind and offensive as well, devoid of the spirit of self-restraint that underlay the international politics in the age of aristocracy. It was no wonder that after Lord Salisbury succeeded Gladstone as premier and foreign secretary, he tried as much as he could to keep foreign affairs out of the reach of non-professionals, though the aristocratic monopoly of foreign policy had passed for ever, if not for good.