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The Stress of Her Disregard: Britannia's Suez Fiasco in Consideration of Anglo-American Diplomacy

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THE STRESS OF HER DISREGARD: BRITANNIA'S SUEZ FISCO IN CONSIDERATION OF
ANGLO-AMERICAN DIPLOMACY

By


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The Stress of Her Disregard: Britannia's Suez Fiasco in Consideration of Anglo-
American Diplomacy

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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To Dr. Iva Marie Thompson
For inspiration comes from the most unlikely of places

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ABSTRACT

The Suez Crisis of 1956 was an unmitigated disaster for the United Kingdom. For the vast majority of historians, it marks the effective downfall of the British Empire. In reviewing the series of events preceding and throughout the crisis, it becomes evident that the reason for the failure of the Suez expedition rests not on actions taken in Cairo or Moscow, but in Washington. The efforts of Dwight Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles to stymie Anthony Eden from achieving his goals during the affair are the key factors to the ruination of British efforts towards removing Gamal Abdel Nasser from power and reversing his nationalization of the Suez Canal. By examining the Suez Crisis, much light is shed on the true nature of Anglo-American diplomacy during the early Cold War period; tense questions arise about the reality of the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain. However, one fact remains certain, in the desert sands of the Sinai Peninsula during November 1956, Britannia lost her Empire and America asserted its dominance.

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CHAPTER I

A HEAVY PRICE FOR A DITCH

“The Suez Crisis was a Greek tragedy, entirely of American making from start to finish.”¹

Sir William Jackson, British general and historian

“Suez had many losers, and two clear victors – President Nasser and the Americans.”²

Mohamed Heikal, Egyptian journalist and advisor to Gamal Abdel Nasser

By 1956, the mandarins at the helm of an ever-shrinking empire viewed Egypt as a lost world. Colored red on maps of British possessions around the globe since the nineteenth century, this former protectorate of the crown was red no longer. Although with the overthrow of its pro-British king in 1952, Egypt had technically broken free from the sphere of influence of its former colonial overseer, lingering effects of empire remained; under the auspices of the Anglo–Egyptian Agreement of 1954 the United Kingdom’s presence persisted. However, its light dimmed with the shadows cast by over 80,000 British servicemen departing Egyptian soil. This impressive army once occupied a base located on the Sinai Peninsula, near the Suez Canal at Ismailia. Called “the greatest overseas military installation the world has ever known,” the base at Ismailia by early summer 1956 was manned by only a single battalion.³ This final squad had the distinct, but dubious, honor of being the last armed men to step foot from this former bastion of imperial power. Their selection for this duty was not left to chance. The regiment of grenadier guards was the direct descendent of the first battalion to land at

¹ William Jackson, *Withdrawal from Empire: A Military View* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 145.

² Mohamed H. Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (New York: Arbor House, 1987), 201.

³ Osgood Caruthers, "British Quietly Give Suez Base to Egypt After 74-Year Stay." *New York Times*, June 14, 1956. 1; Arthur Veysey, "Last of British Army in Egypt Leaves Quietly," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 1956, 2

Port Said during the Anglo-Egyptian War.⁴ In 1882, these soldiers helped to secure Egyptian obedience to the British Empire; now over seventy years later their posterities participated in its eradication. There was no pomp or pageantry to mark the occasion of these last remnants of British authority leaving this ancient land; they quietly stole away in the middle of the night. By dawn of June 13, 1956, it was highly debatable if Britannia still ruled the waves, but no longer a question that she had surrendered the ocean of desert sands covering the pharaohs' former dominion.⁵ However, if the hopes of men occupying power in the corridors of White Hall were realized, not for long.⁶

One Gamal Abdel Nasser held very different hopes. Born into a working-class family during the waning months of World War I, Nasser joined the army at the age of nineteen.⁷ Rising quickly up the ranks in the Egyptian military, Nasser, in view of his contemporaries, was a man on the move. Sixteen years later, at age 36, he became the de facto leader of his nation.⁸ For Nasser, it was only the start. By 1956, the young Egyptian president had become a constant thorn in the side of British interests throughout the Middle East. Since seizing power, Nasser sought to engender and export the spirits of anti-colonialism and pan-Arabism across the region. By rejecting Western defense treaties, destabilizing pro-British regimes, and inflaming Arab masses, it was working. But in the summer of that year he hit a snag. Starting in 1955, Nasser gambled much of his nation's prestige on the construction of the Aswan Dam. Through this massive infrastructure project, he hoped to display the growing power of Egypt under his

⁴ Arthur Veysey, "Last of British Army in Egypt Leaves Quietly," *Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 1956, 2.

⁵ Osgood Caruthers, "British Quietly Give Suez Base to Egypt After 74-Year Stay," *New York Times*, June 14, 1956, 1.

⁶ Remembering the initial phase of the Suez Crisis, prominent Conservative MP, Julian Amery, states, "Plainly the great issue has arisen. I thought that withdrawal from the Canal Zone had been potentially fatal to the unity of the Commonwealth. Was there not any opportunity to retrieve it? I was convinced there was. And if we pressed an attack against Egypt, political if possible but military if necessary, we could recover the ground that had been lost." Quoted in *Channel Four, End of Empire: Egypt* (1985).

⁷ Chester L. Cooper, *The Lion's Last Roar: Suez, 1956* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 54.

⁸ Said K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 55.

nationalist reign.⁹ To fund this expensive endeavor significant sources of foreign investment were required. Eager to gain Nasser as an ally against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States pledged to underwrite a hefty amount of the dam's cost. However, when Nasser sought to garner Soviet financial aid as well, the American government abruptly rescinded their offer.¹⁰ Left in a lurch, with the entire world watching, Nasser contemplated his next move. On July 22, 1956, three days after the American action, a close friend of Nasser proposed gaining increased revenue for the Aswan Dam by renegotiating the fees of the usage of the Suez Canal with the British foreign minister.¹¹ Nasser's confidant argued that the British government might be convinced to up Egypt's share of the canal's revenue to 50 percent. Nasser, never one to dream small, responded, "Why fifty-fifty, why not a hundred percent? Why is [that] too much?"¹² The advisor did not have a response, but Anthony Eden certainly did.

With the advent of the 1950s, the euphoria of victory over Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany had effectively worn off in the United States. To the vast majority of Americans, the specter of a totalitarian menace still endangered the entire world. The threat of international communism, embodied by the U.S.S.R, became an overriding factor affecting both the external diplomacy and domestic politics of the nation. Locked into an increasingly complex global chess match with the Soviet Union, the foreign policy of the U.S. began to deviate more and more from those of its traditional allies of Britain and France. Efficiently preventing the spread of communism became the litmus test of all American actions abroad. In regards to Anglo-American relations, the key point of contention was not the succinct goal but the rudimentary means. Britain, founded as an imperial power, viewed the continuation of her Empire -- albeit in a more benign and informal arrangement -- as an effective rampart against the spread of communist expansion. In turn, the Americans saw it only as an antiquated albatross that actually increased the appeal of Marxist-Leninist ideology throughout the third world.

⁹ William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy toward Egypt, 1955-1981* (Albany: State University of New York, 1985), 40.

¹⁰ Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 47.

¹¹ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, xiv.

¹² Ibid.

The U.S. policymakers believed a third-way of nationalism (opposed to the binary choice of colonialism or communism) constituted the effective means of successfully halting Soviet influence around the globe. In late 1955, these conflicting British and American ideas, gestating under the surface since the beginning of the Cold War, came to a head when the U.S. formally declined to join the Bagdad Pact.¹³ Officially known as the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) and nominally led by Great Britain, the Pact was a collective security alliance formed to deter Soviet expansion into the near east. The Eisenhower administration initially supported its proposed formation enthusiastically.¹⁴ However, the U.S. soon soured on the idea after many in the Arab world began claiming that METO was only a cover for the continuation of Western imperial rule over its regional member nations. METO's fiercest critic was none other than Gamal Abdel Nasser.¹⁵ Fearful of offending Nasser and escalating anti-American sentiment in the region, the U.S., to the chagrin of its faithful British ally, refused to join the organization it had until recently actively promoted. By the dawning of 1956, this perfidy of American support toward the U.K. still perplexed British leaders, although it really should not have. The United States was neither pro-Britain nor pro-Egypt; it was solely first and foremost pro-America.¹⁶

For eight days in the fall of 1956, these forces -- British, American, and Egyptian interests -- battled it out upon the public stage of international affairs with the rest of the world watching. Although other nations were caught up in the conflict, the stakes stood highest for these three. Egypt faced a return to de facto colonial rule, America the loss of goodwill in the developing world, and Great Britain the final demise of its empire. When the smoke settled over the battlefields and the sound and fury ceased on the diplomatic scenes, the victors and vanquished were apparent to all. In this transnational high-stakes poker game over the Suez Canal, Britannia came out flushed. Her luck was up and the chips were gone.

¹³ Cole C. Kingseed, *Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 31.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Yaqub, 38.

¹⁶ John Charmley, *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship, 1940-57* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 269.

After 1956, Suez symbolized more to the British citizenry than a location in Egypt. In that year, it ignominiously fell into the category of words for localities that signified much, much more. For the British people this was not a new concept. Throughout the early twentieth century, many others had been added to the lexicon of their collective conscious. The Somme, Gallipoli, Munich, Dunkirk, and Yalta all come to mind. The mere mention of these points on a map engender images and concepts -- some virtuous, others shameful -- that leave little doubt that during a specific point of time the course of history had been redirected there, for good or ill. In 1956, Suez became such a place. One can find a fitting example of this transformation in the James Clavell novel *Noble House* (1981). Set in the colony of Hong Kong during the 1960s, Clavell's work focuses on a British expatriate attempting to fend off a hostile takeover of his investment bank by an American. One character mentions "Suez" to a colleague and receives a visceral reaction. "Oh! You mean the 1956 fiasco when Eisenhower betrayed us and caused the failure of the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt -- because Nasser had nationalized the canal?"¹⁷ Although the conversation is pure fiction, the sentiment, held in various forms on both sides of the Atlantic, and the accuracy of the facts are not far off the mark.¹⁸ While to term the refusal of Dwight Eisenhower to commit the United States into supporting the Suez expedition as a "betrayal" of the United Kingdom can be chalked up as hyperbolic rhetoric, the endeavor's success nevertheless did hinge on that critical decision. For ultimately the fate of Anthony Eden's gambit would not be won or lost by bullets, tanks, and planes in the Egyptian desert but rested on world opinion, global financial markets, and geopolitics. On these asymmetrical fields of battle, Eden

¹⁷ James Clavell, *Noble House* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1981), 191.

¹⁸ Eisenhower's own vice-president even became convinced this was true. Writing in his memoirs Richard Nixon states: "Eisenhower and Dulles put heavy public pressure on Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw their forces from Suez. In retrospect I believe that our actions were a serious mistake. Nasser became even more rash and aggressive than before, and the seeds of another Mideast war were planted. The most tragic result was that Britain and France were so humiliated and discouraged by the Suez crisis that they lost the will to play a major role on the world scene. From this time forward the United States would by necessity be forced to 'go it alone' in the foreign policy leadership of the free world." Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 179.

needed United States support. It was essential, yet did not materialize. Thus, the breakdown of Anglo-American diplomacy during the Suez Crisis resulted in the failure of the British government to achieve its primary aims of removing Egyptian President Nasser from power and reversing his nationalization of the Suez Canal.

It should have been evident that American consent was essential for any intervention into Egypt by Great Britain and her allies to succeed. Yet during the days and months leading up to the action, the United States consistently expressed its disapproval of a military solution for the Suez crisis. However, the British disregarded these strident messages from the Eisenhower administration and instead chose to collude with France and Israel in ridding themselves of their collective nemesis -- Nasser. Shortly after this tacit agreement, on October 29, Israeli shock troops poured over the Egyptian border igniting the conflict.¹⁹ Two days later Britain joined the fray with RAF pilots raining fire down upon parts of Cairo.²⁰ By the end of the first week of November, British and French forces had already partially seized control of the Suez Canal, while Israeli tanks raced across the Sinai Peninsula chasing remnants of the routed Egyptian army. As military operations went, the joint British-French-Israeli assault could not have gone better.²¹ Resistance was minimal, timetables met, and casualties light; in the fog of war little more could be asked. However, on November 6, without consulting either her French or Israeli allies, Britannia folded. Or, more specifically, Anthony Eden declared a cease-fire to hostilities that would commence at midnight.²² An observer could question why, so close to victory but without any of its true objectives accomplished, the British government called it quits. Although it was a bitter pill to swallow, the reason was obvious. The next day Eden conceded the cruel truth: "It is clear we cannot now carry

¹⁹ Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), 273.

²⁰ Geoffrey Carter, *Crises Do Happen: The Royal Navy and Operation Musketeer, Suez 1956* (Lodge Hill, United Kingdom: Maritime, 2006), 27.

²¹ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: Abacus History, 2012), 313.

²² Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956: A Personal Account* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), 211.

this through alone with the French. We must now get U.S. support.”²³ Prior to this mea culpa realization by the U.K. prime minister, the Americans made it abundantly apparent that this “help” for its faithful ally would come at a steep price. And if the British needed some reminding, the Eisenhower administration gave them some less than subtle hints. As the crisis unfolded the United States denounced Britain in the United Nations as an aggressor, harassed and threatened its naval forces, and most importantly withheld crucial financial support as the U.K teetered on the economic brink.²⁴ The American price, in not so many words, was quite simple: the end of British intervention in Egypt. In keeping with their famous stiff-upper-lip forbearance, the Brits paid in full.

The repercussions of Suez were numerous and significant; they reverberated like earthquakes across the world. Future events, like aftershocks, were shaped and molded by its occurrence. Foremost of these was the ruin of Anthony Eden. First went his physical health, shortly after his political premiership. Although he had been plagued with bouts of illness since a botched gall-bladder operation in the early 1950s, during the duration of the crisis Eden’s wellbeing dramatically declined to such an extent that he was confined to bed by mid-November. By early January 1957, in what many consider an American-supported palace coup orchestrated by members of his own party, he resigned as prime minister.²⁵ Eden always defended his actions during Suez, stating

²³ Scott W. Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US, and the Suez Crisis* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 295; Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis: Reluctant Gamble* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 162.

²⁴ In regards to American financial pressure on Britain during the crisis, some historians hold a much more Machiavellian view of Eisenhower’s role. David Watry argues: “During the Suez Crisis, Eisenhower secretly declared an all-out economic war against Great Britain. He initiated a highly successful speculative financial attack on the value of sterling, which threatened to completely destabilize the British monetary system and economy. Herbert Hoover Jr., an expert at international finance, recommended the very arcane and elaborate strategy of the Federal Reserve quickly dumping their sterling holdings at basement prices, launching an attack on Britain’s currency. Eisenhower played political and economic hardball to compel the British to withdraw from Suez.” David M. Watry, *Diplomacy at the Brink: Eisenhower, Churchill, and Eden in the Cold War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2014), 138.

²⁵ On American involvement, reporter Donald Neff writes, “Though the messages on the secret negotiations between Aldrich and the leadership of the Tory Party remain classified by the government. Transcripts of Eisenhower’s telephone conversations make

shortly after the crisis that he was “convinced, more convinced that I have been about anything in my public life, that we were right, my colleagues and I, in the judgments and decisions we took, and that history will prove it so.”²⁶ He never wavered from this declaration. However, as acclaimed historian Peter Hennessy succinctly puts it, “History has let Eden down.”²⁷ In modern times Sir Anthony Eden is consistently regarded by both the British general public and academics as one of the “worst” prime ministers of the twentieth century.²⁸ When reasons are inevitably cited for this dubious ranking, the word Suez both dominates and encapsulates that particular list.

In contrasting fashion, Eden’s primary antagonist, Gamal Abdel Nasser, emerged from the crisis hailed as an Egyptian national hero and a champion against Western imperialism around the world. His armies beaten on the battlefield, his nation invaded, and his capital bombed, Nasser nevertheless “won” the war. Remaining as leader of Egypt until his death in 1970, he continued to plague his Suez adversaries throughout the Middle East during the 1960s. His initiatives included aiding insurgents against British influence in Aden (Oman) and French governance in Algeria, while once again engaging in open conflict with Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. During the remainder of his rule, Nasser made it a point to settle the accounts of 1956. Although despised by the leadership of the other Arab states, with the notable exception of Syria, Nasser remained beloved by their masses until his death. Today, even in the twenty-first century,

it clear that the Conservative leaders and the Eisenhower Administration now began a secret collusion of their own. Its purpose was to keep the Conservative government in power in Britain. It amounted to a highly unethical meddling in Britain’s domestic affairs by Eisenhower.” Donald Neff, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East* (New York: Linden/Simon and Schuster, 1981), 425.

²⁶ Anthony Eden, *The Suez Crisis of 1956* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 222.

²⁷ Peter Hennessy, *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Penguin, 2007), 406.

²⁸ Andrew Hough, “Gordon Brown 'Third Worst PM Since 1945', Poll of Historians Finds,” *The Telegraph*, August 3, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7923790/Gordon-Brown-third-worst-PM-since-1945-poll-of-historians-finds.html> (accessed August 18, 2015); “Thatcher and Attlee Top PM List,” *BBC News*, August 29, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/5294024.stm (accessed August 18, 2015); “Churchill 'greatest PM of 20th Century,’” *BBC News*, January 4, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/575219.stm (accessed August 18, 2015).

countless denizens of the Near East celebrate him as a vanquisher of colonialism, fighter of Zionism, and father of Pan Arabism; with much of this sustained admiration coming from reverence for his perceived 1956 victory. Myths, like perceptions, die -- if they ever truly do -- hard.

For America the spoils/consequences of Suez was its continued presence in Middle Eastern affairs. After the crisis, as the British lion stumbled off to lick its wounds, it fell to the United States to take up the mantle for Western interests in the region. This fomented a role that is yet to be relinquished. In the afterglow of the British humiliation over Egypt, goodwill toward the Eisenhower Administration abounded throughout the Arab world. Pro-American sentiment filled the streets, and praise reverberated toward the U.S. president who was exalted for his “principles” and his “noble attitude in support of right and justice.”²⁹ In no uncertain terms this euphoria came from only one specific exploit: the United States’ role in halting British and Israeli aims during Suez. For the applause turned out to be ephemeral; less than a year later things began to sour. Nine months after Suez, unrest in Syria brought threats of American intervention, then by 1958 over 10,000 U.S. soldiers waded into the morass of a chaotic Lebanese civil war.³⁰ By these actions -- and numerous more to follow -- many in the Arab world came to believe that the United States had simply replaced a waning Britannia as their would be colonial master; in coming years chants of “death to America” and burning “Old Glory” became ubiquitous on street corners dotting the Arab world.³¹ While Eisenhower’s actions at Suez, taking America into the heart of Middle Eastern concerns, are now over sixty years old, the repercussions of those decisions still linger.

²⁹ Yaqub, 65.

³⁰ Dana Adam Schmidt, "Eisenhower says Soviet Objective is to Rule Syria," *New York Times*, August 22, 1957, 1; W. H. Lawrence, "U.S. Reinforcements Arrive in Lebanon," *New York Times*, August 2, 1958, 1.

³¹ This interpretation of Arab fury over American foreign policy supports Edward Said’s arguments on the subject, laid out in his work *Orientalism* (1979), as opposed to the ones contended by his academic rival, Bernard Lewis, that are prominently featured in Lewis’ 1990 *Atlantic Monthly* article “Roots of Muslim Rage.” See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic*, September 1990, 17-26.

Many Anglophiles might find it as tempting now, as many Britons did in the late 1950s, to compartmentalize the failure of the Suez expedition into a personal one of Anthony Eden's own creation. The harsh truth is, although Eden's fate might perfectly personify the results of the crisis, Suez left an indelible black mark on Great Britain's reputation as a global force, which no amount of whitewashing ever removed. Two dominant, but competing, schools of thought in British history both interpret the failed 1956 invasion of Egypt as the death knell for the empire and a turning point of the nation.³² The first, as Dominic Sandbrook asserts, views this watershed moment as forming a signpost highlighting the declining fortunes of the country. "The symbolic importance of the crisis," he declares, "was that it marked a confrontation between the old ambitions of British imperialism and the new realities of post imperial retrenchment. Indeed, the Suez affair illustrated with striking clarity the decline of British imperial power."³³ He goes on to write, "It was not, as some people tend to imagine, a cause of that decline; rather, it was a reflection of Britain's changed role in the world, partly as a result of two ruinously expensive global wars."³⁴ He closes with, "In fact, British imperial power had been ebbing for decades. Suez simply demonstrated it, powerfully and incontrovertibly, to the entire world."³⁵ In essence, Sandbrook and other historians of this inclination maintain that Suez pulled back the curtain shrouding the British Empire thereby exposing its failing nature for all to see.

³² A third, but not widely-held reading of the post-World War II British Empire postulates Suez was merely a momentary hindrance towards the deliberate transformation of the United Kingdom's global influence from hard to soft power. This theory holds Suez was in large part simply a personal failure for Eden alone. As professor Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon explains: "From 1948 to the mid-1960s, the British government did not abandon its imperial mission. Rather it reshaped that mission to better facilitate the conditions of the postwar world. Correctly recognizing that the age of national self-determination and self-government was upon it, and cognizant of the bipolarity of the Cold War environment, the government evolved its strategy to preference the devolution of power to indigenous peoples over the autocratic practice of that power." Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain's Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 376.

³³ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It so Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2005), 27.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

The second theory holds that the crisis itself is, in fact, the catalyst that brought Britain as a world power to its knees. Although not an adherent of this model, Niall Ferguson makes the very real point that the fiasco at Suez “sent a signal to nationalists throughout the British Empire: the hour of freedom had struck. But the hour was chosen by the Americans, not by the nationalists.”³⁶ Sir William Jackson argues that before Suez, “Britain’s attempt to rebuild her post-war position in the world using the idiom of the Commonwealth rather than Empire seemed to be succeeding.”³⁷ He goes on to make clear that through failing to meet her objectives during Suez, Britannia had no choice but to, “abandon her attempt to regain superpower status in the post-war world and begin the final phases of her withdrawal from Empire.”³⁸ Finally, while these two schools of British historical thought might differ on the actual meaning of the Suez affair, both agree that its ultimate result upon the United Kingdom remains the same; namely, that the nation was left in a much weaker position in its foreign affairs -- and in the world at-large -- after the crisis than before it.

To comprehend clearly the American and British choices resulting in the Suez affair much groundwork is required. These fateful decisions, conceived not in a timeless vacuum, are the accumulation of a long and curious history of Anglo-American relations. By examining this connection, especially during the post-World War II era of the “special relationship,” the rationale directing the leadership in these nations, during the fall of 1956, starts to crystalize. While context does not fully explain the diplomatic breakdown between the two allies, it is essential in paving the way for a balanced explanation. This trip down memory lane illustrates that the rift between the U.S. and the U.K. over British objectives during Suez should not have come as much of a surprise as it did to the Conservative government of Anthony Eden.

Also required in fully grasping the failure of British policy during Suez is an understanding of what Eden sought to achieve through his thinly veiled invasion of Egypt. Here, again, significant context is required. Great Britain’s involvement in the

³⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 297.

³⁷ Jackson, 125.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

domestic affairs of Egypt antedated Suez by over eighty years. During this long and contentious association, violence dotted Anglo-Egyptian relations, sowing the rancorous seeds that eventually blossomed into open warfare between the two parties by 1956. Likewise, another key to understanding this turn of events is the personal relationship between Anthony Eden and Gamal Abdel Nasser. For their actions more than any others brought the crisis to fruition. By examining these two facets of the past, British goals during Suez, of removing Nasser from power and reclaiming the Suez Canal, become manifest.

Finally, the mere recounting of the Suez affair -- from Nasser's July 26 nationalization of the canal to the final withdrawal of British forces on December 22 -- demonstrates that the Eisenhower Administration sought a very different path to resolving the crisis than did the British government. And this disagreement between the United States and Britain over Suez is what wrought failure and humiliation upon Anthony Eden and his nation. Through the narrating of events over this six-month period, Eden's fateful choice to misread, mitigate, and ultimately disregard American objections to a military solution in response to Nasser's action becomes obvious. Although the time period is short, much transpired in these days and nights that made lasting history. Unpacking these events is simple, but not easy. However, no squabbles over definitions of words, no existential interpretations of occurrences, and no high drawn-out metaphysical search for hidden agency will be necessary here. Simply put this is a tale that requires no equivocation.

In 1855, Ferdinand de Lesseps traveled to London to meet with members of the British government. This French diplomat and visionary needed financial investors for an independent company to pursue his dream of transfiguring ocean travel. De Lesseps approached Lord Palmerston, then prime minister, with an audacious plan to carve out a canal from the desert sands covering the Sinai Peninsula.³⁹ When reviewing de Lesseps' proposal the British government declared that he was asking for "a heavy price for a

³⁹ Cooper, 15.

ditch.”⁴⁰ He went home empty handed, but future British leaders would rue this shortsighted mistake made by their predecessor. For after its completion, the incalculable benefit of the Suez Canal became apparent to all. Even to the most obstinate Englishman. In essence, this new waterway had made the world smaller. A little over a hundred years later, the name “Ferdinand de Lesseps” and the ownership of that “ditch” would again come to infuriate a British. On July 26 1956, during a radio address ostensibly decrying Western colonialism, Nasser repeated the Frenchman’s name over fourteen times.⁴¹ It was pointless overkill. The Egyptian troops, waiting for that specific code word, started storming the offices of the Anglo-Franco controlled Suez Company after its initial utterance. Thus began the Suez Crisis, which ultimately cost the British Empire more than it ever bargained for over that particular ditch. Ironically, this heavy price is due, in large part, to the actions of one of its former colonies and its closest allies – the United States.

⁴⁰ Terence Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 337.

⁴¹ Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (New ed. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 133.

CHAPTER II

GREEKS IN AN AGE OF ROMANS

“We have to maintain our position as an Empire and a Commonwealth. If we fail to do so we cannot exist as a world power.”⁴²

-Anthony Eden, 1942

“One thing we are sure we are *not* fighting for is to hold the British Empire together. We don’t like to put the matter so bluntly, but we don’t want you to have any illusions. If your strategists are planning a war to hold the British Empire together they will sooner or later find themselves strategizing alone.”⁴³

-From an open letter to the people of England by the editors of *Life* magazine, October 1942

As the old adage goes, when the chips are truly down, families -- even extended ones -- stick together. Such was the case upon the faraway waters of the Pei-ho River in China on June 25, 1859. During the Second Anglo-Chinese War, an attachment of Royal Navy gunboats assaulting the Taku Forts, which guarded the strategic tributary, literally found themselves in dire straits. Quickly pinned down by preternaturally accurate artillery fire from these Chinese fortifications, the ensnared forces suffered heavy casualties and faced utter annihilation.⁴⁴ In the midst of this chaos, a second barge of armed vessels wrecklessly entered the fray. These newly arrived gunboats of the United States Navy, commanded by Commodore Josiah Tattnall, began rescuing British sailors while also joining in their fight against the Chinese.⁴⁵ The episode marked the first time American and British troops fought, not as adversaries, but as brothers in arms. By disobeying strict orders to maintain U.S. neutrality, the Commodore became, on both sides of the Atlantic, an immediate folk hero for his perceived gallant action. He garnered even more acclaim with his response to superiors who demanded an explanation

⁴² Quoted in David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation* (London: Arnold, 1997), 282.

⁴³ Quoted in Ferguson, *Empire*, 292.

⁴⁴ Charles C. Jones, *The Life and Services of Commodore Josiah Tattnall* (Savannah: Morning News Steam Printing House, 1878), 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

for why he violated a direct command not to get involved in the conflict. Tattnall's simple justification has never left the English-language lexicon. He plainly wrote, "Blood is thicker than water."⁴⁶

During the tumultuous days of November 1956, Anthony Eden banked his nation's fortunes on the conviction that Dwight Eisenhower would make the same magnanimous decision that Commodore Tattnall did a century earlier. Casting aside all his anti-colonial sentiments, discounting the counsel of his Anglophobic advisors, and screwing his courage to the sticking place, the American president would ultimately do the "honorable" thing. Any cursory glance at the communal history of American and Britain relationships of the early 20th century could reasonably give one such hope. For is it not true that through the flames of two world wars and the emergence of a new colder one, they had always stood rigidly together? Steadfast in the defense of democracy, liberty, and decency, these international powers would support their English-speaking counterpart. However, this supposition of the British prime minister, also held by many others, was constructed on a false and romanticized narrative.

Suez stands as a testament to a harsh and fundamental truth: self-interest, not sentimental bonds of brotherhood, forge the fires that fuel international relations. Although noble and altruistic actions did and do occur between nations, they are sadly the exceptions to this axiom. The Anglo-American relationship, considered from the dawn of the twentieth century until 1955, holds fewer of these magnanimous allowances than a casual observer might reasonably expect. In fact, if past interactions by these two nations were indicative of future exchanges, the American obstruction of British aims during the Suez Crisis seems quite predictable. To say the least, from the perspective of Great Britain's policymakers in the waning months of 1956 -- notably one Anthony Eden -- it was anything but. As lessons go, it proved a harsh and unrelenting one. This necessary revisionist lesson of Anglo-American diplomacy, foreshadowing and contributing to decisions made at Suez, divides nicely into two unique chronicles. As with so many other attempts at periodization, here a war's bloody conclusion works suitably to separate

⁴⁶ Jones, 104; Maurice Melton, *The Best Station of Them All: The Savannah Squadron, 1861-1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 11.

the shepherding narratives. The first, 1890s until the end of World War II, lays the foundation of the myth Eden found so falsely reassuring; the second, from 1945 until Suez, exposes the widening cracks -- which British policymakers should have found evident -- between the two English-speaking allies that left Great Britain's national stature tumbling into a sinking abyss during November 1956.

Long before Winston Churchill ever uttered the term "Special Relationship" on a tiny college campus in the spring of 1946, there first came the Great Rapprochement. During much of the 19th century, the exploits of an American commodore on a river in China notwithstanding, dealings between the two Atlantic powers were fraught with tension. Marked by numerous international incidents since open hostilities formally ended with the cessation of the War of 1812, the former colony and its mother country stayed on shaky ground, diplomatically speaking. Through a succession of uneasy and taut engagements, this frosty relationship looked to spark into fiery conflict on more than one occasion. The most notable of these episodes were the Caroline Affair (1837), the grossly misnamed Aroostook War (1839), the Oregon Question (1848), the Trent Affair (1861), the Fenian Raids (1866 and 1871), and the Venezuelan Crisis (1895).⁴⁷ The list goes on; yet, these above-named crises stand out due to the fact war between the United States and Great Britain stood as a real, feasible, and at times likely outcome each. Laying general blame solely on one side for these potential *casus belli* is difficult. However, a number of historians make the case that an arriviste America could fit the bill as the provocateur in most cases.⁴⁸ By 1895, open combat would finally settle hostile

⁴⁷ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1964), 200, 208, 224, 330, 375, 439.

⁴⁸ Writing on this constant tension between Britain and the United States in the mid-1800s, George Bernstein asserts, "American governments, pandering to the democratic mob, provoked crises with Britain for domestic electoral purposes. They did this by encouraging acts of aggression or provocation by American citizens, and by threatening and bullying the British government, in order to get their own way on issues of contention." George L. Bernstein, "Special Relationship and Appeasement: Liberal Policy towards America in the Age of Palmerston," *Historical Journal*, Volume 41, Number, 3 (September, 1998), 725; Furthermore David Dumbleby and David Reynolds attest that later in the 19th century U.S. politicians of both parties also enjoyed "twisting the lion's tail" for political purposes. They argue during this time period "in the United States . . . relations with Britain was the main issue of foreign policy. It was as if

tensions between the two nations; although it was another aged empire, thankfully not Britain, which the American eagle furiously lashed its talons out at that brought about the accommodation.

One telling encounter during the Spanish-American War cannot roughly illustrate or explain fifty years of Anglo-American cooperation, but it is a good start. When the U.S. went to war with Spain in 1898, primarily over Cuba, European solidarity for the Spanish cause stood universal except in Albion.⁴⁹ Although technically neutral, Britannia made her pro-American sympathies perfectly clear: “within hours of the news that the United States had declared war thousands of red, white, and blue streamers decked buildings in London and the British press came out enthusiastically on the American side.”⁵⁰ Here, with the fervent flag waving by Englanders for their Atlantic cousins, many chroniclers attest the Great Rapprochement began; yet its true formation, from a strategic sense, took place thousands of miles away at a contested harbor on the Pacific Ocean.

For even after his one-sided victory over the Spanish on May 1, 1898, George Dewey’s dominance over Manila Bay remained contested.⁵¹ By June of that year, events found him facing down another potential hostile fleet.⁵² Sailing into the harbor were three men-of-war battleships of the German East Asia squadron, with their commanding officer bellowing to a worried Dewey that, “I am here by order of the Kaiser, Sir!”⁵³ This troublesome development seemed to confirm rumors that Germany sought to add the Philippines onto its increasing list of recent colonial possessions. Dewey, taking the

America were trying to define itself in terms of its un-Britishness.” David Dumbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1988), 32.

⁴⁹ “A Spanish Scheme Upset,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1898, 4; Edward Breck, “Berlin Dislikes America,” *New York Times*, May 01, 1898.

⁵⁰ Dumbleby and Reynolds, 35.

⁵¹ “The Fight in Manila Bay,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1898, 6.

⁵² Bailey, Thomas A.. “Dewey and the Germans at Manila Bay,” *The American Historical Review*, Volume 45, No. 1 (October, 1939), 63; “German Ship-Of-War at Manila,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1898.

⁵³ Bailey, 63; Volker Schult, “Revolutionaries and Admirals: The German East Asia Squadron in Manila Bay,” *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Fourth Quarter), 496.

threat seriously, declared to a German Flag-Lieutenant, "If Germany wants war, all right, we are ready."⁵⁴ As both sides positioned their fleets for a prospective battle, the ships of other foreign nations wisely sailed out of range. All except the British contingent, who situated themselves squarely alongside the Americans, guns ready. On August 14, the outnumbered German ships peacefully left the harbor and sailed on their way, easing the rising tensions between the three nations.⁵⁵ In both the U.S. and the U.K., the press celebrated their nations' collective success in stymieing the efforts of an aggressive power.⁵⁶ Through this little-known episode of collaboration between two homogeneous groups against a threatening, "other" comes the direct basis of the Anglo-American cooperation that existed until the end of 1945.

German militarism, early Russian Bolshevism, Japanese imperialism, and Nazi fascism made the U.S. and Britain easy international allies when circumstances demanded. Combined with Otto Von Bismarck's insightful observation of both nations speaking a common language, other factors contributed to this "natural" alliance when facing global and regional dangers to their shared interests. A common heritage focusing on democratic values, mutually beneficial trade and commerce, and power structures in both countries based around similar WASP elites aided as well. The advent of more modern technology quickening potential military threats from hostile powers, rising nationalist fervor in Europe and Asia, and an increased desire to safeguard international trade gave policymakers, on both sides of the Atlantic, caused to parlay these similarities into an informal alliance of their respective nations on various occasions. However, only when both Americans and Britons found it advantageous to their distinct goal(s) did this bonding of Anglo-American unity take place. Furthermore, even when the two nations did agree upon reasons for a *casus foederis* (case for alliance) disagreements still arose plaguing the diplomatic connections of the two powers. Though others exist, the major

⁵⁴ "Germany at Manila," *New York Times*, July 06, 1898, 6; Thomas A. Bailey, "Dewey and the Germans at Manila Bay," *American Historical Review*, volume. 45, No. 1 (Oct., 1939), 67.

⁵⁵ Bailey, 78.

⁵⁶ "The Expansion of Germany," *New York Times*, July 17, 1898. 16,

case in point of this trend of complex interactions between the United States and Great Britain is their resulting relationship after the First World War.

Although speaking about a different situation in an earlier century, Lord Palmerston's telling remark about nations having only permanent interests and not permanent allies could easily sum up the Anglo-American relationship after World War I. Arising again in 1917, as it did in Manila Bay during the summer of 1898, unwise foreign policy initiatives by Kaiser Wilhelm II resulted in American-British cooperation against the German military. On April 2, antagonized by the reveal of the now infamous Zimmerman telegram and by the desperate decision of the German navy to conduct unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic, the United States joined the Franco-British efforts against the Kaiser's Empire.⁵⁷ Soon afterwards, and not for the last time in the twentieth century, forces from the New World belatedly marshaled over the sea to save the Old. With victory achieved against the Central Powers by November 1918, the Anglo-American bond -- generated through their collective wartime struggle against a common enemy -- evaporated like the mid-morning mist. Fundamental disputes arose between the two allies that, "exacerbated tensions in their economic dealings; brought into question the reliability of the USA as a long-term friend; posed difficult questions about the future world order [and] brought Anglo-American naval rivalry into sharper focus."⁵⁸ Adding to these divisions one must include disagreements over war reparations, loan repayments, collective security arrangements, and finally Woodrow Wilson's attempt to remake the world in America's image through the implementation of his Fourteen Points.⁵⁹ For these numerous reasons by the 1920s, with the specter of a

⁵⁷ "President Calls For War Declaration, Stronger Navy, New Army of 500,000 Men, Full Co-operation with Germany's Foes," *New York Times*, April 03, 1917.

⁵⁸ Alan P. Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century of Friendship, Conflict, and the Rise and Decline of Superpowers* (London: Routledge, 1995), 31.

⁵⁹ Even before the conclusion of the war, America sought to coerce its ally into compliance over emerging disagreements. Niall Ferguson argues that through prompting the threat of a sterling crisis, "Americans sought to beat the British into accepting American diplomatic objectives. As Wilson put it, the beauty of having financial leverage over Britain and France was that 'when the war is over we can force them to our

joint international menace long vanished, images of Uncle Sam and Britannia walking with arms interlocked faded into memory. See Figure One.



Figure 1: Poster with artwork by famed American illustrator James Montgomery Flagg. Created by American Lithographic Co. N.Y. in 1918.

Source: Uncle Sam with Britannia. Digital image. Son of the South. Accessed April 9, 2016. www.sonofthesouth.net.

way of thinking.” Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), 329.

Replacing this imagery was military leaders occupying smoke-filled offices located in London and Washington dusting off and updating contingency plans for possible war between the two nations.⁶⁰ Although the chance of armed conflict between the United States and the United Kingdom never stood as a realistic likelihood during these inter-war years, it remained a possibility.⁶¹ As Winston Churchill adroitly pronounced in 1927, while it was, “quite right in the interest of peace to go on talking about war with the United States being ‘unthinkable,’ everyone knows this is not true.”⁶² Thankfully, in the mid-to-late-1930s, these tensions in the English-speaking world abated; differing political and economic circumstances pointed American and British politicians’ focus in opposing -- yet not antagonistic -- directions. Mired in the seemingly everlasting financial downturn of the Great Depression, Roosevelt’s administration concentrated its efforts inward, concerned chiefly with improving the nation’s domestic situation.⁶³ Dissimilarity, the curious and ominous actions of a failed Austrian artist turned German dictator increasingly held the rapt attention of public officials at Westminster. However, by the early fall of 1939, regardless of wanted inclinations by British and American leaders, neither the White House nor Downing Street could help but watch Europe igniting with the first sparks of war.

Arising to the forefront on the stage of history during this dark hour for humanity strode Anthony Eden. Serving as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the governments of both Stanley Baldwin and his successor Neville Chamberlain, Eden, earlier than most, foresaw the menacing presence that a Germany ruled by Adolf Hitler

⁶⁰ Christopher Bell states that, “Statesmen and planners in both Britain and the United States rightfully concluded that the other was their most dangerous potential enemy . . . [g]iven the mutual mistrust that bedeviled Anglo-American relations during the 1920s, contingency planning in both states for an Anglo-American war was a sensible thing to do.” Christopher Bell, “Thinking the Unthinkable: British and American Naval Strategies for an Anglo-American War, 1918-1931,” *International History Review*, Volume. 19, No. 4 (November, 1997), 808.

⁶¹ H.G. Wells, "A War Between Britain and America?" *New York Times*, October 2, 1927, 2.

⁶² Quoted in Bell, 790.

⁶³ Dobson, 29.

offered the world.⁶⁴ Unlike numerous of his compatriots and many members of his own Conservative party, he refused to see the Third Reich as a lesser evil than the Soviet Union, or agree that German Nazism stood as an acceptable counterbalance to Russian Bolshevism. Resigning his cabinet position in 1938 over Chamberlain's appeasement policies, events soon vindicated Eden's earlier warnings when Winston Churchill reappointed Eden to his old post of Foreign Secretary in 1940.⁶⁵ While Eden's strong sentiments against appeasing dictators would directly contribute to his thoughts and actions during the Suez Crisis sixteen years later, a telling moment during these earlier war years seemed to escape his memory in November 1956. For although Eden was as an active participant during the events of World War II, it must be recognized he also stood in the forefront as a first-hand observer.

The dawning of May 13, 1940 saw France quickly collapsing before the Nazis war machine and with it a likely invasion of England looming.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, on that date at a meeting of the War Cabinet, Winston Churchill imparted a blood oath roundly embraced by the British citizenry and their dominion kinsmen to fight to the death against the seemingly unstoppable forces of Hitler's Germany. "If this long island story of ours is to end at last," Churchill defiantly maintained, "let it end only when each one of us lies choking in his own blood upon the grounds."⁶⁷ The horrible prospect of utter defeat for the United Kingdom never stood as a starker and real probability than during the months of that followed that poetic utterance; the crisis over Suez hardly ranks in the same category. Faced with the possibilities of subjugation and national annihilation the British Isles remained alone in its most critical time of need, aided only by its loyal Empire. With the United States unwilling to rush urgently to safeguard Britain's very survival during this calamitous timespan, it is hard to believe any observer -- Anthony Eden

⁶⁴ Augur, "Germany Action Assailed by Eden," *New York Times*, March 8, 1936, 1.

⁶⁵ Ferdinand Kuhn Jr., "Eden Retains His Hold on the British Public," *New York Times*, December 11, 1938, 89; C. Brooks Peters, "Nazis are Angered by Choice of Eden," *New York Times*, December 24, 1940, 4.

⁶⁶ George Axelsson, "Nazis Report Rout," *New York Times*, May 18, 1940, 1.

⁶⁷ John Charmley, *Churchill, the End of Glory: A Political Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 406.

included most of all -- should have expected American support during the Suez Crisis as a foregone conclusion.

Only with a direct Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, accompanied by Hitler's foolhardy declaration of war on the United States three days later, did America finally join Britain's deadly struggle against the Axis powers.⁶⁸ United again as allies in the fight against common enemies, the U.S. and U.K. had more than sufficient reasons to put away past disagreements; but they did not. The British concept and practice of empire lay at the center of an ongoing dispute between the two English-speaking powers. Starting with FDR's thrusting of the Atlantic Charter upon Churchill in August 1941, Roosevelt and his administration seized every opportunity to decry and criticize the British maintenance of their colonial possessions.⁶⁹

Harkening back to sentiments expressed at its inception, the United States never viewed the Britons' custom of acquiring and maintaining imperial holdings in high regard or even as moral. This disdain only strengthened in the early twentieth century with Woodrow Wilson's quixotic crusade to make the world "safe for democracy" and to promote self-determination of peoples around the globe -- philosophies most Americans found antithetical to the concept of empire. However, unlike during the Great War when British and American economic and military strengths were more equipotential, during World War II the United States as the more dominant power pressured its now-unequal confederate to cede to its demands. Ruffling major feathers on the part of the British leadership, this American criticism of internal policies of the United Kingdom came as an unwelcome corollary to critical military and financial aid the U.S. provided to the ongoing war effort.⁷⁰ Churchill and Eden maintained the continued possession of the Empire and the status of Great Britain as a world power were nonnegotiable in a postwar

⁶⁸ Daniel T. Brigham, "Germany and Italy Declare War on US," *New York Times*, December 12, 1941, 4.

⁶⁹ Raymond Daniell, "Atlantic Charter Seen in Need of Redefinition," *New York Times*, March 26, 1944, 1.

⁷⁰ Reliance on American support strongly upset Eden in particular. "It is from every point of view bad business to have to live from hand to mouth when we can avoid it, and the only consequence of so doing so is that the United States makes a policy and we follow it, which I do not regard as a satisfactory role for the British Empire." Quoted in Charmley, *Grand Alliance*, 58.

world -- no matter how their closest ally viewed things.⁷¹ Strongly reiterating this opinion near the end of the war on New Year's Eve 1944, Churchill wrote:

There must be no question of our being hustled or seduced into declarations affecting British sovereignty in any of the Dominions or Colonies. Pray remember my declaration against liquidating the British Empire. If the Americans want to take Japanese islands which they have conquered, let them do so with our blessing and any form of words that may be agreeable to them. But 'Hands off the British Empire' is our maxim and it must not be weakened or smirched to please sob-stuff merchants at home or foreigners of any hue.⁷²

Other voices of a more malleable -- and perchance realistic -- tone did exist regarding the increasingly transforming Anglo-American relationship during the war.

These forward-thinking English adherents held the question: if the United States could aggressively persuade the liquidation of the British Empire as still undetermined; however, they maintained that ascendancy of the United States over the United Kingdom on the international scene a *fait accompli*. In 1943, Harold Macmillan, a rising star in the Conservative Party who later played a critical and curious role during the Suez Crisis, articulated this view wonderfully by way of devising a historical allegory. Speaking of the British upon their status in assessing the ascension of American power and influence, Macmillan declared, "We are the Greeks in the New Roman Empire."⁷³ In this comparison, as historian John Charmley explains, America as the New Romans "had the military prowess and the treasure with which to rule, but they were, so the stereotype had

⁷¹ However, Churchill's stalwart support for the empire's continuation never dampened his undying Americanism, as it progressively did to Eden's pro-American perspective. While Eden held Britain's connection to mainland Europe (particularly France) *almost* as important as its relationship with the United States, Churchill totally rebuked this assessment. In a 1944 argument with Charles de Gaulle, Churchill shouted: "How do you expect us, the British, to adopt a position separate from that of the United States? We are going to liberate Europe, but it is because the Americans are with us to do so. For get this quite clear, every time we have to decide between Europe and the open sea, it is always the open sea that we shall choose. Every time I have to decide between you and Roosevelt, I shall always choose Roosevelt." Quoted in Andrew Roberts, *History of the English-speaking Peoples since 1900* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 336.

⁷² Quoted in Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2010), 253.

⁷³ Charmley, *End of Glory*, 527.

it, rather brainless and therefore in need of guidance from the subtle and better-educated Greeks.”⁷⁴ This theory, eloquently condensed by Macmillan, left hope that with the war winding down the British role in the forming Western alliance and evolving “special relationship” would not have to be one of total subservience to their American partner. As events from the ending of World War II until Suez shows in many aspects this model -- even if its justification is far-fetched -- of an autonomous Britain under the shadow of a hegemonic America proved to a certain extent to be correct.

There is no denying that from the dawning of the Great Rapprochement until the many jubilant celebrations over V-J Day, the United States and Great Britain made competent and willing allies on several occasions. When individual concerns coincided, both countries put aside their disagreements and agreed to combat a threatening “other.” While idealists on both sides of the Atlantic interpreted this mutual cooperation as signs of some mythical eternal bond of friendship, it simply boiled down to plain naked self-interest dressed up in the flashy, but cheap, garbs of a false Anglo-Saxon commonality. For the British to gamble strategic operations, such as the invasion of Egypt in 1956, upon the reliance of altruistic U.S. support grounded in the history of Anglo-American relations stood oddly counterintuitive. During the first forty-five years of the twentieth century, only when Americans found it directly beneficial to themselves did they ever rush to aid their struggling “cousins.” Even with the breakdown of the Grand Soviet-Anglo-American Alliance over Stalin’s expansionist foreign policies, this trait of the U.S. still refused to be reverse entirely. At the end of World War II, with the community of nations already choosing sides between the communist East or the capitalist West, the United States continued to leave their “special” ally to fend for themselves more times than not. By the 1950s, policymakers of Britain -- in turn -- reciprocated by creating wrinkles of their own to the Anglo-American relationship.

Although Winston Churchill began employing the term “special relationship” shortly after the Americans joined the war effort in the early 1940s, it did not gain

⁷⁴ Ibid.

prominence until his usage of it in his “Sinews of Peace” address on March 5, 1946.⁷⁵ By this time, with Cold War tensions heating up, the cooling off of Anglo-American cooperation was well underway. Starting even before the official end of the Second World War, the British public gave their American counterparts a shock. In the summer of 1945, they voted out their beloved war-time leader and selected in his place a socialist.⁷⁶ Perplexed by Clement Attlee’s electoral victory over the half-American Churchill, one U.S. politician proclaimed this move by the British public, “a very long step toward communism.”⁷⁷ Swift to alleviate such fears in the United States, Attlee announced his government as strongly anti-communist and declared Britain’s commitment to the Atlantic alliance intact.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, substantial disagreements with America plagued his premiership.

Conflicts of an economic and diplomatic nature soon arose between the Attlee Government and the Truman Administration. On the day after V-J Day, the American government abruptly halted the lead-lease program, which had then become a sustaining lifeline to the British economy. Faced with an “economic Waterloo,” Attlee sent famed economist John Maynard Keynes to Washington hoping to negotiate funds for his now nearly bankrupt nation from its much wealthier ally. Keynes, confident that he could convince his American counterparts to gift much of the needed capital, considered that such an allotment of funds a fitting reward for the suffering the British endured while America refused to join into the war effort until late 1941. The U.S. representatives thought otherwise.⁷⁹ When the terms and conditions of the 1946 Anglo-American loan agreement were finalized, no altruistic gifts, or as Keynes had also put it “justice,” for the

⁷⁵ Roberts, 349; “Churchill Speech Hailed in London,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1946, 6.

⁷⁶ Henry Hazlitt, “Effect of Britain’s Election on U.S. Thinking Analyzed,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1945, 24.

⁷⁷ Bradford Perkins, “Unequal Partners: The Truman Administration and Great Britain,” In *The “Special Relationship”: Anglo-American Relations since 1945*, edited by William Roger Louis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 46.

⁷⁸ “U.S. Link to Britain Vital, Attlee Says” *New York Times*, December 6, 1945, 10; “Attlee Calls George Washington Builder of Freedom Binding Britain and the U.S,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1946, 3.

⁷⁹ John H. Crider, “British Loan Fight Livens in Senate,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1946, 12.

British people laid included in its text.⁸⁰ As an English reporter smartly summarized for the British, “It is aggravating to find that our reward for losing a quarter of our national wealth in the common cause is to pay tribute for half a century to those who have been enriched by war.”⁸¹ Quickly coming on the heels of this humiliating loan arrangement was news of the passage into law by the American government of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 -- or as commonly titled the McMahon Act. Disregarding vital contributions by British scientists to the Manhattan Project along with an earlier pledge by the U.S. to share the discovery of atomic bomb with the United Kingdom, the McMahon Act forbid imparting of nuclear secrets to any foreign power.⁸² In defiance of the U.S. wishes to halt nuclear proliferation, Britannia forged her own path. Fearful that an anti-colonial America would not defend its overseas possessions against a threatening atomic power (namely, the Soviet Union), the British government sought its own nuclear deterrent. Attlee’s Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, stated after reviewing the potential power of the atomic bomb, “We've got to have this thing over here, whatever it costs We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it.”⁸³ To the chagrin of many in America, British scientists granted Bevin his wish with the success of Operation Hurricane, the initial successful testing of a nuclear device by the U.K., on October 3, 1952.⁸⁴

Although these discernible differences caused relations to deteriorate between the two nations, Cold War pressures held the fundamental alliance together during these early years of the special relationship. Marked with the perceived encroachment of the Soviet Union upon Western spheres of interest in Europe and the Middle East, the United States maintained a firm internationalist bent to its foreign policy. It did not retreat to the safety of its own hemisphere, as it had after World War I, but instead spearheaded a multinational coalition against communist expansion. Yet, this coalition made obvious the increasingly subservient place the United Kingdom now held in this alliance.

⁸⁰ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain, 1945-1951* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 98.

⁸¹ Quoted in Louis, 52.

⁸² Hennessy, *Never Again*, 266-267.

⁸³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, *Never Again*, 268.

⁸⁴ Raymond Daniell, "British are Happy over Atomic Test Feat," *New York Times*, October 4, 1952, 3.

Stretched to its limit by financial confines and logistical commitments of its continuing Empire, by 1946 Great Britain found itself unable to adequately support Greece's friendly government against communist insurgents or protect Turkey from unwarranted Soviet influence.⁸⁵ Forced to withdraw troops and funds from the conflict in Greece, Bevin quickly fired off a telegram to his American counterpart pleading with him to fill the void of the extracting British support.⁸⁶ Recognizing the need to curb further Soviet expansion, Secretary of State Dean Acheson swiftly agreed America needed to supplement and continue economic and military aid to Turkey and Greece, which could no longer be provided by its English ally. Although this commitment by the United States to replace and expand Western assistance to countries facing communist insurgents -- commonly known as the Truman Doctrine -- secured the U.S. and the U.K. as partners against the Soviet Union, and it also revealed the true pecking order of that union in the eyes of the United States. As Acheson decried, this episode showed to America that as a world power, "the British are finished. They are through."⁸⁷

By the return of Winston Churchill to the premiership in 1951, Britain found itself fighting a two-front war. Numerous observers in London saw both flanks as uphill battles. Mired with anti-colonial sentiments in many parts of the Empire, guerrilla warfare dotted the decreasingly red-colored charts of British colonies while maps denoting Asia and Europe turned increasingly red of a different shade. To the vexation of the newly reelected Churchill, large chunks of the British Empire he once governed were now bygone memories. Under amplified pressure from the Truman Administration, Attlee had allowed India and Palestine to slip from English rule.⁸⁸ Adding to Churchill's

⁸⁵ Hebert L. Matthews, "U.S. View on Turkey Awaited in Britain," *New York Times*, March 9, 1946, 2; C.L. Sulzberger, "Large Strategic Stakes in Test over Greece," *New York Times*, September 1, 1946, 64; Raymond Daniels, "Greece and Turkey: the Internal Situation," *New York Times*, March 16, 1947, 1.

⁸⁶ Peter Clarke, *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Birth of the Pax Americana* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 486-487.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 487

⁸⁸ "Last British Military Unit Leaves India amid Cheers," *New York Times*, February 29, 1948, 5; Gene Currivans, "Last British Unit Leaves Palestine," *New York Times*, July 1, 1948, 1.

frustration came the perceived failure of the West to sufficiently heed his warning of the encroaching threat of international Marxism. Pressed to the limits by its decreased global influence and ability to project national power, the British Empire needed to make a choice. Unable to commit to both fighting internal dangers to its colonial holdings while rigorously combating every external communist threat around the globe, Britain, under the leadership of Churchill, decided to salvage the enduring remnants of British imperial power. Concentrating upon fighting pitched holding actions in Kenya, Malaysia, and Egypt, the United Kingdom left the wider geopolitical conflict of the Cold War squarely on the shoulders of the United States. This British course of action set an unruly wave of displeasure between the Atlantic powers.

By the inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower as the thirty-fourth American president, the Cold War had turned increasingly hot. While fighting side by side in a stalemated Korea, the governments of the United States and Great Britain found themselves increasingly at odds on maintaining a united Anglo-American foreign policy in regards to the rest of the world. As historian Daniel Williamson argues, the primary reason for this disunion was that “Britain did not place its own [foreign] policies, designed to defend its status as a global power, in subordination to the American plans for containing Communism.”⁸⁹ When forced to choose between stalwartly promoting an anti-communism agenda or protecting its Empire, Britain always chose empire.⁹⁰ Williamson clearly agrees with this assessment: “The principal goal of Britain’s foreign policy was to stop the erosion of its power. America’s overwhelming concern was to stop the expansion of Communism.”⁹¹ China stands as the perfect hallmark of these diverging policies. With the failure of Chiang Kai-shek in 1949 to hold mainland China, communist domination of a third of the globe became a reality.⁹² American politicians of both liberal and conservative stripes reeled at this event. This “fall of China” contributed

⁸⁹ Daniel C. Williamson, *Separate Agendas: Churchill, Eisenhower, and Anglo-American Relations, 1953-1955* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 8.

⁹⁰ Mallory Browne, "Britain Bases Foreign Policy on Her Empire," *New York Times*, February 24, 1946, 69.

⁹¹ Williamson, 8

⁹² “Chiang’s Exit Ends Rule of 22 Years,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1949. 2.

significantly to the rise of a second Red Scare in the United States and the advent of McCarthyism. Yet in America's closest ally, the mood was far less apocalyptic.

To preserve its colony of Hong Kong from Red Chinese aggression, Great Britain eagerly sought to establish cordial diplomatic relations with Mao Zedong's new government.⁹³ In 1950, to the profound irritation of the American government, Britannia recognized the People's Republic of China and withdrew her recognition of the Nationalist regime on Taiwan.⁹⁴ Then in 1954-55, during what would be termed the First Offshore Crisis, the U.K. refused, over intense American pressure, to support Taiwan against aggressions from the mainland communist government.⁹⁵ U.S. frustrations at the refusal of Great Britain to follow its lead during this time also brought clashes over another Asia nation.⁹⁶ In 1954, with French colonial forces making a desperate final stand at Dien Bien Phu, the United States longed to aid its French ally in Indochina. Although a committed anti-colonial, Eisenhower and his administration sought frantically to deny a victory in Vietnam to the communist insurgents led by Ho Chi Minh. In the waning days of the war, the Americans proposed to the British a joint action to save the beleaguered French forces. Titled Operation Vulture, it entailed the usage of massive American air power to lift the siege of Dien Bien Phu.⁹⁷ Although Eisenhower requested only token British forces to foster an appearance of bilateral action, Churchill and Eden -- believing the French fight to hold Vietnam a lost cause -- declined to commit any aircraft to the effort. Without British support, Eisenhower refused to green light the operation, leaving the encircled French army to surrender on May 7.⁹⁸

Only when faced with naked communist aggression, such as in Korea, did Britain ever enthusiastically join the American anti-communist crusade during the late 1940s to the mid-1950s. Contrary to Macmillan's airy metaphor of post-war Anglo-American

⁹³ "Pressure on Hong Kong," *New York Times*, February 6, 1950.

⁹⁴ Raymond Daniell, "Britain Announces Her Recognition of Peiping Regime," *New York Times*, January 7, 1950, 1.

⁹⁵ Elie Abe, "China Rift Curbed in U.S. and Britain," *New York Times*, February 18, 1955, 5.

⁹⁶ Thomas J. Hamilton, "U.S.-British Split on Asia Broadens at Decisive Stage," *New York Times*, May 17, 1954, 1.

⁹⁷ John Prados, *Operation Vulture* (New York: Ibooks, Inc., 2002), 188-89.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 227, 249.

relations, the British-Greeks held their own against the American-Romans when the issue of their Empire or their national interest demanded. As Dwight Eisenhower angrily discovered on occasions, Winston Churchill -- and by 1955, Anthony Eden sans his mentor -- sought to safeguard Britain as a world power, at any expense. If it upset the Anglo-American alliance in the process, so be it. For as Eden and Churchill viewed it in the increasingly bi-polar climate of the Cold War, a Britain without its colonial holdings (i.e. Empire) stood only as a near-client state of the United States; indeed only a subservient Greek backwater in an idealist-based Roman Empire.

Many of the roots of Suez are here. The history of Anglo-American relations from the Great Rapprochement to the Special Relationship demonstrates that only when entwined by self-regarding national interest do countries rush to aid one another. From its inception, during the Spanish-American War, up through the twentieth century, the on again, off again alliance between the United States and Great Britain left little room for sentimentality; it remained strictly business. Pushed by differing objectives during the Suez Crisis, the U.S. and U.K. worked to their own discernible ends -- as they had consistently done in the past. In November 1956, Britain sought to prolong its influence, prestige, and standing in the world. During the same period, America looked for potential confederates to join in its struggle against Moscow. Dual and opposing priorities of America's quest for Cold War allies vs. British attempts to hold on to its waning empire came to a fever pitch. Anglo-American interests were binary opposed; hence, the United States put the Atlantic Alliance on hold -- just as Churchill and Eden did on the matters of Vietnam and China. On the battlegrounds of the Sinai Peninsula, America gained no advantage from a British victory, so felt no urgent need to seek one. If historical sentiment played any part in the U.S.'s decisions during Suez, it was not based on the cooperationist past of the two English-speaking powers, but more likely due to on an intense contempt against the British Empire rooted in the American psyche.

CHAPTER III

THE LION AND THE SPHINX

“In Egypt I see they are remembering the bombardment of Alexandria. That kind of thing could be done in the Nineteenth Century: it cannot be done now, we are working under an entirely different code.”⁹⁹

-Prime Minister Clement Attlee, 1951

“If we have any more of their [the Egyptians] cheek we will set the Jews on them and drive them into the gutter from which they should never have emerged.”¹⁰⁰

-Prime Minister Winston Churchill, 1951

In 1956, exacerbated by recent events in the Middle East, Anthony Eden summoned his Private Secretary, Anthony Nutting, for a meeting. Nutting, on orders from his superior to formulate a plan to solve the perplexing problem of Gamal Abdel Nasser, had utterly failed in his mentor’s estimation. Angered at tepid proposals made by his protégé, the prime minister unleashed his fury. Shouting across the telephone line Eden exclaimed, “What’s all this poppycock you’ve sent me . . . what’s all this nonsense about isolating Nasser or ‘neutralizing’ him, as you call it?”¹⁰¹ Bellowing to his aide he continued, “I want him destroyed, can’t you understand . . . and I don’t give a damn if there’s anarchy and chaos in Egypt.”¹⁰² Recounting in his memoirs, Nutting states that this encounter with the prime minister left him feeling as if he had just awoken from a

⁹⁹ Quoted in James, 566.

¹⁰⁰ Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Foreign Office Diaries 1951-1956* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 29.

¹⁰¹ Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez* (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1967), 34.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 34-35; In an interview conducted during the 1980s, Nutting states that the actual word Eden used was not destroy, but murder. As Nutting recounts it: “I was horrified to get a telephone call over an open line to the Suryor Hotel in which Anthony Eden said, ‘What is all this poppycock you sent me about isolating and quarantining Nasser? Can’t you understand, and if you can’t understand it will you come to the cabinet and explain why? I want Nasser,’ -- and he actually used the word -- ‘murdered.’” Quoted in Channel Four’s *End of Empire: Egypt*.

nightmare, “only the nightmare was real.”¹⁰³ While many observers might find this proposed reaction by Anthony Eden justified in response to Nasser’s seizure of the Suez Canal, they might alter their opinion through the addition of one simple fact. The conversation occurred in March, over five months before Egypt nationalized the Canal. For contrary to perceived notions Eden’s animosity with -- and one could almost term his unwavering hatred of -- Gamal Abdel Nasser stems prior to the events of the Suez Crisis. A strong case for the *raison d’être* in the British invasion of Egypt is not only the retaking of the canal, but also the overthrowing of this apparent nemesis of Eden. Yet even before the rise of these combative men to the heads of their respective nations, Anglo-Egyptian relations stood routed for a likely collision. A successful imperialistic Britain and an independent nationalist Egypt were in many respects not a duel possibility. Only with the Suez Crisis did these unstable mixtures of individuals and national interests finally find resolution.

Cursed by their country’s geographical location, later exponentially buoyed by the creation of the Suez Canal, Egyptians found autonomy and self-determination as unreachable objectives through much of their history in the modern age. Not without strong provocation, these descendants of kings and pharaohs can blame only one entity that bears the most responsibility for this national suppression -- namely the British Empire. Drawn to the strategic importance of Egypt brought about by its centrality to three continents, the British, from an early age, sought to keep this region out of the hands of their foreign enemies. From chasing a French revolutionary army headed by a young Corsican general away from the Nile, to supporting the Ottoman Turks rule over Egypt, the protection of this vital area remained an uttermost priority to London throughout the early 1800s.¹⁰⁴ With the opening of the Suez Canal, the ante in the minds of those controlling Westminster upped substantively. With the Empire now spreading across many parts of Asia and the Pacific, coupled with the still critical importance of

¹⁰³ Nutting, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Direct control of Egypt did not stand as a British objective in the early to mid-nineteenth century. As Palmerton described, “We do not want Egypt, any more than a rational man with an estate in the north of England and a residence in the south would wish to possess the inns on the road. All he could want would be that the inns should be always accessible.” Quoted in Lapping, 228.

India to the motherland, quicker travel to these far-flung possessions stood as an imperative need. In order to protect these hard fought-over lands from either internal uprisings or external invasions Britannia required the ability to transport her armies and navies swiftly. This quicker waterway glimmered as a heaven-sent answer, yet it also arose new tactical priorities. As historian Lawrence James writes, “The completion of the Franco-Egyptian-financed Suez Canal in 1869 increased the need for Britain to remain the dominant power in the Middle East.”¹⁰⁵ Not to mention it also initiated an outright invasion and subsequent war. In 1888, with an HRS flotilla riding anchor off its coastline, the defenders and inhabitants of Alexandria found themselves the first, but certainly not the last, Egyptians to discover the enormity of Britannia’s regard for their native land.

After the cessation of Anglo-Egyptian War, while *de jure* control in Cairo formally laid at the feet of the Sultan of Turkey’s representative, *de facto* power rested at the door of the British High Commissioner. The official status of the Kingdom of Egypt remained murky up until the 1930s, and British control stood as the reality for those intervening years. However, concessions were needed to maintain this foreign grip over Egyptian internal affairs. The major one of these allowances was the 1936 agreement to the removal of British troops, minus those protecting the Suez Canal, from Egyptian soil. This success by independence-seeking Egyptians stood only as a fleeting victory, for with the advent of World War II the British routinely reminded the citizens of Egypt who truly controlled their nation. On numerous occasions, they were not subtle. When King Faruq showed sympathy towards the Axis cause, tanks crashed through his palace gates. Flanked by aides brandishing pistols the British Ambassador then showed himself into the king’s quarters and ordered at gunpoint the indignant monarch to appoint a pro-Allied prime minister to govern Egypt; he wisely complied. Although the British stranglehold over this Middle Eastern nation began to quickly dissipate with the transition from a world war to a cold one.

In 1950, Egyptian demands for the promised withdraw of British troops steadily increased. Spurred on by King Farouk, in a bid to retain his power in a sea of a

¹⁰⁵ James, 196.

nationalist furor, anti-British demonstrations and terroristic acts directed at Commonwealth soldiers erupted. The focal point of these deeds of intimidation was largely directed at the Suez Canal Zone, whereby early 1952 its military base laid under virtual siege. However, on January 26, the bloodletting spilled out onto the streets of the Egyptian capital. Commonly known as Black Saturday, as a contemporary from the British embassy described, “It was a day of arson and rioting . . . resulting in the immediate deaths of two Englishmen.”¹⁰⁶ He goes on to recount, “One, dragged from the Turf Club in the centre of the city, was murdered, his body dismembered and burnt in the street; the other, cornered trying to escape by jumping from an upstairs window of the Club, was later found stabbed to death.”¹⁰⁷ The final death toll “after weeks of rioting was put at seventeen British and other nationals living in Cairo.”¹⁰⁸

Through specifically targeting British citizens this civil unrest took to looking like a full-fledged reenactment of an Eastern Europe pogrom. As then Foreign Minister Anthony Eden recalls, “A number of British-owned buildings were set on fire, as well as cinemas, restaurants, cafes, and department stores . . . the violence was in the main anti-British.”¹⁰⁹ He goes on to recount, “The material damage in central Cairo was later estimated to amount to three or four million pounds to British interests alone.”¹¹⁰ With “the country . . . teetering on the edge of anarchy,” British commanders in the Canal Zone made hasty preparations to march for Cairo to protect their countrymen’s lives and restore order.¹¹¹ Yet an outlying, but interested, party declined to sanction this rescue effort.¹¹² Without this entity’s international support, Anthony Eden refused to issue the order. The interested party was none other than the United States of America.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Robert Hornby, *Prelude to Suez* (Gloucestershire, United Kingdom: Amberley Publishing, 2010), 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Eden, *The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1960), 231.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 232-233.

¹¹³ Lapping, 252.

Years before the official start of Suez Crisis, the United States sought to undermine any continued British neo-colonial control in Egypt. By 1947, American policy towards Egypt and the entire Middle East was already changing direction from its British ally. As Lawrence James explains, “the aim of America’s policy was to cajole rather than coerce independent Middle Eastern states into the West’s camp.”¹¹⁴ Earlier Cold War considerations had intertwined an Anglo-American need of maintaining the large network of airfields of the Canal Zone in British hands for the possible bombing of southern oil-rich regions in the Soviet Union. However, after the boon of Ankara allowing the building of U.S. airbases in Turkey, the American necessity for continued Western control of the Canal Zone evaporated. By the beginning of the 1950s, the attitude of Washington toward Egypt shifted to one similar to that London held in the early 1800s. While strategic and direct control stood as an essential imperative for the British, the American government deemed it unnecessary. As long as unfettered access to the Suez Canal remained open, who owned the waterway -- the Egyptians or the British -- mattered little to the U.S. The major factor for this laissez-faire attitude of the Americans rested upon their priorities, specifically ideology over economics. Unlike Britain, which depended on canal access for Middle Eastern oil, the United States during the 1950s supplied its petroleum needs from sources primarily in the Western hemisphere. As Anthony Eden’s private secretary, who later headed Middle Eastern Affairs at the Foreign Office, Evelyn Shuckburgh explained, “for the United States the Cold War is paramount, whereas for the United Kingdom our economic strength is at the moment fundamental.”¹¹⁵ Chief on the agenda for the United States remained to contain the international spread of communism and the influence of the Soviet Union. Supporting a British intervention against a non-aligned native population, such as the one proposed in 1952, simply did not fit that bill -- nor would a bloody battle over an open canal for that

¹¹⁴ James, 568.

¹¹⁵ Dutton, 355.; Ernest Bevin stated as early as August 1949 that: “In peace and war, the Middle East is an area of cardinal importance to the U.K., second only to the U.K. itself. Strategically, the Middle East is a focal point of communications, a source of oil, a shield to Africa and the Indian Ocean, and an irreplaceable offensive base. Economically it is, owing to oil and cotton, essential to United Kingdom recovery.” Quoted in Walker, 127.

matter.¹¹⁶ Even so the Americans did not have to cross that last bridge for another four years.

In spite of the fact that the wrath of the Egyptians took the form of anti-British riots in the early months of 1952, it soon turned back to a long-simmering anger directed towards their monarch. When the Jews of Palestine declared their independence in 1948, King Farouk had followed suit with his fellow Arabic leaders and invaded the newly minted nation of Israel. Although their collected goal stood to push the Zionists back into the sea from wince they came, it did not go as planned. Popular resentment of this failure, compounded by a rising Arab nationalism, and rampant corruption in his government finally brought a reckoning for King Farouk. On July 22, 1952, a cabal of young Egyptian military commanders, known as the Free Officers Movement, overthrew their unpopular sovereign and took charge of the country.¹¹⁷ Caught off guard by the turn of events, all the foreign embassies in Cairo, “were taken by surprise, none more so than the British embassy.”¹¹⁸ The response to the regime change by London stood restrained. As an Egyptian journalist recounts, “had the King commanded the smallest degree of confidence they [the British] might have backed him, but he did not. Nor was there any real excuse for forcible intervention.”¹¹⁹ Despite some initial trepidation diplomacy between British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, and the new Egyptian leader, Muhammad Naguib started well. Eden, who sought a solution for Sudanese independence from Egypt, found the first president of Egypt, Naguib, quite malleable to a settled agreement on the situation.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, by February 1953, Anglo-Egyptian cooperation hit a major snag. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second-ranking member of the

¹¹⁶ In a naked bid to increase their influence and garner goodwill the Americans, less than three months after the anti-British riots of January, offered to sell arms to Egypt. Not surprisingly, Anthony Eden voiced his disapproval to the U.S. ambassador by explaining that the Americans should not supply weapons to Egypt that might be used to kill British troops. Eden’s request, he was told, would be taken under advisement by the State Department. Eden, *Suez Crisis*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Mohamed Heikal, *The Cairo Documents: The Inside Story of Nasser and His Relationship with World Leaders, Rebels, and Statesmen* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), 23.

¹¹⁸ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 29.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Eden, *Suez Crisis*, 27.

Army Council of Revolution after President Naguib, declared in a fiery speech that if British forces did not “immediately and unconditionally” withdraw from the Suez Canal Zone, they would need to “fight for their lives.”¹²¹ To say the least, the young Interior Minister of Egypt did not like to mince his words.

Nasser first began speaking out against the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, which allowed British troops to remain stationed in the Suez Canal Zone, in October 1952. In an interview with Margaret Higgins of the *New York Times*, he demanded a total removal of all British forces from Egypt within six months.¹²² He also pressed for a renegotiating of the '36 Treaty or threatened increased guerrilla attacks on British encampments.¹²³ Nasser's less-than-diplomatic rhetoric on this issue brought him a windfall of support; forcing the colonial presence of the British Empire out of Sinai Peninsula held an almost universal appeal to the Egyptian populace. As his Minister of the Interior continued to issue not-so-veil threats of death to soldiers of the United Kingdom, President Naguib found the U.K.'s closest ally wooing him for Egyptian support.

Only four months after taking office, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles paid the new leader of Egypt a visit in May of 1953.¹²⁴ Looking to promote American goodwill, Dulles arrived in Cairo bearing a unique gift. While the British stationed in the Suez Canal Zone were suffering up to a dozen casualties a day from Egyptian snipers and saboteurs, the American diplomat graciously gave the de facto dictator a pistol.¹²⁵ The pearl-handled revolver came inscribed: “To General Naguib from his friend Dwight D. Eisenhower.”¹²⁶ Intentional or not, the present should have registered, at least in part, where American sympathies or lack thereof laid. Also on his visit, Dulles found time to sit down with, who knowledgeable observers viewed as the rising power in Egypt, Gamal

¹²¹ "Egyptian Threatens Attack," *New York Times*, February 24, 1953.

¹²² Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 33.

¹²³ "Egyptian Threatens Attack," *New York Times*, February 24, 1953.

¹²⁴ Aburish, 49.

¹²⁵ Herman Finer, *Dulles Over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953-1957* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1992), 16; Accounts differ if Dulles actually gave Naguib one or two pistols; yet the point remains the same.

¹²⁶ Finer, 16.; To Winston Churchill this came as a bridge too far. He quickly called Dwight Eisenhower and protested the strongly placed symbolism of the gift. Heikal, *Cairo Documents*, 43.

Nasser. In their meeting, Dulles pressed Nasser into joining a forthcoming regional anti-communist pact directed against the Soviet Union.¹²⁷ Refusing to commit to such an alliance, Nasser, in turn, requested from the American government two things, weapons and diplomatic support in forcing the 80,000 British soldiers off Egyptian soil. On the issue of arms sales, Dulles remained evasive, but the Egyptian Interior Minister did have an effect on him concerning the other two matters discussed. As a close confidant of Nasser later recounted, “Dulles was influenced by the strength of Nasser’s arguments against Egypt’s joining a mutual security pact and afterwards Dulles drew back from wholehearted support of the Baghdad Pact.”¹²⁸ In addition, the American diplomat “became convinced of the need to ease the path of Britain’s withdrawal from Egypt.”¹²⁹ While historians continue to argue over the amount of influence Dulles held over American foreign policy vis-à-vis Eisenhower, on this last matter the argument can be considered moot. As the president wrote in his memoirs, concerning that particular issue Eisenhower and, after his meeting with Nasser, Dulles stood in complete agreement. Writing on the subject Eisenhower states, “I believed that it would be undesirable and impracticable for the British to retain sizable forces permanently in the territory of a jealous and resentful government amid an open hostile population.”¹³⁰ While Eisenhower’s assessment on the feasibility of the British retention of their strategic foothold is debatable, the president fails to recount that his same estimation could apply to American involvement around the world in his nation’s past and then near future.

Pressed by the Dulles and Eisenhower, Winston Churchill reluctantly reentered talks with Egypt over its continued troop presence in the Canal Zone in 1954. As with previous discussions between the parties, sticking points still held up a suitable agreement. While Naguib and Nasser considered the Suez Canal Zone as the rightful

¹²⁷ Nasser told Dulles that a defense pact against the U.S.S.R made no sense from an Egyptian perspective. Speaking bluntly to the American, Nasser explained: “I must tell you in all frankness that I can’t see myself waking up one morning to find that the Soviet Union is our enemy. We don’t know them. They are thousands of miles away from us. We have never had any quarrel with them.” Quoted in Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 39.

¹²⁸ Heikal, *Cairo Documents*, 43.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, *The White House Years, 1956 -1961: Waging Peace* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 23.

property of their nation, Churchill and Eden sought to uphold the terms of 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty that granted sovereignty of this territory to Great Britain until 1956. This year “1956” stood as looming deadline for the United Kingdom. When signing the treaty in 1936, Anthony Eden agreed to only a twenty-year charter for British control of the zone, but with a caveat stating at the end of that time period a renegotiation of the treaty would commence. By 1954, with the current state of affairs between Great Britain and Egypt standing as they were, the chances of a new treaty favorable to the interests of the U.K. looked quite dismal. However as the parley between the two governments continued fortune shined on the British Empire, for the Egyptian negotiators sought an agreement as soon as possible.

Since the overthrow of the King, two years before, the stability of the Egyptian government remained -- in one word -- shaky. After taking power, as even a close confidant of Gamal Abdel Nasser admits, the members of the Revolutionary Command Council held no calculated agenda for bettering their nation; he writes, “apart from getting rid of the King and his corrupt associates, the Free Officers had few plans.”¹³¹ Unhappy with the perceived lack of progress by their new national leaders, factory workers rioted less than a month after the military coup, “when the police and army attempted to restore order nine people were killed and more than twenty were wounded.”¹³² Rudderless from the beginning, the Egyptian ship of state found itself beset by an increasingly amount of internal criticism -- with a substantial amount coming from a growing religious faction calling itself the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³³ In a wise bid to foster national cohesion, Nasser sought to coalesce the discontented Egyptian population around a common and popular cause. Driving a time-honored colonial power’s military from this nation’s soil was the route he sought. It proved a popular one. With Egypt in the midst of an undeclared guerrilla war with the British army, Nasser’s countrymen naturally rallied to the cause. Yet the Interior Minister’s compatriots demanded results, or at the very least substantial process towards driving the foreigners out. Since the ill-equipped Egyptian military stood little chance in a direct confrontation with the 80,000

¹³¹ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 33.

¹³² Aburish, 44.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 47-48.

Commonwealth soldiers fortified in the Canal Zone, negotiations with the hated British Empire proved the quickest solution to the status of forces dilemma and, also, in righting the helm of the Egyptian state. Efforts to rush an agreement with London notwithstanding, Muhammad Naguib, the first president of Egypt, still fell from power. Confined to house arrest and stripped of all his official positions, Naguib would spend the next eighteen years as a prisoner of the country he once governed. His usurper turned out not to be from the ranks of religious zealots, secular communists, or counterrevolutionary monarchists as he might have feared, but that of his ablest lieutenant. By September 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser, after overthrowing his revolutionary confederate, had become the unquestioned ruler of Egypt at the age of 36.¹³⁴

On October 19, the final signatures of an Anglo-Egyptian agreement took place. Considered by some as the true date of Egyptian independence, both sides gave up much from their perspectives to achieve it. While, as mentioned above, both parties had selfish interests in concluding an arrangement, they also found themselves beset with an outside pressure to come to a quick rapport. Prior to signing the treaty, each side found the United States pushing them into an arraignment. As former official historian to the British Cabinet Office William Walker explains both, “The British government under American pressure to take risks in order to win Egyptian friendship; and the Egyptians were being encouraged to be reasonable by American promises of generous economic and military aid.”¹³⁵ The final terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement included as Walker states: “British troops would leave Egypt 20 months after the new agreement was signed; the base would be taken over and run by British civilian contractors for an initial

¹³⁴ Robert C. Doty, "Closeup of Egypt's Strong Man." *New York Times*, September 19, 1954, 12; British Foreign Minister during Suez, Selwyn, Lloyd, had an interesting take on the reason for Nasser's desire to become ruler of Egypt. In his account on Suez, Lloyd writes, “It had begun with his deep resentment at the insult inflicted upon King Farouk and Egypt by the British,” of forcing the King to appoint a pro-Allied Prime Minister. After this event, “Nasser had immediately begun to conspire against the British, but he soon realized that his resentment against them could only be satisfied if Farouk were eliminated. Therefore, he next began to conspire against Farouk. That conspiracy was successful, but Neguib was not sufficiently anti-British, so Nasser had to conspire in turn against Neguib.” Lloyd, 45.

¹³⁵ Walker, 132.

period of seven years.”¹³⁶ However a “trigger for military reactivation of the base would be an attack on any Arab state and Turkey by an ‘outside power’ other than Israel.”¹³⁷ Finally the “agreement was gilded by Egypt extending overflying rights and landing facilities to the RAF, and by an Egyptian reaffirmation of the 1888 Constantinople Convention, guaranteeing freedom of transit throughout the Suez Canal to all nations in peace time.”¹³⁸

Initially the Egyptians and British governments were similarly pleased with their collective settlement. Nasser got the withdrawal of British troops and international respect for bringing the conflict to a peaceful resolution. Eden, still foreign secretary, received an extended lease on the Canal Zone and its military installations, plus a signed commitment for its quick reinforcement by British forces in times of war. However, the euphoria in London and Cairo did not last long.

A week after the official signing of the agreement, during a speech celebrating the impending withdrawal of the British troops, a would-be assassin fired eight shots at Nasser.¹³⁹ Angry at the treaty, the shooter, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, sought to punish the new Egyptian leader for his perceived collaboration with the colonial British. Shortly afterward Nasser instituted a violent crackdown on the Brotherhood and other potential insurgents. Now very mindful of the fates of the two men who previously ruled Egypt before him, Nasser also sought ways to bolster his support among his fellow countrymen. While he introduced domestic improvements, such as land reform and infrastructure developments, Nasser also sought popular acclaim through the avenue of foreign affairs. Wishing to champion himself as a proponent for Arab nationalism and a foe of Western imperialism, the young president of Egypt found hindering British interests as the means to this goal. Never coy, Nasser more-or-less stated this fact in a fateful gathering with none other than his future chief adversary during the Suez Crisis -- Anthony Eden.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Robert C. Doty, "Nasser Escapes Attempt on Life," *New York Times*, October 27, 1954. 9.

Four days before the one and only meeting between Anthony Eden and Gamal Nasser, Turkey and Iraq signed a mutual defense treaty colorfully termed the Northern Tier.¹⁴⁰ The agreement stood as the first step towards the creation of METO (Middle East Treaty Organization) or more commonly called the Bagdad Pact.¹⁴¹ Formed on the same basis as the European-orientated NATO and the Asia-Pacific SEATO, the Bagdad Pact's genesis laid in Western attempts to contain communist expansion in a specific global region.

Unsurprisingly this intimal step towards METO dominated the two men's conversation as they sat down in the British Embassy in Cairo on February 24, 1955. Looking to regain Egypt's strategic position firmly back into the column of the West, Eden pressed Nasser to join the emerging pact. Nasser, just as he did with Dulles in their meeting two years before, attempted to lay out the reasons why joining such a pact did not benefit Egyptian interests. Unlike Dulles, Eden remained unmoved by Nasser arguments and took the rejection somewhat as a personal affront. With the rise of Arab nationalism and the rulers of Middle Eastern nations seeking more autonomy from British involvement in their countries' affairs, Eden viewed METO as the key to keeping the critical region under the influence of the United Kingdom. Without Nasser's participation in the Bagdad Pact, it severely limited the agreement's usefulness and undermined its legibility in the eyes of the world. In addition, without Egypt joining into the treaty, America, fearful of alienating Nasser and the millions of Arabs who he influenced, refused to enter the organization as well. Still leaving the meeting, Eden, now mindful of Nasser, still did not view the Egyptian leader as an outright enemy, just difficult.¹⁴² However, after taking office as prime minister of Great Britain, Eden's attitude radically changed.

Despite Nasser's outright refusal to join the METO, Anthony Eden, now prime minister after succeeding the retiring Churchill on April 6, sought to pressure Egypt into

¹⁴⁰Eden, *Full Circle*, 219-221.

¹⁴¹ Formally joining into the alliance shortly afterwards included the nations of Great Britain (April 5, 1955), Pakistan (July 1, 1955), and Iran (October 9, 1955). Kingseed, 31.

¹⁴² Dutton, 363.

joining the organization by others means -- namely carrots and sticks. First, alongside their American ally, Great Britain offered funding for a major infrastructure program close to Nasser's heart. Since seizing power, Nasser longed to build a dam on the Nile at Aswan. Seemingly unmoved by this gesture of goodwill, Nasser continued his anti-British campaign. Broadcasting from powerful radio stations to large sections of the Middle East, the Egyptian leader spoke out against the Bagdad Pact and perceived British colonialism it represented.¹⁴³ The need for action only intensified when in September, with the full blessing of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia sold 250 million dollars of military equipment to Egypt.¹⁴⁴ Fearful that this very harmonious gesture by a Warsaw Pact nation was the first step of communist encroachment into the Middle East, Anthony Eden now maneuvered to isolate Nasser's influence in the region.¹⁴⁵ He sought to achieve this detachment by bringing the nation of Jordan into METO. As it became more and more apparent to both the Arab populace and their unelected leaders, Eden and Nasser were now engaged in a struggle for which one of them would lead the Arab world. If Jordan joined the Bagdad Pact, it signified to all that it sided with Britain, but if the nation declined Nasser substantially benefited. According to then British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, King Abdullah I bin al-Hussein initially agreed to bring Jordan into the pact.¹⁴⁶ However, by January 1956, with public pressure vigorously stirred by Egyptian propaganda, the government of Jordan ceded in the face of violent demonstrations to withhold joining METO.¹⁴⁷ For Nasser, the non-event marked a major victory, to Eden a bitter defeat. As events in Jordan continued to transpire, what came next marked Gamal Abdel Nasser as a dead man in the eyes of Anthony Eden.

The murky transition from colonial province to an independent state occasionally created unlikely couplings. By 1956, in the case of the transfiguration from Transjordan to the Kingdom of Jordan, one such eccentric pairing remained. Since its independence

¹⁴³ Aburis, 94-95.

¹⁴⁴ Kenneth Love, "Arms Deal for Egypt Raises Mideast Tension," *New York Times*, October 09, 1955, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Lloyd, 29.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Love, "Jordan Pressure Denied By Britain," *New York Times*, January 10, 1956. 5.

from Great Britain in 1946, the nation of Jordan had had a British officer as the commander of its army. Lieutenant-General John Glubb stood as a walking anachronism; born and raised in England, he had commanded the Arab Legion (the Jordanian army) since 1939. While his leadership of a foreign army probably seemed odd to many around the world, in Great Britain it stood as a guarded sense of pride and respect. All that evaporated when on March 1, 1956, bowing to the internal anti-British sentiment of his subjects and wanting to assert his authority, King Hussein unceremoniously discharged Glubb of his position.¹⁴⁸ As Harold Macmillan recounts the dismissal of Glubb, caused an uproar in London for, “the blow to British prestige was serious.”¹⁴⁹ As explanations were sought in the House of Commons for this drastic failure, Anthony Eden saw only one man as the instigator of this very British humiliation -- Gamal Nasser. Unperturbed by the lack of facts, the British Prime Minister devoutly believed that only Nasser’s nefarious influence had brought the King to dismiss Glubb.¹⁵⁰ Believing drastic measures were now justified to halt the Egyptian leader, Eden sought Nasser’s removal from power, by any means necessary.

Recounting in his diary on March 12, Evelyn Shuckburgh describes how Eden exclaimed to him in regards to Nasser that, “it is either him or us, don’t forget that.”¹⁵¹ As British historian Calder Walton elaborates, “Eden became obsessed with overthrowing Nasser, and tasked SIS to instigate a coup to depose or even assassinate.”¹⁵² Adding to the macabre aspect of this unveiling scene came revelations by former assistant Director

¹⁴⁸ Eden, *Full Circle*, 347.

¹⁴⁹ Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm 1956-1959* (London: Harper & Row, 1971), 92.

¹⁵⁰ Here Eden seems well off base. As Selwyn Lloyd, who was actually in Cairo at the time of the dismissal recounts at a meeting between Lloyd and Nasser, “Nasser began by congratulating me on having arranged for Glubb’s dismissal in order to improve relations between Egypt and Britain. It was very wise of us.” Lloyd, 47. While Lloyd took this as a sarcastic jab by Nasser, there is no evidence that Nasser was not being sincere.

¹⁵¹ Shuckburgh, 346.

¹⁵² Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War, and the Twilight of Empire* (New York: Overlook Press, 2013), 295.; Historian David Watry makes the assertion that a British plan to kill Nasser came much earlier than directly after the dismissal of Glubb in March. Watry writes, “MI6 began making secret plans to assassinate President Nasser of Egypt as early as February 1956.” Watry, 113.

of MI-5 Peter Wright in his controversial bestselling memoir *Spycatcher* (1987). By mid-1956, Wright asserts, “MI6 [had] developed a plan, through the London Station, to assassinate Nasser using nerve gas.”¹⁵³ Candidly speaking of his involvement in the attempt, Wright states, “Their plan was to place canisters of nerve gas inside the ventilation system, but I pointed out that this would require large quantities of gas, and would result in massive loss of life among Nasser’s staff.”¹⁵⁴ While these notions from a second-rate spy novel amounted to naught, Eden’s blinding hatred for Nasser remained absolute. As Anthony Nutting recounts after the dismissal of Glubb in March, “the next three months passed somewhat uneventfully and without offering any opportunity for Eden to translate his declaration of war on Nasser into action.”¹⁵⁵ “In June the last British troops left Egyptian soil,” Eden’s private secretary continues, “and with their departure calm seemed to settle on the scene.”¹⁵⁶ This respite stood only as the waning serenity before the arrival of a looming hurricane. As Nutting explains, “I knew all too well, it was a deceptive calm. Sooner or later an incident was bound to occur in that most explosive area which would give Eden the pretext he sought to move in on Egypt and try to smash Nasser.”¹⁵⁷ In July, thanks to a chain of events originating in America, Eden received his wish; however, he would come to regret it ruefully.

By the summer of 1956, events formed an environment where a confrontation between Egypt and Great Britain stood as highly probable. While considerable blame for this situation must lie at the feet of the national leaders in these two countries, another source is exceedingly culpable as well. The United States must not go unmentioned in its share of responsibility. Playing a shell game with where their allegiance laid, the Eisenhower administration constantly sent mixed signals to both the British and the Egyptians. No shining example stands as clear as the U.S.’s position on the Bagdad Pact. After the signing of Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1954, relations between Britain and Egypt improved, yet rancor over METO brought them again to an adversarial position.

¹⁵³ Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (New York: Vicking Penguin Inc., 1987),160.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

¹⁵⁵ Nutting, 40.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Initial American enthusiasm, especially from John Foster Dulles, sold Britain on the need of the Pact's formation. However when it came time to put pen to paper, the U.S. refused to join. Writing on the topic, Harold Macmillan states American Secretary of State Dulles, "had used every possible pressure upon us to become full members and to give it our active support; but he continued, throughout 1955, to refuse . . . to commit the United States to membership. That decision placed the whole burden upon Britain."¹⁵⁸ Even after America itself balked at joining the organization in response to Nasser's attacks on the Pact, the United States continued to manipulate its would-be direction from behind the scenes. It was none other than the U.S. who urged Britain to press Jordan into joining METO. Macmillan states that the Eisenhower administration anxiously urged the British to, "persuade Jordan to join in order to relieve the isolation of Iraq, at present the only Arab member inside the Pact."¹⁵⁹ This American request brought Anglo-Egyptian relations to an even lower ebb for reasons stated previously.

On the Egyptian side of the British-Egyptian divide, an unreliable America caused problems as well. Attempting to coax gratitude from the Nasser regime, a double-dealing Dulles offered to use American influence to prevent further Arab membership in the Baghdad Pact. While discussing such a proposal, Dulles argued, "I believe that Nasser would be willing to pay a considerable price to get the United States in limiting the Baghdad Pact to its present Arab membership."¹⁶⁰ Adding to this Janus-faced stance on METO, is the U.S. continued refusal to sell arms to Egypt; even after intimating such an arrangement stood as a distinct possibility. As Dwight Eisenhower writes, "As early as February of that year [1955] Nasser had attempted to obtain arms from the United States."¹⁶¹ Instead of outright rejecting the offer, as the British desired, the Americans left the door to such a proposal not quite shut. "Our State Department," Eisenhower continues, "confident that [Nasser] was short of money, informed him that payment would be expected in cash rather than barter."¹⁶² A major motivation for the 1955

¹⁵⁸ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 91.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Burns, 60.

¹⁶¹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 24.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Egyptian-Czech arms deal that concerned Eden was an attempt by Nasser to cajole America to sell arms to Egypt by playing off its cold war fears.¹⁶³ Although the Egyptian leader's ruse failed, it contributed greatly to distrust between Britain and Egypt. Heading into the maelstrom of the Suez Crisis, it is without a doubt America contributed greatly to the atmosphere that provoked it.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

INTO THE VORTEX (July 19 –October 28)

“Britain considered Suez as something as a symbol, a symbol of their position in the entire Middle East and the Arab world; their reaction [to its seizure] was not immediately predictable but it would require all we could do to keep the lid from blowing off.”

Dwight Eisenhower, reflecting on Suez¹⁶⁴

“The Americans would not have moved until all was lost. All through the Canal negotiations Dulles was twisting and wriggling and lying to do nothing.”

-Anthony Eden, reflecting on Suez¹⁶⁵

Not surprisingly, given its then recent history of involvement between the two nations, an act by America sparked Anthony Eden’s long-awaited confrontation between Egypt and the United Kingdom. Around noon on June 19, 1956, in meeting with the Egyptian Ambassador, John Foster Dulles calmly lit the spark that exploded into the Suez Crisis.¹⁶⁶ Originating about a year before, the reason for this hastily planned consultation boiled down to money -- Nasser desperately needed it, and Dulles steadfastly refused it. Since taking office, Nasser “had been working to turn his dream of building a high dam at Aswan into a reality.”¹⁶⁷ This massive building project was estimated to cost \$1 billion dollars, “which \$400 million would have to be in foreign currency.”¹⁶⁸ While the World Bank promised, half of this external sum (200 million) to Egypt, Nasser still required the rest from another source. In an effort to foster closer relations and to forestall a proposal of aid by the Soviet Union, the Eisenhower Administration tentatively offered to provide loans to help make-up the difference.¹⁶⁹ The terms of such an agreement tied a

¹⁶⁴ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 34.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Dutton, 365.

¹⁶⁶ Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 340-341.

¹⁶⁷ Heikal, *Cairo Documents*, 58.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 60.

¹⁶⁹ Dana Adams Schmidt, "U.S. may Urge Congress to Help Egypt Build Dam," *New York Times*, December 8, 1955. 1.

substantial American loan with the offer of aid by the World Bank. It also included a pledge, made before the Anglo-Egyptian incidents over Jordan, of around 14 million in sterling by the United Kingdom.¹⁷⁰ Although eager to build the dam, Nasser, fearful of Egypt falling into the orbit of the United States, refused implicit conditions tacked on a potential Egyptian-American loan agreement.¹⁷¹ These stipulations primary included attempts by America to influence the foreign policy of Egypt -- such as getting Nasser to support a U.S. sponsored Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, and halting arms purchases from the communist bloc.¹⁷² As negotiations over the Aswan aid package stalled, U.S. enthusiasm waned, for as Anthony Eden notes, “The Egyptian financial position deteriorated and it became more and more doubtful whether the Egyptian government would be able to cover their part of the inevitable expenditure for the dam project.”¹⁷³ Astoundingly, Eden, now actively plotting Nasser’s demise, actually thought it best not to rescind formally the Western offer to aid the Aswan project, but to simply let it “wither on the vine.”¹⁷⁴ However, by mid-summer 1956, his American allies thought a message need to be sent to Nasser. One clarifying that in the view of Eisenhower and Dulles, Egypt rapidly had to choose if it stood with America or the Soviets; in their estimation, no middle ground would suffice.

In May, Egypt formally extended diplomatic recognition to mainland China.¹⁷⁵ In a bid to circumvent an impending United Nations arms embargo on sells to Middle Eastern nations, Nasser planned to buy weapons from the Red Chinese, who were not members of the U.N. so not bound to any such embargo.¹⁷⁶ The news of this latest Egyptian embracement with a communist power stood as the final straw in Washington D.C.; Nasser required a stern lesson. Up to the task, Dulles gave it to him in spades. One minute after Ahmed Hussin, Egypt’s Ambassador to the U.S., walked through Dulles’

¹⁷⁰ Eden, *Suez Crisis*, 47.

¹⁷¹ Dwight Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 330.

¹⁷² Burns, 72-73.

¹⁷³ Eden, *Suez Crisis*, 48.

¹⁷⁴ Burns, 67.

¹⁷⁵ Elie Abel, "Dulles Reproves Nasser Over Ties with Red Chinese," *New York Times*, May 23, 1956. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Heikal, *Cairo Documents*, 57.

door at the State Department for his June 19 meeting, a spokesperson for the Department, “issued a statement to waiting reporters announcing the withdrawal of America’s offer of aid.”¹⁷⁷ Before the two men had even uttered a word, the U.S. announced its intentions on the matter to the world. Stunned at this undiplomatic display of bluster, Nasser found himself at a vulnerable place on the international stage.¹⁷⁸ Even excluding the public humiliation by the American, Dulles’ act stung the Egyptian president hard. For with the withdrawal of potential U.S. aid, the World Bank revoked its agreement of assistance on the Aswan project as well, since the two offers were interlinked. Backed onto a ledge custom-made by the United States, Nasser needed to find a way to 1) regain his stature in eyes of the world, and 2) find alternative funding for the Aswan Dam to retain his popularity in Egypt. Refusing to jump into the waiting arms of the Soviet Union or fall into the lap of a reconciliatory America, Nasser, to the extreme detriment of the British Empire, decided to leap.

On July 26, when word first arrived in London and Washington that Nasser had seized the Suez Canal, Anthony Eden and Dwight Eisenhower took the bulletin quite differently. In America, its president urged caution; in Great Britain, its prime minister demanded war. Dining with the King of Iraq and the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said when the news broke, Eden received some hurried advice from one of his guests. Nuri counseling Eden, told him, “You only have one course of action open and that is to hit, hit now, and hit hard. Otherwise it will be too late. If [Nasser] is left alone, he will finish all of us.”¹⁷⁹ Although this shrewd advice did not fall on deaf ears, it stood superfluously. For the British prime minister already understood the stakes and knew which course to proceed down. Writing in his memoirs, Eden recounts his thoughts of that July evening, “I had no doubt how Nasser’s deed would be read . . . [t]his was a

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 66.

¹⁷⁸ Heikal, *Cutting the Lyon’s Tail*, 117.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Lucas, 142; Lloyd, 74.; Nutting doesn’t deny this exchange took place, but adds a caveat in his account to the conversation. As Nutting writes, “In light of subsequent events, it is only fair to Nuri’s memory to say that he later told me that he had also warned Eden to resist any temptation to ally himself with Israel, or with France, in order to bring Nasser to heel, since any such alliance would have dire results for Anglo-Arab relations.” Nutting, 48.

seizure of Western property in reply to the action of the United States Government. Upon its outcome would depend whose authority would prevail.”¹⁸⁰ Eden quickly adjourned to the Cabinet Room with his foreign minister, Selwyn Lloyd; the Lord Chancellor, David Maxwell Fyfe; the Lord President of the Council, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (5th Marquess of Salisbury), and Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Alec Douglas-Home.¹⁸¹ Rapidly summoned to join the impromptu meeting were the chiefs of staff of the armed forces; the French Ambassador, Jean Chauvel; and in lieu of the U.S. Ambassador, the American Charge d’Affaires, Andrew Foster.¹⁸² The inclusion of the nation’s top echelon military leaders plus representatives of the country’s two closest strategic allies set the tone of the meeting. Eden desired quick and unflinching action; however, it would not work out as he hoped.

The prime minister hurriedly laid out the first order of business. In front of his assembled advisors and the two foreign emissaries he directly asked, “When can we take military action to topple Nasser [and] free the canal?” It was a simple question, backed by a logical viewpoint. For a mighty empire that retained over 750,000 active duty soldiers and spent around ten per cent of its gross national product on its military, it seems hard to believe that Great Britain did not have the capacity to recapture the Canal quite rapidly after Nasser nationalized it.¹⁸³ Yet after conversing with his chiefs of staff, that is exactly what Eden ruefully discovered. Lord Louis Mountbatten, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, was first to douse Eden’s hopes of a speedily retaking of the Canal by recommending that due to numerous restraints, “unilateral action by the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines should not be taken.”¹⁸⁴ As Mountbatten and the other military commanders explained, if a successful military operation against Nasser were to be conducted it would take time.¹⁸⁵ As accounts of this initial meeting of July 26 and

¹⁸⁰ Eden, *Full Circle*, 424.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 424.

¹⁸² Lloyd, 74-75.

¹⁸³ Roy Fullick and Geoffrey Powell, *Suez: the Double War* (South Yorkshire, United Kingdom: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 1979), 30.

¹⁸⁴ Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 538.

¹⁸⁵ Lloyd explains further: “Nasser had three infantry divisions and one armoured division. Two-thirds of his forces were in Sinai. The armoured division was straddling

numerous subsequent consultations of the chiefs of staff show, the British military faced numerous problems that severely limited its initial response capabilities to the crisis.¹⁸⁶

These hindering complications were two-fold. The first revolved around logistics and infrastructure. With the forfeit of the Canal Zone in June, the U.K. did not have a military base near enough to Egypt equipped for handling the massive ships and numerous landing crafts needed to conduct an invasion. In addition, while Britain did have over three-quarters of a million men in arms, these forces were widely spread throughout the globe protecting the rest of the Empire. It would take a lot of precious time to redirect them against this new objective. The second series of limitations for the British boiled down to the absence of planning.¹⁸⁷ In 1956, all of Great Britain's defense arrangements boiled down to dealing with only two likely threats. Either an all-out nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union or fighting insurgency in its colonies, "almost no provision existed for limited or conventional war of the old sort."¹⁸⁸ However facing these stark realities gave Eden little pause in altering his favored course of action. For him only the timetable needed changing -- the dogs of war were still to be unleashed. After a meeting with the full Cabinet, Eden found it members supporting this assessment. Reviewing Nasser's action they agreed, "That our essential interest in the area must, if necessary, be safeguarded by military action and that the necessary preparations to this end must be made."¹⁸⁹ As Harold Macmillan recalled, "the unanimous view of my colleagues was in favor of strong and resolute action."¹⁹⁰ Provisions started immediately to gear Britain for the forthcoming conflict. Given the title of "Operation Musketeer" by the chiefs of staff, this plan for an invasion of Egypt quickly began taking form. In the first days of the crisis, as the drums for righteous battle steadily increased their pounding across Albion, on the other side of the Atlantic they remained quite muted.

the Canal There were various geographical difficulties to be overcome if we were to carry out a military operation. It would require several weeks to mount it." Lloyd, 84.

¹⁸⁶ The British National Archives (hereafter referred to as BNA), AIR 8/1940.

¹⁸⁷ BNA, AIR 8/1940.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas, 41.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Hennessy, *Having it so Good*, 418.

¹⁹⁰ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 101.

After the initial news of the seizure of the Suez Canal broke in Washington, the primary concern of President Eisenhower was not to punish Nasser, but to restrain Eden. From the American perspective, the need of this containment of British action became readily apparent shortly after Eisenhower received a message from Eden on July 27. In the telegraph, Eden argued that Britain and the U.S. “cannot afford to allow Nasser to seize control of the Canal in this way.”¹⁹¹ Intimating the direction of action needed, Eden argued that, “we should not allow ourselves to become involved in legal quibbles about the rights of the Egyptian government to nationalize what is technically an Egyptian company.”¹⁹² Then to put a finer point on it the Englishman stated, “As we see it we are unlikely to obtain our objectives by economic pressure alone.”¹⁹³ It took little reading of the subtext of the two-page message for Eisenhower to see how Eden wanted to handle the affair. Negotiations were not the answer; force of arms was the only solution. With his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles away in South America, Eisenhower took direct control in the efforts to temper British fury over the new crisis. Less than 24 hours after receiving Eden’s communication, the president circumspectly replied, “While we agree with much that you have to say, we rather think there are one or two additional thoughts that you might consider.”¹⁹⁴ It was not the forceful answer Eden hoped to receive, yet it did allow for interpretation. Next, due to the unavailability of Dulles, Eisenhower sent Deputy Undersecretary of State Robert Murphy to London. The president’s instructions to Murphy are telling of his opinion of the matter; he ordered Murphy to “just go over and hold the fort,” and avoid committing America, “in any precipitate action with the French and British.”¹⁹⁵ It appeared in Eisenhower’s estimation

¹⁹¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter referred to as DDE), Ann Whitman File, International Series, Box No. 21, Eden 7/18/56 – 11/7/56, Folder 1.

¹⁹² DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series, Box No. 21, Eden 7/18/56 – 11/7/56 Folder 1.

¹⁹³ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series, Box No. 21, Eden 7/18/56 – 11/7/56 No. 1.

¹⁹⁴ BNA, PREM 11-1177.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors: The Unique World of a Foreign Service Expert* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 379.; David Nichols, *Eisenhower 1956: The President’s Year of Crisis: Suez and the Brink of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011), 137.

the potential reaction of America's allies stood as a far greater concern than the original seizure of the Canal.

The causes behind the initial deviation of Anglo-American reactions to Nasser's confiscation of the Suez Canal are stark and telling. Embedded here are many reasons why America left Britannia to fend for herself as the crisis deepens. While the personal hatred that Eden held toward Nasser, which was conspicuously absent in Eisenhower, obviously played an important influence, other significant factors contributed to how the two men conversely viewed the crisis. A truly jumbled mosaic of reasons, justifications, and national and personal interests motivated the distinct acts of the Atlantic powers when confronting the predicament.

One cannot overlook the potential economic implications of Nasser's action for the British compared to the Americans. In 1956, 80 percent of oil supplying Western Europe came through the Suez Canal.¹⁹⁶ At the beginning of August, Britain had only a strategic stockpile of six weeks' worth of oil to rely upon if the Canal closed, after that the lights were out and the cars grounded to a halt.¹⁹⁷ Although Nasser guaranteed to keep the Canal fully operational as long as Egypt retained control of it, to the British any promise of the Egyptian leader was highly dubious at best. As Eden surmised with Nasser controlling the Canal it effectively meant, "He held a knife to our jugular;" or as Harold Macmillan articulated, "having his thumb on our windpipe."¹⁹⁸ Even with setting aside the hyperbolic rhetoric of the two men, they still raised a valid point. With the vast wealth of oil in the Northern Sea still undiscovered, Britain remained especially dependent on Middle Eastern sources. Just the possible closure of the Suez Canal left the British economy standing on very shaky ground. As Yale professor Diane Kunz recounts as early as the "afternoon of July 27 . . . sterling was under such strong pressure that the Bank of England could not determine the rate for transferable sterling."¹⁹⁹ Impossible to

¹⁹⁶ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56 Folder 1.

¹⁹⁷ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56 Folder 1.

¹⁹⁸ Macmillan, 426.

¹⁹⁹ Diane Kunz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 78.

put it more bluntly, the Executive Director of the Bank of England stated on August 1, “[T]he situation created by the Egyptian Government imperils the survival of the U.K. and the Commonwealth, and represents a very great danger to sterling.”²⁰⁰ Through the eyes of the British, Nasser’s nationalization of the Canal looked like an economic quietus by a hostile power. Thus in order to safeguard her monetary and financial well-being, Britannia needed to reverse this egregious event as soon as possible.

An ocean away, things looked quite different. Economically speaking the seizure of the Canal seemed to raise little concern in the halls of the United States government. In a Cabinet meeting on July 27, concerns over the subject of the Suez and its effect on the free transit of oil were viewed as a problem for Europe, not the homeland.²⁰¹ According to the record of the meeting, Eisenhower seemed more concerned on how the nationalization of Suez Canal might influence the control of a more vital waterway for America – the Panama Canal, than its direct result on the United States.²⁰² By early as August 3, while the British government continued to view itself still under an economic sword of Damocles, for the U.S. Secretary of Treasury George Humphrey the situation, still only in its first week, was already abating. In that day’s Cabinet meeting, Humphrey stated, “that the quieting down of the crisis was very helpful to the Treasury.”²⁰³ He added that lower interest rates for American borrowing seemed certain in “the near future.”²⁰⁴ On this supposition, Humphrey confuses coloration with causation -- as the sterling stood under attack, it made logical sense for the American dollar to rally. With investors and speculators alike attempting to flee the troubled British currency, the rational safe haven was the American greenback. Hence, the continued control of Suez Canal by a hostile power to Britain (i.e. Egypt) actually strengthened the United States economic position in the world. Even more to the point, if the British did invade Egypt

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Kunz, 73.

²⁰¹ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Cabinet Series, Box No. 7, Folder Cabinet Meeting of July 27, 1956.

²⁰² DDE, Ann Whitman File, Cabinet Series, Box No. 7, Folder Cabinet Meeting of July 27, 1956.

²⁰³ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Cabinet Series, Box No. 7, Folder Cabinet Meeting of August 3, 1956.

²⁰⁴ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Cabinet Series, Box No. 7, Folder Cabinet Meeting of August 3, 1956.

the likelihood of Nasser blocking or damaging the Canal out of vengeance stood as very likely. If this scenario came to pass and the Canal remained inoperable for an extended period of time, then the vast majority of Western Europe's petroleum needs would have to be supplied mainly from the Western Hemisphere.²⁰⁵ While the United States planned for this happenstance, its leaders viewed it as very unappealing.²⁰⁶ For it meant unpopular oil rationing for Americans and probable limiting of economic growth for the nation.²⁰⁷ For all these reasons, from the financial standpoint of America the nationalization of the Suez Canal was acceptable, but a British attempt in retaking it was not.

Popular opinion and political support also played a significant role in how the American and British governments proceeded to deal with the crisis. As early as the last days of July, London-based newspapers started calling for a rapid response to the crisis. The *Daily Mail* advised, "We must cry 'Halt!' to Nasser as we should have cried 'Halt' to Hitler. Before he sets the Middle East aflame, as Hitler did Europe."²⁰⁸ Harkening with similar sentiments was *The Times*, the *News Chronicle*, and the *Daily Herald*.²⁰⁹ Comparisons of Nasser to Hitler were ubiquitous throughout the daily papers and on the nightly airwaves. Even Hugh Gaitskill, the leader of the Labor Party, got in on the act. In addressing the House of Commons on August 2, Eden's primary political opponent claimed Nasser's aims were, "all very familiar. It is exactly the same as that we encountered from Mussolini and Hitler in those years before the war."²¹⁰ As the nation rallied to Anthony Eden's anti-Nasser crusade, support from other areas of the Commonwealth also bolstered his determination. In a rejoinder to a cable from Eden, the Prime Minister of New Zealand made his nation's sentiments publicly clear. He stated, "I was able to tell Sir Anthony Eden . . . that Britain could count on New Zealand standing by her through thick or thin . . . Where Britain stands, we stand; where she

²⁰⁵ DDE, White House Central Files (Confidential File) 1953-61, Subject Series Box, No. 82, Folder Suez Canal Crisis No. 1.

²⁰⁶ DDE, White House Central Files (Confidential File) 1953-61, Subject Series Box, No. 82, Folder Suez Canal Crisis No. 1.

²⁰⁷ Kunz, 82.

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Cooper, 109.

²⁰⁹ Dutton, 386.

²¹⁰ Eden, *Full Circle*, 440.

goes, we go; in good times and in the bad.”²¹¹ Certainly, a stark response compared to the vacillating reaction offered by the U.S. president. Even without substantial American support, popular backing for direct action in regaining the Canal remained high throughout Great Britain.²¹² As historian David Dutton describes, “In the first days after nationalization the elements of a Suez consensus appeared to fall into place.”²¹³ While this initial wave for war dampened in the preceding weeks, in America it never reached even close to such a fever pitch. In fact, throughout the United States it stood as nonexistent.

A July 30 article by Harold Callender in the *New York Times* sums up the tone for a vast number of Americans to the crisis. For Callender the entire construct of, “the Suez Canal is a relic and a symbol of an age of European imperialism this is passing.”²¹⁴ In 1956 America, much of anti-colonialism sentiment fostered since 1776 had not faded. While pro-Nasser romanticism did not factor into the equation during the early days of July and August, an abiding sympathy for the Egyptian people stood out. As a *New York Times* editorial appearing in August argues, the real issue is not the control of the Canal but, “the question of what can be done to improve the lives of people as groups and of individuals as persons How do the Egyptian people themselves and their neighbors stand to come out of this dispute?”²¹⁵ Bleeding heart sentiments like this aside, as Professor Diane Kunz states, the American press did express some concern, “about the nationalization of the canal but viewed the matter as a primarily European issue.”²¹⁶ She goes on to add, “Editorials stressed conciliation, not condemnation [of Nasser’s action], and avoided all speculation involving military pressure. This stance reflected the view of the American public, which was prepared neither to accept oil rationing nor the use of force for a faraway canal about which they knew little and which had no apparent impact

²¹¹ Quoted in Kyle, 158.

²¹² Benjamin Welles, "Prestige of Eden in Britain Rises," *New York Times*, August 5, 1956. 2.

²¹³ Dutton, 386.

²¹⁴ Harold Callender, "Suez Canal a Symbol." *New York Times*, July 30, 1956, 3.

²¹⁵ "The Suez and the People," *New York Times*, August 26, 1956, E8.

²¹⁶ Kunz, 82.

on their lives.”²¹⁷ Even though the U.S. government’s refusal to support military action against Egypt ultimately wrought disaster onto its closest ally, it, at least, had the wholehearted support of the American people.

After acquiring their respective offices of president and prime minister, Eisenhower and Eden desired quite different reputations. With no need of psychoanalysis, there is little doubt this fact contributed to their actions and mindsets during the Suez Crisis. Known quite rightfully as a man of war, after his election to the presidency, Eisenhower sought long and hard to transform his persona in the eyes of the world to a man of peace. Setting aside his then secret attempts to bring America into the First Indochina War, by 1956 he had achieved this coveted mantle. Through negotiations, he had brought the Korean War to an acceptable stalemate in 1953 and during the Geneva Summit in 1955 broke bread with Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin. Gearing up for a re-election battle in November, Eisenhower promised to play the role of peacemaker for the American public. As the Suez Crisis broke, with Britain and France immediately clambering for war, Eisenhower’s peaceable reputation laid on the line. If he bowed to Eden’s not-so-subtle demands for support for a British invasion of Egypt, then it would lay in ruins. If the president needed any restating of this fact, his press secretary gave Eisenhower a friendly reminder on August 6. In a call to Eisenhower, Jim Hagerty argued that the American “people are intensely concerned about Suez . . . and that the British (and French) are edging closer to war.”²¹⁸ He then prompted the president about Eisenhower’s recent statement that, “you would go anywhere, anytime, in the interests of peace.”²¹⁹ For the man, one of his long-time aides remembered as “slow to pick up the sword,” the message was superfluous; to Eisenhower, and for the sake of his reputation, war was not even an option.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Ibid, 82; In a public opinion poll conducted during August on behest of the U.S. State Department only 16% of Americans endorsed active military intervention. Finer, 211.

²¹⁸ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box No. 8, Aug. '56 Diary - acw Folder 2.

²¹⁹ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box No. 8, Aug. '56 Diary - acw Folder 2.

²²⁰ Nichols, 3.

Since taking office in 1955, Anthony Eden sought to prove to himself and the British people that he was an apt successor to the great war-time leader Winston Churchill. As American historian Paul Johnson states Eden's, "first year in power out of Churchill's shadow had been a let-down. He was criticized, especially in his own party, for lacking 'the smack of firm government.'"²²¹ As British journalist James Margach recounts, "Scarcely had he succeeded Churchill and with astonishing flair won the 1955 general election than decay set in. Of all prime ministers' honeymoons his was the briefest."²²² Seen as a weak sister by right-wing members of his own party, by January 1956, "an 'Eden Must Go' campaign was sweeping through the Tory Party."²²³ Ironically much of this anger from the Right came from a perception that Eden, during the negotiations of the 1955 Anglo-Egyptian agreement, conceded too much to Nasser.²²⁴ With much of Eden's career and reputation built on his opposition to Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy to Hitler, these attacks stung very close to home. As attempts to paint Eden as an appeaser to the "Egyptian Hitler" continued, his popularity in the Conservative party waned. After Nasser had nationalized the Canal, the British prime minister saw the impending crisis as the perfect test to show the right wing of his party that he had the mettle to meet the challenge. Diplomacy and talks were not going to work, force and military strength stood as the favorable option.

After Eisenhower's envoy to the British, Robert Murphy, touched down at Heathrow Airport on July 28, things started moving quickly. Attempting to get a lay of the land, Murphy conversed with numerous British officials over the next two days.²²⁵ On orders from Dulles, Murphy instructions were to remind the British that under American law, "the President had no authorization to commit military action" and "would require Congressional authorization."²²⁶ In two separate meetings on July 29,

²²¹ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992), 490.

²²² Quoted in Hennessy, *Having it so Good*, 358.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Johnson, 490.

²²⁵ Murphy, 379.

²²⁶ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series Box No. 7, Folder Dulles, John Foster July '56.

Murphy, the eyes and ears of the American government, received wildly varying accounts on the intentions of the British government towards the crisis. In an early meeting, the British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd falsely told him that military force stood, “as a last resort.”²²⁷ Later in a dinner with his old friend and Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan, Murphy found himself lied to yet again when Macmillan gave, “him the impression that our military expedition to Egypt was about to sail.”²²⁸ Searching for explanations for these outright falsehoods told to an American diplomat by high British government officials is not complicated. On the issue of Lloyd’s claim, it came from an unequivocal agreement by France to join the British in instrumenting Operation Musketeer. After discussions with the French Ambassador, Lloyd discovered, “The French were ready to go all the way with us. They would be prepared to put French forces under British command if this was necessary.”²²⁹ With this diplomatic breakthrough with France, direct American military support was not required for the success of Musketeer; hence, Lloyd did not seek it. Lying to Murphy that military action stood as a last resort made sense since the British did not want early American inference with their plan. Why Macmillan claimed the direct opposite to Murphy came from Macmillan’s distorted view of the Anglo-American relationship, and how he independently sought for the crisis to play out. A committed Americophile, Macmillan truly believed if push came to shove, the United States would support military action against Egypt by their British ally. Writing in his memoirs Macmillan expressed as much, “I was confident that if and when the moment for action arrived we should have, if not the overt, at least the covert sympathy and support of the Government and people of the United States.”²³⁰ Longing to see the two Atlantic powers united as they were during World War 2, he refused to comprehend that Anglo-American relations stood at loggerheads over Suez. Naively believing the complete opposite of Lloyd, that the U.S. would never seek to interfere with Musketeer, Macmillan attempted to gain immediate

²²⁷ Lloyd, 88.

²²⁸ Harold Macmillan, *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years 1950-1957*, edited by Peter Catterall (London, Pan Books, 2003), 580. As Macmillan himself writes in the same diary entry, “It will take at least six weeks to prepare it, in fact.”

²²⁹ Quoted in Lucas, 149.

²³⁰ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 104.

American support from Murphy by falsely stating that a British invasion of Egypt was imminent.

If still perplexed where the British stood on military action over the crisis, Murphy, after sitting down with the prime minister on July 31, received a better indication of how things were progressing. Unlike the earlier cable to Eisenhower, where Eden eluded to a possible joint Anglo-American military action against Egypt, the Englishman gave no indication that he expected -- or sought -- any direct armed support from the United States. However, like Macmillan, he foresaw no U.S. attempt to impede such action. Writing in his memoir, Murphy recounts that at their meeting:

There was a confident assumption, however, that the United States would go along with anything Britain and France did. As Eden expressed it, there was no thought of asking the United States for anything, 'be we do hope you will take care of the Bear!' A neat way of saying that Britain and France would take care of the Egyptians, but in case of intervention by the Russian Bear, it was anticipated that the United States would step in. It seemed to me that Eden was laboring under the impression that a common identity of interest existed among the allies. That was not the American view, and I gave no encouragement to the idea.²³¹

During this conversation with Anthony Eden, all equivocation evaporated in Murphy's mind; he writes, "It became increasingly evident that there was serious and perhaps imminent prospect of Anglo-French military action."²³² Attempting to retard any intervention, Eisenhower urgently sent John Foster Dulles to London for further talks and rapidly drafted a personal message to Eden.²³³ In the communiqué, the American president told the British prime minister, that Murphy had informed him of, "your decision to employ force without delay or attempting any immediate and less drastic steps."²³⁴ Eisenhower cautioned, "I cannot over-emphasize the strength of my conviction that some such method must be attempted before any such action such as you contemplate should be undertaken."²³⁵ He goes on to state, "I have given you my own

²³¹ Murphy, 381.

²³² Ibid., 383.

²³³ Nichols, 142.

²³⁴ BNA, PREM 11-1177.

²³⁵ BNA, PREM 11-1177.

personal conviction . . . as to the unwisdom [sic] even of contemplating military force at this moment.”²³⁶ The message was clear, yet for Eden not clear enough.

To his determent, Eisenhower did not categorically repudiate the non-direct support Eden sought from the United States -- such as America checking any Russian involvement. Echoing Murphy, Eisenhower again repeated that without Congressional approval he could not send in America forces. However, the president did not absolutely discount the possible need for military action; the phrase “if unfortunately the situation can finally resolve only by drastic means” in the message left much wriggle room.²³⁷ Plainly, in Eden’s estimation, Eisenhower wanted a peaceful solution to the crisis, but if one proved impossible or maybe just improbable, the American was willing to put the option for armed intervention back on the table. In many respects, the message just confirmed the opinion Eden held of the American position already: that the U.S. would not directly intervene militarily, and favored “attempts” at public negotiation before the British and French started shooting. With the meetings with Dulles in London, this estimation did not change, but through the American Secretary of State’s blunt language only intensified.

Although Anthony Eden and John Foster Dulles held an adversarial relationship for many years, with Dulles arrival to London, the British Empire seemingly found a welcomed ally.²³⁸ Speaking to U.S. Secretary of State on August 1, Harold Macmillan clearly explained that this “game” for the British was not one they could afford to lose and, “it was a question not of honour only but of survival.”²³⁹ Dulles responded with appropriate alarm. In a meeting with his long-time rival on the same day, the American suggested to Eden that an international conference of concern parties meet to discuss the

²³⁶ BNA, PREM 11-1177.

²³⁷ BNA, PREM 11-1177.

²³⁸ On more of the animosity between Dulles and Eden see Douglas A. Franklin, “Aspirations for Greatness: John Foster Dulles, Anthony Eden, and the Conduct of Anglo-American Diplomacy, 1951-1956,” PhD. dissertation, University of Kentucky, Lexington, 1990.

²³⁹ The way to win the game in Macmillan’s assessment came down to a two-fold plan: “a) international control of the Canal b) humiliation and collapse of Nasser.” Macmillan, *Diaries*, 580.

Canal issue.²⁴⁰ For reasons that will become clear, Eden agreed. Then Dulles expressed his forthright opinion on the crisis:

A way had to be found to make Nasser disgorge what he was attempting to swallow We must make a genuine effort to bring world opinion to favour the international operation of the canal It should be possible to create a world opinion so adverse to Nasser that he would be isolated. Then if a military operation had to be undertaken it would be more apt to succeed and have less grave repercussions than if it had been undertaken precipitately.²⁴¹

As Eden recalls, “We were encouraged by his statements. . . . Nasser must be made, as Mr. Dulles put it to me, ‘to disgorge.’ These were forthright words. They rang in my ears for months.”²⁴² Eden then reported to Dulles: that the United States Naval Attaché desired information about British military preparations. The American, as Eden explains, “replied that the United States government perfectly well understood the purpose of our preparations and he thought that they had a good effect.”²⁴³ This pronouncement was just more music for the prime minister’s ears. However, unlike what Eden longed to believe, Dulles sincerely expected diplomatic measures to foil Nasser.²⁴⁴ As Dr. Scott Lucas argues, “Dulles had not given Eden a blank cheque for military action. He merely restated the American position that preferred covert methods to the overt use of force. However . . . he fostered the illusion that the US would not oppose unilateral British measures.”²⁴⁵ Hugh Thomas states this type of misunderstanding was purposeful, “Dulles seemed to agree with British hatred of Nasser when he was with the British,” however, “in the USA he would publicly talk against old-fashioned colonialism.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ *Finer*, 349-350.

²⁴¹ Quoted in Eden, *Full Circle*, 437.

²⁴² Eden, *Full Circle*, 437; “Unfortunately, [Dulles] confused the issue by occasional references of necessity to force Nasser to ‘disgorge’ the Suez Canal region. Such remarks were typical of the secretary, who was prone to make inflammatory statements. Understandably, Eden and Lloyd were somewhat perplexed by this contradictory position, and they later cited this statement as proof that the United States had not eliminated the resolution of the dispute by military force.” Kingseed, 55.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 438.

²⁴⁴ Hugh Thomas, *Suez* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 54.

²⁴⁵ Lucas, 155.

²⁴⁶ Thomas, 54.

As Dulles returned to Washington, the Anglo-American rift over the Suez had both widened and cemented. These facts were woefully unclear to both the British or Americans involved. The fundamental differences between the positions held by Eden's government and the Eisenhower's administration were now utterly irreconcilable. Barring Nasser deciding to reverse the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Britain remained committed to the use of force. However, the United States now formally held the position that diplomacy through an international consensus was the key to "disgorging" the Canal from Nasser's possession. Despite the seemingly sympathetic words of Dulles to the British, Washington's approach to using military action against Egypt stood diametrically opposed to that of London. A day before meeting with Eden, Dulles stated to the American ambassador to Britain, "The US Government would not be in sympathy with any attempt to make the Egyptian Government rescind their nationalization decrees, or to regard them inoperative, under the threat of force."²⁴⁷ Why he did not directly relay this to the British government remains a mystery. For through obfuscation and blustering on the part of Dulles, the split between the allies remained obscured. While in the July 31 letter from Eisenhower to Eden, the president counsels strongly against military action, this warning is over-shadowed by Dulles' rhetoric in his face-to-face meetings with members of the British government. When selecting which message to take to heart, that of a cautious Eisenhower or a winking Dulles, it only takes a simple deduction to pick which one Anthony Eden chose to believe -- and which to disregard.

As agreed by Dulles and Eden steps were soon undertaken for an international conference to work toward setting up a practical arrangement of the Suez Canal under a transnational structure. Scheduled for mid-August in London, twenty-four nations were invited to participate. These included the remaining states that initially signed the 1888 Constantinople Convention -- the official treaty that prior to Nasser's seizure regulated the administration and supervision of the Suez Canal -- in addition to countries that

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Lucas, 151.

shipped significant cargo through the waterway.²⁴⁸ Heading into this conference, three of the principle players of the crisis all welcomed the idea of a forthcoming summit with pleasure; each with varying motives but the same intractable reason. Eisenhower, Eden, and Nasser all wanted more time.

Despite the word games Dulles played with Eden, the prime minister understood the United States disapproved of immediate military action by the British against Nasser. However since the United Kingdom could not mount an immediate invasion of Egypt, this attitude did not initially disturb him. Preparations for war remained the primary objective. On August 2, Queen Elizabeth signed a royal proclamation recalling reservists to active duty.²⁴⁹ By August 5, two Royal Navy aircraft carriers loaded with 4,000 parachutists and gunners sailed for the Mediterranean.²⁵⁰ While frantic preparations were underway for Operation Musketeer, the now joint British-French military staff planning the strike still needed time to set up the logistics and infrastructure for the attack.²⁵¹ Coordinating and moving the massive amounts of men and equipment for their upcoming mission stood as a major hurdle. The earliest tentative D-day for Musketeer stood as September 15.²⁵² In addition to engineering the military end of the operation, Eden also found it necessary to bolster political support for his proposed endeavor against Nasser. Although initial political and civic support for immediate action to regain the Suez Canal was strong across Britain, it did not last. As Anthony Nutting writes, “The spontaneous reaction of anger on the part of the British public, which followed the nationalization of the Canal, was now subsiding.”²⁵³ By mid-August roughly only 32% of Britons

²⁴⁸ “The eight surviving parties to the 1888 agreement were Egypt, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. The sixteen other nations that received invitations were Australia, Ceylon, Denmark, Ethiopia, West Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Sweden, and the United States.” Kingseed, 56.

²⁴⁹ Fullick and Powell, 45.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁵¹ BNA DEFE 13-238.

²⁵² Kyle, 177.

²⁵³ Nutting, 58.

supported military action in Egypt.²⁵⁴ Aware he needed to prepare public opinion to accept the initiation of Musketeer, Eden required an interval to accomplish this feat.

Rightfully believing that Nasser would never participate in a conference held in London or be willing to reverse his nationalization of the canal, Eden saw no harm in placating the Americans by taking part in a useless conference. Also by appearing open to a diplomatic solution, this allowed the British to claim they took the United States' advice by seeking a peaceful route before engaging in their planned invasion. Without the capability to strike Nasser quickly, it made sense for Eden to pretend to go along with the façade that an international symposium could solve the crisis. While all the while, British-French forces ceaselessly readied for battle.

In Cairo and Washington, the hopes were that the lengthier the crisis continued without open hostilities, the less chance of them occurring existed. Nasser supposed that the longer he held the Suez Canal then world opinion would eventually come around to its new status in the hands of the Egyptians as an accepted fact. In a bid to lessen the tensions of forcefully taking control of the Canal, the Egyptian president ordered it to remain open to all shipping and, as Eisenhower writes, Nasser promised, "The freedom of navigation in the Canal would not be affected."²⁵⁵ He also started downplaying the part America held in his decision to take it. In a press conference shortly after July 26, Nasser maintained that planning for the nationalization of the Suez Canal began long before the U.S. refused in aiding the building of the Aswan Dam.²⁵⁶ As Mohamed Heikal states, "Nasser was playing for time, trying to mobilize support for Egypt both in Arab countries and in the wider world opinion."²⁵⁷ The Eisenhower Administration, for its part, calculated that since Britain had not attacked forthrightly -- as Macmillan and Eden stated

²⁵⁴ Leon D. Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* (Urbana, United States: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 146; Eden disagreed with these numbers believing support for action were actually a lot higher. Writing in his memoirs he argues: "[P]ublic opinion in our own country held steadier than appeared from press reports. Left-wing and doubtful-minded journals saw in the possible use of force a handy stick with which to beat the Government. From early August onwards they did not hesitate to employ it." Eden, *Full Circle*, 445.

²⁵⁵ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 41.

²⁵⁶ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 133

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

the British Empire might -- then cooler heads were prevailing in London as the crisis progressed. In essence, the hastily British were taking the consul of the sage Americans. As the commander of French forces during Suez, Andre Beaufre argues, "Eden drew the conclusion that, once the conference had assembled, the Americans would support him, whereas in fact they were playing for time."²⁵⁸ Heading into the First London Conference, Nasser continued to work on world public opinion, Eden in completing his military preparations, and Eisenhower in believing he had made substantial headway with the British. The lit fuse of the crisis continued to burn towards open conflict.

The First London Conference, launched August 18 and ending on the 23, essentially came to naught. Boycotted by Egypt, the international meeting, in borrowing a Shakespearean term, was simply a lot of sound and fury signifying little -- thanks in very large part to the United States. "The conclusion," as Rab Butler wrote in his memoirs, "of the conference agreed to by eighteen of the twenty-two -- that an international board representing the maritime powers and Egypt should manage the canal -- had to be taken to Nasser."²⁵⁹ Headed to lead the delegation to Cairo was the Prime Minister of Australia Robert Menzies.²⁶⁰ As historian David Nichols ventures this Menzies mission "was almost certain to fail. Why would Nasser, his prestige so enhanced by his seizure by his seizure of the Suez Canal, accept an agreement that would effectively return authority over its operation to the British and French?"²⁶¹ It seemed -- at least to the British -- that at the very least only a viable and real threat of force could potentially achieve this huge capitulation on the part of Nasser. Nevertheless, the conference never broached the explicit threat of force towards Egypt if the nation rejected its proposal. However, still with the diplomatic backing of the eighteen powers of the London Conference in addition to the growing concentration of Anglo-French forces at

²⁵⁸ Andre Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger Inc., 1969), 25.

²⁵⁹ Rab Butler, *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1971), 189; The four opposing votes were cast by the Soviet Union, India, Indonesia, and Ceylon. Nichols, 155.

²⁶⁰ Robert Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memories of Men and Events* (London: Cassell & Company, 1967), 156.

²⁶¹ Nichols, 159.

the likely staging area of Cyprus, a pressured Nasser might have agreed to the Menzies' offer. It was either that or the invasion he knew Anthony Eden truly desired. Yet the words of two prominent Americans totally dashed any slim chance of this nonviolent resolution to the crisis from succeeding.

On August 28, during a press conference, John Foster Dulles, speaking on the crisis as a whole remarked, "This is not a matter which is primarily of U.S. concern but primarily of concern to the many countries whose economics are vitally dependent on the Canal."²⁶² It stood as a public hand washing by Dulles even Pilate would have envied. Speaking to the American press two days after the arrival of the Menzies mission in Cairo, Eisenhower completely and unconditionally disallowed any possible use of force if Nasser rejected the eighteen-nation plan. The American president stated that, "For ourselves, we are determined to exhaust every possible, every feasible method of peaceful settlement . . . We are committed to a peaceful settlement of this dispute, nothing else." In a message from Eden to Eisenhower on August 29, the British prime minister privately rebukes this type of sentiment to the American president by declaring, "It is our intention to proceed with our plans unless Nasser can be seen clearly and decisively to have given in."²⁶³ However, this firm stance by Eden did not stop Eisenhower from uttering only three days later that the Menzies' mission was in the eyes of the United States a toothless dragon.

Winthrop Aldrich, the then U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain later remarked, "Eisenhower cut the bottom right out of the thing by saying publicly, while Menzies was down there, that it never had been his intention to have force used at all . . . That was the ball game. It made it impossible for Menzies' mission to have any success at all."²⁶⁴

²⁶² Quoted in Menzies, 166.

²⁶³ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 2.

²⁶⁴ Oral history Interview with Winthrop Aldrich, conducted by David Berliner on October 16, 1972, Columbia University Oral History Project, located at Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library; Rab Butler agrees with Aldrich's assessment. In his memoirs Butler states: "Unfortunately, [Menzies] afterwards complained, the rug was pulled clean out from under his feet by President Eisenhower, who chose the very moment when Menzies was warning Nasser that the alternative to acceptance could be

Unsurprisingly it did not. After Menzies arrived for talks with the Egyptian leader on September 3, Nasser appeared to have little intention of coming to an equitable understanding with the Australian Prime Minister. Stating he would only meet during the evenings Nasser said, “Mr. Menzies it looks as if I may have a war on my hands and in the morning I must be preparing for it.”²⁶⁵ Nasser, a shrewd strategist, clearly understood the direction of the prevailing fury coming from London and Paris. During this first day of talks, Menzies warned Nasser that if he did not comply with the proposal than force might have to be used. However, after the reveal of Eisenhower’s pacifist-like remarks of the prior day in the Egyptian newspapers, the tiny chance of a fruitful dialogue went squarely out the window.²⁶⁶ As Menzies himself makes clear. In his autobiography the Australian writes, Eisenhower’s statement signaled to Nasser that, “the possibilities of force could be ignored, since he would naturally assume that force would not be employed against the will of the United States.”²⁶⁷ And as Menzies adds, “he could reject our proposals, knowing that if he rejected them quite strongly America would be casting about for new proposals which . . . would need to be more favorable to Egypt.”²⁶⁸ As the Menzies’ mission departed Cairo on September 9 in utter failure, the British -- still determined to force Nasser’s hand -- attempted to play their next card. Yet again, the Americans, not the Egyptians, were the ones to trump it.

Even before the failure of the Menzies’ mission in early September, the British were planning to take their case for Egyptian regime change to the United Nations.²⁶⁹ In his August 29 message to Eisenhower, Anthony Eden floated the idea to the American

force, to announce that the American would go to any length to secure a peaceful settlement.” Butler, 189.

²⁶⁵ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 148.

²⁶⁶ Eisenhower oddly questions about the intentions of the United Kingdom, “The British granted the French permission to station French troops on Cyprus. By now I was wondering at the times whether the British and French governments were really concerned over the success of the Menzies mission.” Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 48.

²⁶⁷ Menzies, 166.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ In a message to the Foreign Office dated August 26, 1956 Eden mentions this prospect. BNR, DEFE 13-238.

president.²⁷⁰ Looking to legitimize his impending invasion, Eden writes to Eisenhower that if Nasser refuses the eighteen-nations proposal then, “the balance of advantage lies in our taking the initiative in raising the matter in the Security Council immediately after a negative reply from Nasser.”²⁷¹ Asking for American support for this action, Eden continues, “I cannot emphasize too strongly that your active help to the success of this plan.”²⁷² Alluding to the actual reason for this measure he writes, “The plan might pay a dividend with regard to Nasser’s reactions but the main objective would be to put us in the best possible positive internationally in relation to the action we may be obliged to take.”²⁷³ Also with massive amounts of British and French men and arms arriving in Cyprus, Eden estimated that a concerned third-party, namely the Soviet Union, would raise the issue in the Security Council. Hence he wanted to beat the communists to the punch. As Eden writes in his memoirs, “The French and ourselves were determined that an appeal to the United Nations must be firmly based on the two conditions.”²⁷⁴ The first that no agreement be accepted by the U.S., France, and the U.K. short of the eighteen-power proposal and second, “that together we should resist any move by less friendly powers to limit our freedom of action.”²⁷⁵ If an Anglo-French plan along these stated lines passed into a U.N. Security Council resolution, it granted Eden an official stamp of approval in taking out Nasser with force. The Americans saw this as a tipping point. If such a resolution came to a decision of the Security Council then in front of the entire world, it would force the U.S. to declare publicly on whose side they stood; either with their trusted ally or an upstart dictator. That stood as a decision Eisenhower wanted to prolong as long as he could.

²⁷⁰DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 2.

²⁷¹ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 2.

²⁷² DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 2.

²⁷³ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 2.

²⁷⁴ Eden, *Full Circle*, 475.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

While the Americans dragged their feet about the prospect of the British and French taking their case to the United Nations, Dulles hatched a plan later entitled the Suez Canal Users Association or SCUA.²⁷⁶ Journalist Donald Neff writes, “While Eden and Mollet searched desperately for an internationally acceptable pretext to go to war with Egypt, Dulles applied all his formidable energies and legal prestidigitation to sidetrack them.”²⁷⁷ SCUA, a proposed international body to govern the Canal alongside Egypt, was for Dulles and Eisenhower a means to restraint the British and French from both arguing their side to the United Nations and also from preceding to invade Egypt -- the real goal of the two European powers. Historian Huge Thomas calls this planned Users’ Association, “Dulles’s (sic) most masterly scheme of evasion.”²⁷⁸ While Eden and the French Prime Minister Mollet Guy had their doubts about it accomplishing anything, they had their own reasons for going along with talks over SCUA.

As the deadline loomed for the September 15, the launch date of *Musketeer*, the time frame of the planned operation looked more and more unfavorable to the British. As world public opinion settled, Eden now believed that a pretext, more than just the nationalization of the Suez Canal, was required for his planned invasion of Egypt to seem somewhat justified in the eyes of the international community. Since July 26, Nasser had allowed all French and British shipping through the Canal and even tolerated these vessels refusal to pay their tolls to the Egyptian government -- the two nations, in an act of defiance, continued to make payments for their usage of the waterway to the old Suez Company.²⁷⁹ Also instead of flatly refusing to meet the Menzies mission, Nasser graciously listened to their proposals and at least seemed amenable to a peaceful solution.

²⁷⁶ A declassified top-secret Foreign Office document entitled “Events Leading up to the Suez Operation” states: “With the rejection by the Egyptian Government of the Eighteen Powers Proposals conveyed by the Menzies Mission a deep difference arose between the British and French governments on one hand and the United States Government on the other. The United Kingdom Government wished to go to the Security Council (though the French were not enthusiastic). Parliament was recalled to hear the announcement of this. Dulles diverted this intention by suggestion of a User’s Association and it was the formation of SCUA which was announced to Parliament.” BNA FO 800-725.

²⁷⁷ Nuff, 304.

²⁷⁸ Thomas, 76.

²⁷⁹ Nutting, 50.

These signs of reasonable action were not the kind that Britain and France found useful when attempting to paint Nasser as a new Hitler or Mussolini. A more clear-cut *casus belli* for the British, if not the French, who were uncaring on the subject of world opinion, needed finding. Ever wise to the fact Nasser stated, “The British and French are going to stay out there in the Mediterranean until they find a pretext to come in.”²⁸⁰

Furthermore, the objectives and logistics of Musketeer remained problems for the September 15 timetable. Initially planned as an all-out attack on Egypt, the preliminary directive called for a landing at Alexandria.²⁸¹ Philip Ziegler writes this strategy, “made it inevitable that an armed amphibious assault in a densely populated area would be preceded by massive bombardment by sea and air.”²⁸² With such a substantial attack, the civilian casualty rate stood to rank in the thousands or possibly in the tens of thousands.²⁸³ Even the military leadership balked at these figures, “As the details were worked out, the planners themselves became more and more aghast at what they were proposing.”²⁸⁴ On the behest of the Commander-in-Chief of Middle Eastern Land Forces, General Charles Knightley, who the British government charged to lead the attack against Egypt, the original plan for Musketeer was ordered restructured.²⁸⁵ In this revised attack-plan, the landing for the assault changed from Alexandria to Port Said with the retaking of the Suez Canal as the now initial objective.²⁸⁶ However, the marching orders of “Musketeer Revise” still held after the securing of the Canal Zone the Anglo-

²⁸⁰ Quoted in Kyle, 222.

²⁸¹ In an oral history Guy Millard Fyfield, prime secretary to Athoney Eden, overlays the transformation of Muskeeter. In 1991, he recounts: “One must also remember that originally the operation, when it was launched, if it was launched, was designed to be launched against Alexandria and to go to Cairo with the object of overthrowing Nasser and thereby solving the problem of the Canal, killing two birds with one stone you might say. In the course of the planning, not for political reasons, but primarily for military reason, I think, this was changed. And the operation which was originally called Musketeer then became Musketeer Revised. The objective was switched to Port Said and the Canal. Oral history interview with Guy Millard Fyfield, conducted by James S. Sutterlin on April 20, 1991, United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library,

²⁸² Ziegler, 542.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ BNA, DEFE 13-238; Kyle, 237.

²⁸⁶ Fullick and Powell, 56.

French forces redirecting their attack towards Cairo with the ultimate goal of ousting Nasser.

By mid-September to the chagrin of the Conservative Government, the glorious armed forces of the British Empire were still unprepared to tackle the Egyptian armies of Gamal Nasser. Having less to do with the combat-readiness of the British fighting men, the problem laid in the still nagging one of logistics. The June abandonment of the massive complex of military bases in the Canal Zone left Eden to stage his upcoming invasion of Egypt from the island of Cyprus. However due to inadequate airfields and harbors on the island in mid-September the RAF and the Royal Navy forces were divided between there and Malta. Extensive refitting of these facilities were still underway by mid-September. Keightley and Mountbatten needed more time in order to finish these improvements so they could muster their forces for a necessary coordinated attack. From early September on, Eden, on the counsel of both his political and military advisors, kept pushing the date for *Musketeer*, and later *Musketeer Revise*, back. With the buildup of the Anglo-French military forces in the Mediterranean evident to both his domestic and foreign critics, Eden soon faced an undesirable choice. He needed to order the invasion, ready or not, or call the whole thing off. The presence of mounting internal and external political pressure and the racketing of tensions caused by the gathering of such a large armed force demanded that current situation could not go on indefinitely. Backed into a corner, Eden found himself in a precarious position. If he refused to attack Egypt and through negotiations backed by the Americans, Nasser held onto to the Canal then Eden's government was certain to fall. Historian Jonathan Pearson writes, "By the 13 September, Eden found himself under intense pressure both from the opposition and from a split in his own party."²⁸⁷ Now war or the return of the Suez Canal stood as the only options. With Nasser standing firm on retaining his prize, the British prime minister badly needed a pretext for his invasion -- time, once his welcomed friend, now ticking against him.

²⁸⁷ Pearson, 81.

On September 14 the European pilots who steered the ship through the 120-mile length of the Suez Canal collectively walked off the job.²⁸⁸ Due to the complex and challenging nature of circumventing the Canal, trained navigators needed to helm the boats on their journey through it. Prior to July 1956, few Egyptian nationals held this occupation and the vast majority of these pilots were either French or British. After nationalization of the Canal, through the combination of the necessity to keep the seaway open and the refusal of Nasser to let these men quit, these Europeans had stayed at their post. But on orders of Eden to the Suez Canal Company, this all changed. Believing that the Egyptians were incapable of the difficult task of navigating the waterway, he concluded without the assistance of the mostly British and French pilots then shipping would ground to a halt through the channel. With the Suez Canal inoperable the precious supply of Middle Eastern oil had no way of reaching Western Europe. Just the excuse for the British to retake the Canal for the common good of Europe; it was a pretext that even the U.S. might find acceptable. However, this latest venture by Eden failed and even backfired.²⁸⁹ Nasser, who wisely foresaw this potential British provocation, had been busy ordering the training of Egyptian pilots just for this eventuality. In most cases, they filled the positions of the departing Europeans without a hitch.²⁹⁰ To the fury and wonderment of Eden and Mollet, the Canal remained open, and its productivity and efficiency even increased.²⁹¹ This episode showed to the world that despite British and French protests the Suez Canal laid in capable hands with Gamal Abdel Nasser.

On September 19 a second London Conference convened consisting of the eighteen nations that signed off on the Menzies mission. The creation of the so-called

²⁸⁸ Kingseed, 75.

²⁸⁹ As Diane Kunz states, “Nasser decisively won this round of the Suez confrontation. Both the British and French governments, using information supplied by the Suez Canal Company, had predicted total chaos that would further bolster their claim that Western intervention was a vital necessity and provide a perfect pretext for military action. Instead, during the week following the departure of the Western pilots, Egyptian and other pilots shepherded almost the usual numbers of ships through the canal.” Kunz, 99.

²⁹⁰ Cole Kingseed writes, “Nasser was operating the Suez Canal with his own pilots more efficiently than the British.” Kingseed, 75.

²⁹¹ Aburish, 116.

Suez Canal Users' Association was the agenda of the meeting. The intention of SCUA, at least in the selling of it to the British by the Americans, was to form an international organization to manage the Canal by hiring its pilots and collecting its tolls. Otherwise, as Eden viewed it, "to convoy ships of its members through the canal if the Egyptians refused or proved unable to do so."²⁹² However, as agreed by almost everyone involved in the crisis through hindsight, it had a more clandestine *raison d'etre* in the mind of its actually creator, Dulles. Eden's optimistic attitude on the potential usefulness of SCUA did not last long.

Even before the gathering of its participants, Dulles cut the floor directly from under SCUA. On September 13, during a press conference the American secretary of state declared that in the view of the United States the forthcoming User's Association had no authority to use military force against Egypt if Nasser did not comply with the terms of its arrangement.²⁹³ He further added that the organization was strictly a volunteer body that could not require its individual members to follow SCUA's mandates.²⁹⁴ These utterings by the American left SCUA as nothing more than a paper tiger. The credit for why the British ever agreed to host or participate in a conference setting up such a meaningless association must go directly to Dulles. Although the American actually thought up the notion of SCUA, Dulles nevertheless convinced Eden to announce it to the world as a British proposal. Still tendered to the idea after the Americans categorically refused to support its rulings with military force, the U.K. had no choice but to follow through with the Second London Conference and hope for the best. By the first days of the meetings, it appeared they were expecting too much. Remarking on this merited frustration, Anthony Eden writes, "It became clear to us only gradually that the American conception of the association was now evolving so fast that it would end as an agency for collecting dues for Nasser."²⁹⁵ Anthony Nutting described the United States' position of a voluntary nature for SCUA as meaning, "the User's Club

²⁹² Eden, *Full Circle*, 488.

²⁹³ DDF, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series Box No. 7, Folder Dulles, Foster Sept. '56, Folder 2.

²⁹⁴ DDF, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series Box No. 7, Folder Dulles, Foster Sept. '56, Folder 2.

²⁹⁵ Eden, *Full Circle*, 490.

would do no more than crystallize the status quo and would not be empowered to bring any further pressure on Egypt.”²⁹⁶ To Eden and his Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd it became obvious the route envisioned by Dulles for SCUA was a ruse from stopping the British and French from acting in their best interests (i.e. invading Egypt). The conference ended on September 21, with nothing accomplished except scheduling yet another conference for October 1, for the opening of the now christened Suez Canal Users Association. Sick and tired of Dulles’ time-wasting maneuvers and in contradiction of the wishes of the United States, the British and French petitioned their case against Egypt to the United Nations Security Council on September 23.²⁹⁷ True to form, Eisenhower refused to sponsor the proposed resolution, leaving the Eden and Mollet to go it alone.

On October 13, after ten days of discussions on the issue, the Security Council, through the veto of the Soviet representative, rejected any direct action against Egypt under a United Nation’s banner.²⁹⁸ “There was no on in that room at the United Nations,” Eden states, “at the conclusion of the vote, who supposed for an instant that any life was left in the work of the London Conference.”²⁹⁹ The countless hours spent in both international conferences and meetings at the United Nations garnered nothing for Eden in his duel against Nasser. Time for action was at hand, and with the Americans steadfastly refusing to do anything but delay, the British opened to an intriguing offer made by the French.

Unlike the United States, Great Britain found a faithful ally during the crisis in the nation of France. Reminiscent of the world wars, the Anglo-French alliance stood throughout the events of 1956 cemented in stone. With no vacillating, the French rallied from the start to the cause of their European neighbor. Andre Beaufre, the commander of the French expeditionary forces for Suez, recounts, “As early as 31 July Colonel Prieur of the Army Staff went to London to announce the colour of the French money: France

²⁹⁶ Nutting, 64.

²⁹⁷ Lloyd, 149.

²⁹⁸ Eden, *Full Circle*, 505.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

was ready to commit two divisions to Egypt.”³⁰⁰ Only just a day before Prieur’s offer the country’s Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, matched any of bellicose rhetoric originating from the other side of the English Channel. Labeling Nasser a “would-be dictator,” Mollet decried the Egyptian leader as a Hitler imitator.³⁰¹ Alongside their British allies, the nationalization of the Suez Canal stood as an intolerable act for the French government.³⁰² Just as with Britain, the economic consequences of the potential closure of the waterway would leave France in dire straits. For the nation, the access of Middle Eastern oil was a vital necessity. Although state prestige and concern for its perception as a world power mattered to the Mollet government, it never factored into their decisions during the crisis as much as it did to the British. However, another dynamic urgently pushed France for the overthrow of Nasser.

Mired in a bloody guerrilla war against Arab nationalists in Algeria since 1954, the French believed that a direct link existed between this conflict and the Suez Crisis.³⁰³ Considered by many French citizens not simply as an overseas colony but an actual providence of France, Algeria stood as a test of the will of the nation. The red, white and blue tricolor had flown over the Northern African territory since 1830, but by 1956, the cities and towns of the region were erupting into full-fledged warzones in a bid to tear it down. Unlike the retreat from Indochina in 1954, the battle to hold on to Algeria -- where over one million Pied-Noirs (French-descendent inhabitants) were fighting for their homes and businesses -- was to the French very personal.³⁰⁴ Much of the finger pointing from Paris for the unrest and violence in this North African providence pointed towards Cairo. Mollet considered Nasser as the number one instigator and prime supporter for this nationalist insurrection spearheaded by a group calling themselves

³⁰⁰ Beaufre, 25.

³⁰¹ Harold Callender, "Nasser is Hitler Imitator, France's Premier Charges," *New York Times*, July 31, 1956, 1.

³⁰² Dwight Eisenhower writes, “Though the British government was the largest single shareholder in the Suez Canal Company -- 44 per cent – private French citizens held more than 50 per cent of the shares.” Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 77.

³⁰³ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 162.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 545.

the National Liberation Front (FNL).³⁰⁵ As Diane Kunz states, “By striking at Nasser would deny the FLN material support and would help assuage the growing feeling of impotence engendered by the peculiarly destructive nature of guerrilla war.”³⁰⁶ With Nasser deposed the French government could cut off Egyptian backing towards the Arab nationalists within its own borders. Arguing this point, the Resident Minister in Algeria stated, “One French division in Egypt is worth four divisions in North Africa.”³⁰⁷ As with Eden, Mollet viewed the crisis as more to do than just the control of the Suez Canal; the Frenchman saw an opportunity to rid his citizens of the most vocal and active international champion for Algerian independence -- Gamal Abdel Nasser.³⁰⁸ By mid-October, through the stringent urgings of the powers-that-be in Paris, France brought another interested party into Eden’s anti-Nasser coalition, one that radically altered the entire dynamic of the Suez Crisis.

France not bound to any so-called special relationship cared quite a bit less in placating the U.S. or attempting to garner American support during the crisis than its British ally. As early as July 31, after Robert Murphy in London refused to support armed intervention, Mollet already began feeling the sense that America had abandoned France.³⁰⁹ Even at that early of a date, a covert meeting had taking place with another close ally, who the French trusted not to shrink from what needed doing. Unbeknownst to either the British or the Americans, French military officials on July 29 had initiated contingency planning with Israel for a possible joint attack against Egypt.³¹⁰ A long-time supplier of arms to Israel, by 1956 France considered the Jewish state one of its closest allies. The same about Israel could not be said concerning the United Kingdom. Only eight years prior, the British Empire fought a bloody guerrilla war against the same men who now governed Israel. In addition, Anthony Eden -- despite his troubled dealings in

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 162.

³⁰⁶ Kunz, 77-78.

³⁰⁷ Sylvia K. Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel From Suez to the Six Day War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

³⁰⁸ Diane Kunz writes: “Algeria provided the central motivation behind the incessant pressure exerted by the French prime minister (sic) Guy Mollet and his colleagues on their British counterparts to take firm action against Nasser. Kunz, 77.

³⁰⁹ Kyle, 156.

³¹⁰ Crosbie, 68.

the Middle East -- considered himself an Arabist and believed his nation's duty remained to lead, if not rule, the Arab world. His adamant backing in forming the Baghdad Pact is a perfect example of this sentiment. During the crisis the British kept Israel diplomatically shut off from any involvement in dread of negative Arab reaction such participation would engender.³¹¹ However, numerous times between July and September both Mollet and the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau prodded the British to include Israel in their war planning for Operation Musketeer.³¹² Fearing how this involvement would appear to both the Americans and the rest of the world, Eden categorically refused such a provocative measure. Nevertheless, by the middle of October, with the unaltered political climate and the desperate need to act least every fell apart, the British prime minister opened to the idea of a covert arrangement with the Israelis. With the once wartime ally, Eisenhower, refusing to support him, Eden turned to a former enemy of the British Empire for assistance.³¹³

On October 21, Eden ordered Selwyn Lloyd to undertake a secret meeting on behalf of the British Government. The next day Lloyd, "announced that he had a heavy cold and cancelled his existing appointments."³¹⁴ Arriving by plane in France, as described by a companion of Lloyd, the British Foreign Minister was shuffled into a private home in Sèvres where the French and Israelis were already discussing future plans.³¹⁵ In this French villa, the Prime Minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion and Mollet

³¹¹ Mordechai Bar-on, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955-1957* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 182-183.

³¹² Avi Shlaim, "The Protocol of Sèvres, 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot," *International Affairs*, Volume. 73, No. 3 (July, 1997), 528.

³¹³ Due to his membership of Haganah, a pro-Zionist terrorist organization that murdered British soldiers, in 1946 the United Kingdom issued a warrant for the immediate arrest of David Ben-Gurion should he set foot on British territory. Michael Bar-Zohar, *The Armed Prophet: a Biography of Ben Gurion* (London: Arthur Barker Limited, 1967), 88.

³¹⁴ Oral history interview with Sir Donald Logan, conducted by James S. Sutterlin on April 22, 1991, United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library.; Sandbrook, *Never Had it so Good*, 15.

³¹⁵ Oral history interview with Donald Logan.

called on Lloyd to help end the Suez Affair once and for all.³¹⁶ On direct orders from Eden, the Englishman readily agreed. The new plan organized by the three nations at Sèvres held for the Israelis to attack Egypt across their shared border and menacingly move towards the Suez Canal. After this initial outbreak of hostilities, British and French military forces, in the ironic guise of peacemakers, were to land -- just as proposed in Operation Musketeer Revise -- at Port Said and seize the Canal for its “protection.”³¹⁷ Eden demanded only two concessions from Ben-Gurion and Mollet to his agreement with this strategy. One, for the Israelis to hit the Egyptians hard -- not to hold back -- and two, that the appearance of the Anglo-French attack against Egypt kept, by any means, to look as an interdiction to separate the already warring parties.³¹⁸ If these conditions could be met, then Eden believed he had finally found the right pretext for the war he so longingly sought.³¹⁹ Unbeknownst to the rest of the world, on October 24 a top-secret document entitled the Protocols of Sèvres -- signed by French foreign minister Christian Pineau, Ben-Gurion, and Patrick Dean, an Assistant Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office -- formalized the collision on the part of the three nations in jointly attacking Egypt.³²⁰

On October 17, just prior to the secret meeting of Sèvres, Britain, now formally committed to a tacit alliance with France and Israel in invading Egypt, stopped all

³¹⁶ If one is looking for any information on the Suez Crisis, do not, repeat do not look to David Ben-Gurion's *Memoirs*. This book is the most unorganized piece of writing probably ever produced and contains nothing of importance on the subject.

³¹⁷ Selwyn Lloyd maintained no formal arrangement with Israel for military action ever occurred. Writing on the topic he states, “We had no plan for co-operation with Israel. We said that we would not defend Egypt, and we had agreed to a French proposal that if Israel attacked Egypt we would intervene to protect the Canal,” Lloyd, 184.

³¹⁸ Oral history interview with Donald Logan.

³¹⁹ Logan states, “Oh sure, yes, of course. It was a pretext. Eden was being asked to help the French to get the Israelis to launch the attack that would be, he hoped, Nasser's downfall. Eden saw that he couldn't simply say, ‘right, we are going to do this with Israel’ because the feeling in the country at the time was too strong to make that acceptable but he had to find a way of covering his action, a pretext,” Oral history interview with Donald Logan.

³²⁰ Shlaim, 509.

attempts to influence the United States Government over the Suez Crisis.³²¹ Since receiving a strongly worded message from Eisenhower on September 3, Eden essentially understood the United States rejected the use of force against Nasser.³²² Yet in Anthony Nutting's estimation the more Eisenhower warned Eden: "that America and world opinion would not support him . . . Eden became to conceal his hand from the Americans. And after the decision to gang up with Israel had been taken, Eisenhower was told nothing at all."³²³ The America president states by late-October, "It looked like the British had given up We couldn't figure out exactly what was happening because, as I say, finally all communications just ceased between us on the one hand, and the French and the British on the other."³²⁴ Dulles, in a meeting with his staff, also showed concerned over this abrupt change noting, "It's very strange that we have heard nothing whatever from the British for ten days. We must try to find out what they and the French are up to."³²⁵ For the first time since the formation of the crisis, Dulles and Eisenhower were totally out of the loop in regards to the pending actions of their British allies. Although American intelligence reported increased mobilization by the Israelis military, the U.S. could not decipher which neighbor of the Jewish state these bellicose actions were intended for -- Jordan, Syria, or Egypt.³²⁶ Totally in the dark, the Eisenhower Administration, in the throes of a presidential election battle and worried by a brewing crisis in Hungary, hoped for the best.

Also hoping for the best in the fading days of October 1956 was Anthony Eden. Although much criticism had since been lobed at him for deciding to take the path of

³²¹ Walker, 160; Anthony Nutting writes, "From the moment when Eden decided to go along with the Franco-Israeli conspiracy, the most elaborate precautions were taken to preserve absolute secrecy, even to the point of misleading our friends and 'enemies' alike. . . . Nobody was kept more completely in the dark than the President of the United States." Nutting, 110.

³²² BNA PREM 11-1177.

³²³ Nutting, 110.

³²⁴ Oral history interview with Dwight Eisenhower, conducted by Philip A. Crowe, Dulles Oral History Project, located at Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

³²⁵ Quoted in Murphy, 388.

³²⁶ DDE, White House Central Files (confidential File), 1953-61 Subject Series Box No. 82, Suez Canal Crisis, Folder 1.

“collusion,” by that time Eden held very few cards left to play. While some historians, like Johanthan Pearson in his book *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis: Reluctant Gamble* (2003), argue Eden folded to intense pressure from the French to conspire with their Israeli allies, it is hard to conceive that it took a lot of arm squeezing to get the British Prime Minister to join in an alliance against his arch-enemy Nasser. Having exhausted all attempts to earn American support for military action, he needed a resolution that excluded the direct involvement of the United States. With tens of thousands of British servicemen overseas anxiously waiting for the word to attack, and a political situation deteriorating daily, Eden’s creditability and political survival stood on the line. If he withdrew the British military without any meaningful concessions from Nasser, Eden’s government would undoubtedly fall. And if the numerous conferences, meetings, and diplomatic missions proved anything it was Nasser persisted in steadfastly keeping the Canal unless forced to disgorge it. With the refusal of Eisenhower even to seriously contemplate meaningful economic sanctions or the use of force, the situation became an effective stalemate. Each side were sticking to their guns, but only Nasser’s, through his holding of the Canal, were loaded. Unlike at the beginning of the Suez Crisis, when time seemed firmly on the British side, now, with Dulles numerous delaying tactics taking their toll, it was quickly running out. Collusion, as the critics of the Protocols of Sèvres have called it, stood for Eden as a way out of all of this malaise.

However, there remained an all-important caveat to this track; American support of a substantial amount had to materialize for Britain to achieve its goals in this risky endeavor. While certainly Eisenhower, and to a lesser degree Dulles, denounced any attempt for Britain to resolve the Suez Crisis by armed intervention, to what extent were they serious remained in Eden’s estimation debatable. Once bullets started flying how could the United States abandon one of its closest allies. In effect all the British needed was the tacit backing of their Atlantic partner -- not direct military assistance. Support in the United Nations, help with keeping the Soviets at bay, and most importantly access to North American oil if the Canal became inoperable. All critical needs to the British, but only limited liabilities to the Americans. Heading into the last week of October, Eden gambled that when push came to shove the United States -- while unhappy about being

placed in such a precarious position -- would ultimately support their English-speaking cousins.

CHAPTER V

A VERY BRITISH GAMBIT (October 29 – December 22)

“The British Cabinet certainly made a profound miscalculation as to the likely reaction in Washington to the Franco-British intervention.”³²⁷
-Harold Macmillan from his memoirs

“Those who began this operation [the British and the French] should be left . . . to boil in their own oil.”³²⁸
-Dwight Eisenhower remarking on the unfolding crisis on October 30, 1956

On October 29, 1956, to quote the words of poet John Milton, all hell broke loose. As according to plan, David Ben-Gurion commenced Operation Kadesh -- an aggregated invasion of the Sinai Peninsula.³²⁹ Under the cover of nightfall, aircraft of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) dropped an airborne brigade near the strategic Mitla Pass, only 31 miles from the Suez Canal.³³⁰ As the vanguard of paratroopers, “were digging in on the Mitla heights, two armoured columns crossed the frontier and started their dash across the desert, sweeping aside the small Egyptian detachments in their path.”³³¹ Initially the motive for the Israeli attack was a complete mystery to Nasser and his closest advisors. The IDF forces racing across in a mad sprint towards the Suez made no sense to the Egyptian military staff; it left the Israelis open to both aerial bombardment and a cutting off of their lengthening supply lines. Oddly, Nasser assumed that “the only plausible explanation offered was that Israel now believed Britain and France to be on the point of

³²⁷ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 157.

³²⁸ Quoted in Kyle, 386.

³²⁹ British author Robert Henriques states, “The Egyptian force in the Sinai Peninsula amounted to approximately 45,000 men, all of them deployed in positions which were formidably prepared for defense. Israel put against them a force of approximately the same size.” Robert Henriques, *100 Hours to Suez* (New York: Viking Press Inc., 1957), 54.

³³⁰ S. L. A. Marshall, *Sinai Victory: Command Decisions in History's Shortest War, Israel's Hundred-Hour Conquest of Egypt East of Suez, Autumn, 1956* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1958), 25.

³³¹ Bar-Zohar, *The Armed Prophet*, 240.

reaching a settlement with Egypt, so the crisis was over, and a frustrated Israel was trying to settle its own private scores with Egypt in a hurry.”³³² By mid-morning on Tuesday, October 30, the erroneousness of this scenario dissipated when reports reached Nasser of RAF reconnaissance aircraft spotted over the Suez Canal.³³³ The astute Egyptian president now fully recognized the prearrangement of the situation.

As news reached America of the Israeli invasion -- unlike the bewilderment of the Egyptian government -- the first thoughts of both Dulles and Eisenhower turned to possible involvement by Britain and France. On first hearing of the attack, Dulles in an effort to “smoke them out and see where they stand” called for an audience of the British and French ambassadors.³³⁴ Conspicuously neither was available for consultations. In a meeting later that day with the president, Dulles stated that the U.S., “must expect British and French intervention. In fact, they appear to be ready for it and may even have concerted their action with the Israelis.”³³⁵ Writing in *Waging Peace* (1960), Eisenhower notes, “Some at the meeting speculated that the British and French might be counting on the hope that when the chips are down, the United States would have to go along with them, however much we disapproved.”³³⁶ Then he chilly adds, “But we did not consider that course.”³³⁷ By the evening of the 29, Eisenhower decided that the best recourse for the United States was to introduce a resolution in the United Nations condemning the Israeli attack and calling them to withdrawal immediately from Egyptian territory. In a meeting that night between Henry Cabinet Lodge, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., and his British counterpart, Pierce Dixon, the Americans received their first true indication on how the government of the United Kingdom stood on the evolving situation. Eisenhower in a telegram to Eden dated October 30 recounts the event. As Eisenhower writes, Lodge requested Dixon to support the upcoming American resolution in the United Nations

³³² The author goes on to add, “Later, of course, it would be possible to discern the method behind the apparent Israeli madness. If the threat to the canal, which was to provide the rationale for Anglo-French intervention, was to appear realistic, Israeli forces had to at least make a feint in that direction.” Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 178.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 179.

³³⁴ Nichols, 201,

³³⁵ Quoted in Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 73.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

denouncing Israel's aggression in the Middle East.³³⁸ On Dixon's reaction, Eisenhower tells Eden, "We were astounded to find that he was completely unsympathetic, stating frankly his Government would not agree any action whatsoever to be taken against Israel."³³⁹

The next day Eisenhower received a message from Eden expressing no desire to aid Nasser against Israel and stating Egypt had brought the attack upon itself.³⁴⁰ He further went on to state, "we cannot afford to see the Canal closed or to lose the shipping which is on daily passage through it We feel decisive action should be taken at once to stop the hostilities."³⁴¹ Ending the communiqué the prime minister stated he would write again that day after meeting with Guy Mollet and Christian Pineau. By mid-morning Lodge had introduced the resolution calling for Israel to withdraw its troop from Egyptian soil to the U.N. Security Council.³⁴² In historic firsts, Britain and France exercised their veto power against the resolution; then again, when the Soviet Union introduced a resolution along the same lines.³⁴³ Although the vetoes caused an uproar among the assembled diplomats, to Eden and Mollet, who failed to gain the international organization's support earlier in the month, it must have felt like appropriate payback. Regardless the two men, sans the U.N., were busy issuing their own highly controversial resolution the very same day.

As agreed upon during the clandestine meeting at Sèvres, the Britain and France formally interceded into the fray. On October 30, at 4:30 P.M. Eden while addressing the House of Common announced the issuing of an ultimatum ostensibly directed at both Israel and Egypt.³⁴⁴ It demanded the two nations ceased military action, withdraw their forces at least ten miles away from the Suez Canal and allow the occupation of the Canal

³³⁸ BNA PREM 11-1177.

³³⁹ BNA PREM 11-1177.

³⁴⁰ DDE, Ann Whitman File International Series Box No. 21 Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56 Folder 4.

³⁴¹ DDE, Ann Whitman File International Series Box No. 21 Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56 Folder 4.

³⁴² *Finer*, 367.

³⁴³ *Nuff*, 377-378.

³⁴⁴ *Lloyd*, 195.; Nasser received the actual Anglo-French ultimatum only a half an hour before at 4 P.M. London time, *Heikal*, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 179.

Zone by Anglo-French forces, or face immediate attack by Britain and France.³⁴⁵ He gave a deadline of 12 hours for compliance with his mandate. Eden stated the motive for these measures “was to separate the belligerents and to guarantee freedom of transit through the canal by the ships of all nations.”³⁴⁶ However, the mechanics and wording of the ultimatum gave little doubt of its true intention. With only Egyptian forces in a ten-mile radius of the Canal and Nasser still controlling the waterway, the Anglo-French threat for noncompliance only applied to Egypt. For these reasons, the role of impartial peacekeepers on the part Eden and Mollet found few credulous believers anywhere in the world. Nevertheless, both premiers formally received the backing of their respective legislative assemblies shortly after the announcement of their ultimatum; in the British Commons Eden received 270 votes to 218, and in the French National Assembly Mollet garnered a majority of 368 to 182.³⁴⁷ With the die cast, now the only thing left was for the British to inform their most crucial, yet unapprised, ally -- the Americans.

Fearing U.S. attempts to halt the issuing of the Anglo-French ultimatum, Eden did not inform Eisenhower until he had already officially announced it to the world. As promised in an earlier telegram that day, the British prime minister cabled Eisenhower after his speech to the Commons. In it, he outlined the demands he had already issued and attempted to excuse his decision in leaving the Americans in the dark on this action.³⁴⁸ Eden closed with hopes that “after the dust settles there may well be a chance for our doing a really constructive piece of work together.” Reception of the news of the two-power ultimatum at the White House was anything but welcoming. Dulles, speaking to Eisenhower, called it about as “cruel and brutal” demand as he had ever

³⁴⁵ Nichols, 206.

³⁴⁶ Eden, *Full Circle*, 527.

³⁴⁷ Thomas, 126.

³⁴⁸ American Ambassador Winthrop Aldrich maintains the British issuing of the threat truly caught the United States off guard. He writes, “The effect on our Government of this sudden and unexpected British and French move and of the actual opening of hostilities against Egypt two days later was catastrophic. The British Government had been told over and over again at the highest levels that we wished to do everything possible to avoid the use of force, and for force to be used without any warning came as a profound shock. Winthrop W. Aldrich, “The Suez Crisis: A Footnote to History,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 45, Number 3 (April, 1967), 541-552.

encountered.³⁴⁹ The president seethed to an aide, “I’ve just never seen great powers make such a complete mess and botch of things!”³⁵⁰ Eisenhower fired off a new telegram to Eden, which the president later categorized as a warning.³⁵¹ Writing on the current situation he stated to Eden, “I must urgently express to you my deep concern at the prospect of this drastic action” and “that peaceful processes can and should prevail to secure a solution.”³⁵² Clearly, the British prime minister did not comprehend the warning or just disregarded it. Eden cabled back to Eisenhower later that night his desire to use parts of the president’s message to justify the British Government’s position in the ongoing debate over it in the House of Commons.³⁵³ To Eisenhower it was almost too much to comprehend; he fired off a response telling Eden to do, as he liked. Clearly it would take more than interpersonal messages between head of states to halt the British from the widening the war.

At dusk the next day, October 31, British aircraft appeared over Cairo. They delivered with fury the wrath of an Empire finally seeking it revenge. Bombs dropping across the Egyptian capital specifically targeted airfields and the Egyptian air force.³⁵⁴ The RAF then turned to knocking out Radio Cairo and dropping millions of leaflets blaming the Egyptian population in putting their faith in the hands of Gamal Abdel Nasser.³⁵⁵ These latter planned psychological attacks put the Britain’s role as unbiased arbiter in jeopardy, but by then it became less of a priority. The immediate goals of taking out Nasser and regaining the Suez Canal took precedence over maintaining the

³⁴⁹ Nichols, 207.

³⁵⁰ Quoted in Nichols, 208.

³⁵¹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 77.

³⁵² BNA, PREM 11-1177.

³⁵³ BNA, PREM 11-1177.

³⁵⁴ Carter, 27; Christopher Hitchens and W.W. Rostow writes of this first British blow: “Most of the Egyptian Air Force was destroyed on the ground, removing the threat of any retaliation against Israel. So complete was the surprise that Abu Sueir airfield, seeing the approaching planes, radioed to them, ‘Can we help you?’ Cam the reply ‘Yes please—beam us in’; followed by the bombs.” Hitchens, Christopher and W. W. Rostow, “Mad Dogs and Others: Suez 1956.” *Grand Street*, Volume 6, No. 1 (Autumn, 1986), 112.

³⁵⁵ Thomas, 131; Kunz, 119; “The British and French Air Forces destroyed a total of 260 Egyptians planes on the ground, most of them during the first thirty-six hours of the battle.” Fullick and Powell, 121.

now highly dubious pretext for these actions. With other coordinated attacks on the Egyptian airbases throughout the nation, Britain and France soon gained air superiority over most of the country. By November 1, as the Anglo-French armada rode anchor off the islands of Crete and Malta, invasion loomed close. In preparations for hostile landings, Nasser desperately ordered the bulk of the Egyptian army to withdraw from the Sinai in order to protect Cairo and instructed the workers of the Suez Canal to prepare for guerrilla warfare. It seemed certain to him and the rest of the world, nothing was stopping the British and French from an all-out invasion of his homeland. However, as the French, Israeli, and British battled the Egyptians, another war flared between Britain and America. This conflict -- fought out in the trenches of the United Nations, finical corridors of power, and boiling over to the high seas -- was the one that ultimately saved the Egyptian dictator from the hands of his embittered enemies.

On the first of November, in a bid to stymie their headstrong allies, the Americans struck back. In a televised speech, Eisenhower addressed the nation, and the world, over the Anglo-French bombardment. On air the president made clear, "The United States was not consulted in any way about any phase of these actions. Nor were we informed of them in advance."³⁵⁶ Distancing the U.S. further from its European allies he added, "As it is the manifest right of any of these nations to take such decisions and actions, it is likewise our right, if our judgment so dictates, to dissent. We believe these actions to have been taking in error."³⁵⁷ The message was clear to all; Britain and France had acted alone with no covert or tactic backing by the United States. To cement this fact, the U.S. again went to the United Nations.

Circumventing the Security Council, where the definite vetoes of Britain and France terminated any hope of progress, Eisenhower directed Ambassador Lodge to take the U.S. case for an immediate cease-fire to the General Assembly. Fearful that any inaction might cause ruin to the foreign policy of the United States, Dulles summed up the need to press the issue:

³⁵⁶ Quoted in Sherman Adams, *First-hand Report: The Story of the Eisenhower Administration* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 257.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

If we are not now prepared to assert our leadership in this cause, then leadership will certainly be seized by the Soviet Union For many years now the United States had been walking a tightrope between the effort to maintain our old and valued relations with our British and French allies on the one hand and on the other trying to assure ourselves of the friendship and understanding of the newly independent countries who have escaped colonialism. Unless we now assert and maintain this leadership, all of these newly independent countries will turn from us to the U.S.S.R. We will be looked upon as forever tied to British and French colonialist policies.³⁵⁸

As Eden attests, here the Americans succeeded, he writes, “It was not Soviet Russia, or any Arab state, but the Government of the United States which took the lead in [the General] Assembly against Israel, France, and Britain.”³⁵⁹ As an emergency session of the General Assembly convening at 5:00 P.M. on November 1, the cards were clearly stacked against the British and their allies. In a marathon like Assembly meeting that lasted twelve continuous hours, finally ending at 4 A.M. the next morning, the British and French delegates were exposed to almost universal censure and blinding criticism.³⁶⁰ As Eden described it, “The Assembly was in a mood to punish. The hunt was up after Israel and the ‘colonial’ powers.”³⁶¹ Now with the complete absence of any convivial talk about “disgorging” the Canal from Nasser, Dulles, himself, introduced the resolution calling on the British to end their anti-Egyptian crusade. The final count had 64 countries voting for the American resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire and only five rejecting it; these were Britain, France, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand.³⁶² The vote was devastating to the United Kingdom’s position on the world’s stage.³⁶³ Although the Assembly resolution, unlike a Security Council motion, did not have the weight of an order, its effectively labeled Britain, alongside France and Israel, as international pariahs flaunting the established rule of law.

³⁵⁸ Quoted in Neff, 390.

³⁵⁹ Eden, *Suez Crisis*, 183.

³⁶⁰ Kunz, 126.

³⁶¹ Eden, *Full Circle*, 541.

³⁶² Lucas, 280; Nutting, 132.

³⁶³ Andre Beaufre writes, “As soon as the smaller nations realized that the United States was no longer covering the Franco-British action, the General Assembly moved in to the kill, voting [a] firmly worded resolution,” Beaufre, 97.

At dawn on November 2, Anthony Eden found himself in a perilous position. Since the issuing of the two-power ultimatum and the ensuing air campaign, domestic disapproval had sharply increased for his government's policies. By then opinion polls showed only 37 percent of the British public supported his decision to "take military action in Egypt."³⁶⁴ Only two days earlier, on October 31, Eden received the resignation of his political protégé, Anthony Nutting. Refusing to go along with what he termed collusion, Nutting effectively gave up his political career to protest Eden's decision to join Britain's lot with France and Israel.³⁶⁵ When accepting Nutting's notice, the prime minister optimistically concluded the meeting by saying: "I hope, in spite of all this, that we shall see something of each other in the future."³⁶⁶ After the meeting, they never saw each other again.³⁶⁷ Moreover, in Parliament the tide against intervention in the conflict continued to rise. Although Eden had substantially won the vote for his ultimatum in the House of Commons, the divisions for and against fell directly down party lines. Without the support of Labour the resulting vote, "showed conclusively that Britain was launching its military action against the expressed desires of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition."³⁶⁸ The now escalating international opposition, spurred on by the United States, only worsened Eden's home front troubles. Adding to these difficulties were also multiplying concerns originating from Britain's two allies, France and Israel.

Fearing these mounting pressures might soon break the will of the British to continue with the agreed upon plan, the French started baiting their English allies to launch their invasion forces for Egypt post haste. Beginning with the bombing of Cairo, Mollet and Pineau lobbied for an immediate follow-up with the landing of their respective ground troops. The Frenchmen argued if the Anglo-French forces would coordinate with the Israeli military then a quick and safe landing at Port Said could be assured. If the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) crossed the Suez and hammered the Egyptians then Operation Musketeer Revised would assuredly succeed. Eden, fearful of

³⁶⁴ Epstein, 142.

³⁶⁵ Nutting, 122.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ Epstein, 69.

the charge of collusion with Israel, refused any attempt to synchronize the two allied forces. As Keith Kyle states, “France, from the beginning, was engaged in a fighting a different war from Britain.”³⁶⁹ While Britannia was, “inhibited by her Commonwealth ties, her ‘special relationship’ with the United States, and that regard for appearances which both her domestic politics and her record at the UN required,” France only desired to destroy Nasser and aid their ally Israel caring little in pretexts and perceptions.³⁷⁰ Without the direct aid of Israel in the forthcoming landing, launching immediately after the start of the air campaign stood as a risky proposition.

Once Nasser understood the three-power dynamic of the attack against him, he had ordered the Egyptian army to the west side of the Suez Canal, the side British and French sought to land and then fight towards to Cairo.³⁷¹ Also, with negotiations in the General Assembly reaching a fever-pitch on November 1 and 2, the idea had been batted around that a United Nations peacekeeping force should intercede in the ongoing conflict. The British believed that their yet unengaged ground troops could take up that banner if the premeditated invasion fell apart. After the debacle during the fight over the ceasefire resolution at the United Nations, Eden rightfully held doubts that the original secret Sèvres scenario remained workable. Although still committed to landings at Port Said, the British sought cover for their invasion; but the French were still not entirely convinced. They saw capitulation in the ranks. Speaking of Eden, Pineau remarked he “is no Churchill. He has neither the tenacity nor the steel of nerves. The test, instead of strengthening him, exhausts him. It is not yet a ‘breakdown,’ but we are not far from it.”³⁷² This coming breakdown originated from attempting to please everyone and pleasing no one. No matter how much talking, explaining, or pleading with Eisenhower and Dulles these Americans were standing firm: no military solution from the outset and now since the bombing campaign only an immediate ceasefire. Bound by honor to the Sèvres agreement and his own convictions, Eden refused to shift in accepting these demands. Finally, bowing to French pressure, the British set a date for the D-day of the

³⁶⁹ Kyle, 408.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Lucas, 281.

³⁷² Quoted in Lucas, 280.

invasion. On November 5, gunpowder and plot -- albeit not treason -- were finally coming to fruition.

On November 4, in the ongoing mêlée to halt the war, another resolution passed the General Assembly calling for the U.N. to introduce a police force into the Middle East within forty-eight hours. It passed in a 55-0 vote. The American supported resolution, “established a United Nations command for an emergency international force to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities.”³⁷³ Despite this occurrence, in Downing Street the British prime minister held firm. Now resolved to the landing of forces, Eden was determined to play out his gambit to the hilt. British and French ships loaded with men and instruments of war steamed toward the Sinai Peninsula. This armada found an unlikely opponent on the way to its destination. See Figure Two.

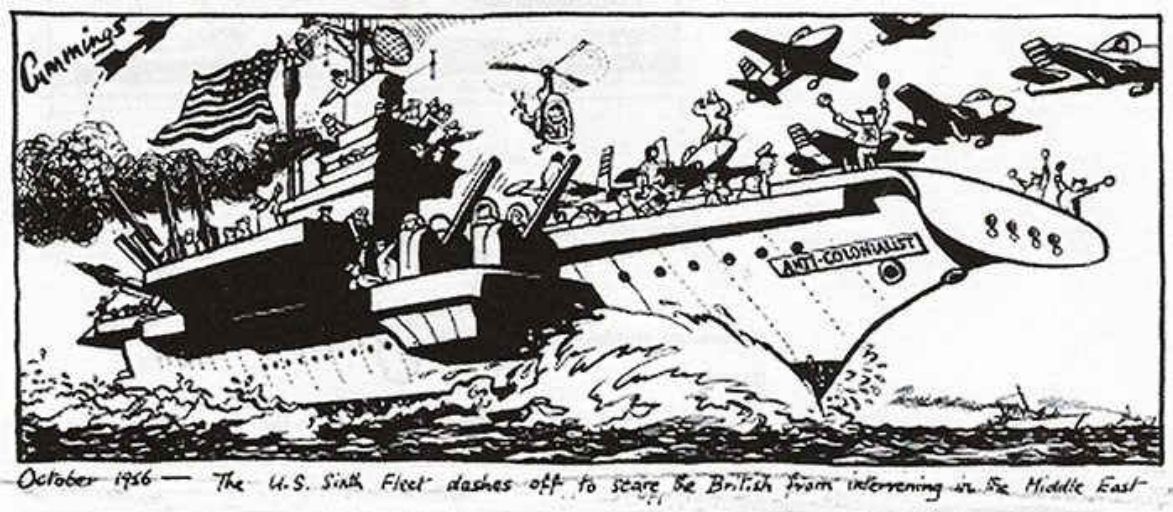


Figure Two: Political Cartoon by Michael Cummings printed in *The Daily Express* on May 26, 1957.³⁷⁴

Source: "1957 - The U.S. Sixth Fleet dashes off to -er - ahem - intervene in the Middle East..." Digital image. A Cartoon History of the Middle East. Accessed April 9, 2016. <http://www.mideastcartoonhistory.com>

³⁷³ Kingseed, 117.

³⁷⁴ Caption reads, “October 1956 – The U.S. Sixth Fleet dashes off to scare the British from intervening in the Middle East.” In the drawing, the aircraft carrier is entitled the “Anti-colonialist.”

Right from the beginning of the Suez affair, only one institution in the American government unwaveringly supported the aims, means, and ways of Great Britain in its efforts towards solving the crisis. Unlike the politicians they served and advised, the leadership of the United States military stridently wanted the British to succeed. In a memorandum of July 31 to the secretary of defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that if necessary to regaining “the Suez Canal under a friendly and responsible authority” the U.S. should take military action in support of Britain.³⁷⁵ Also on the same day, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh Burke declared in a National Security Council meeting that, “the JCS are of the view that Nasser must be broken We should declare ourselves in support of their [the British] action.”³⁷⁶ Ironically, granted under direct orders from civilian authority, Burke’s actions months later were diametrically opposed to this recommendation. With the Israeli invasion of the Sinai on October 29, the American State Department began issuing evacuation orders to all U.S. citizens in Egypt. To help with this withdrawal Burke ordered the U.S. Sixth Fleet to take position off the coast of Egypt. Two days later as the British and French entered the fray, the commander of the Fleet, Vice Admiral Charles Brown, found himself in a precarious position. With the Royal Navy and the RAF now actively engaging Egyptian ships, Burke ordered Brown to “prepare for imminent hostilities.”³⁷⁷ When the perplexed Brown responded, “Am prepared for imminent hostilities, but which side are we on?”³⁷⁸ To the query Burke did not give a direct answer, he only told the Vice Admiral to, “take no guff from anyone.”³⁷⁹

Understanding the risk of a potentially life-threatening incident with anxious naval and air forces operating in such a close proximity, First Sea Lord Earl Mountbatten requested the withdrawal of the U.S. fleet after it completed its evacuation mission; the Americans demurred. In fact, the actions of vessels and aircraft of the Sixth Fleet seemed

³⁷⁵ Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume 6: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955-1956*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 178.

³⁷⁶ Quoted in Condit, 178.

³⁷⁷ Carter, 73.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

to invite an incident that so worried Mountbatten. Throughout the days and nights leading up to the landing of British forces, numerous incidents of harassment towards the Royal Navy by American armed forces took place.

As an engineer on the RFA (Royal Fleet Auxiliary) Retainer, W. H. Cameron, recounts, “They kept saying on the BBC news that there was no interference from the Americans but there was I saw it.”³⁸⁰ “On one occasion we were replenishing HMS Eagle when an American helicopter hovered about the deck of the Eagle,” Cameron recalls.³⁸¹ He continues, “[I]t did not move away until a petty officer rushed to a multiple Bofors gun and swung the barrels directly on the helicopter which was only a few feet above it.”³⁸² On another occasion occurring on November 2, the HMS Ulysses reported she had been, “continuously menaced in the past eight hours by US aircraft, flying low and as close as 400 yards.”³⁸³ In addition, British convoys found themselves utterly disrupted when American naval vessels blazingly sailed through their lines.³⁸⁴ These types of harassments were much more than minor nuances. With the British at a wartime footing, anything might have occurred in response to these reckless actions. The chance of an American aircraft or vessel being mistaken as hostile Egyptian attacker remained constant. If direct orders were given for these American measures against the Royal Navy, they have not yet been discovered or disclosed. Whatever the motive for these actions, to treat these British servicemen as a plaything while they were entering the fray of battle just exemplified the American attitude to the United Kingdom at the moment; especially when it did not fall in line with the will of the United States.

On November 5 at 7:15 in the morning, fifteen minutes after the U.N. Assembly resolution called for all hostilities to have ceased, British paratroopers landed four miles west of Port Said.³⁸⁵ Encountering little resistance, they sought to secure the airfields on the outskirts of the city for resupply and prepare for the landings of the main attack force. On the same day, Eisenhower received a message from Eden that the Englishman had

³⁸⁰ Quoted in Neillands, 334.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Carter, 76.

³⁸⁴ Neillands, 335.

³⁸⁵ Kyle, 444; Lloyd, 206.

sent the night before. In the letter, Eden, addressing the American president as “Dear Friend” opened with, “It is with great grief to me that the events of the last few days have placed such a strain on the relations between our two countries.”³⁸⁶ While showing remorse for their differences, the prime minister held that the invasion he had ordered was still justified, “I have always felt . . . that the Middle East was an issue over which, in the last resort, we would have to fight.”³⁸⁷ “I know that Foster thought we could have played this longer,” Eden continues, “But I am convinced that, if we allowed things to drift, everything would have gone from bad to worse.”³⁸⁸ He ended the letter quite fatefully with, “History alone can judge whether we have made the right decision.”³⁸⁹ Eisenhower contemplated writing back but did not respond; in his estimation, events were moving too quickly to capture the moment.³⁹⁰ However, another foreign leader did take the time to write Eden on that fifth of November; and in the keeping with the tradition of Guy Fawkes, this man promised explosions.

Initiating a bloody and cruel “re-invasion” of Hungary only two days earlier, the leadership of the Soviet Union openly reveled over the Anglo-America split by November 5.³⁹¹ With the Western alliance fractioned over the Suez Crisis, the Soviets found this the perfect time to quell the anti-Russian sentiment sweeping their once stalwart Warsaw Pact ally. Unable to coordinate a unified front, and busy working against each other over affairs in Egypt, the Atlantic alliance did little more than protest this belligerent act of the Soviet Union. As British and American diplomats and politicians squabbled, thousands of Hungarians valiantly died. Even more despicable

³⁸⁶ DDE (Ann Whitman File) International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 4.

³⁸⁷ DDE (Ann Whitman File) International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 4.

³⁸⁸ DDE (Ann Whitman File) International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 4.

³⁸⁹ DDE (Ann Whitman File) International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 4.

³⁹⁰ Nichols, 243.

³⁹¹ Brian McCauley, “Hungary and Suez, 1956: The Limits of Soviet and American Power,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 16, No. 4 (October, 1981), 793.

was that while the Soviet Union was conducting this vile suppression in Eastern Europe, the Americans were by default allied with the U.S.S.R in their attempts to impede the welfare of their closest allies, France and Britain. Writing to Dulles, the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Charles Bohlen, said as much. “One of the most disagreeable features of the present situation,” Bohlen stated of the ongoing Suez Crisis, “is finding ourselves on the same side of this question with the Soviets.”³⁹² In both the Security Council and the General Assembly, the United States and the Soviet Union voted alongside each other against the interests of these two vital members of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Too many, including almost certainly Anthony Eden, must have viewed this as a world turned upside down.

Secure in his belief that the United States had entirely abandoned the United Kingdom over the British intervention in Egypt, the Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin sent an alarming letter to Anthony Eden that the Englishman received the same day British troops engaged the Egyptians. The message is nothing but chilling:

In what position would Britain have found herself if she herself had been attacked by powerful states possessing every kind of modern destructive weapon? And there are countries now which need not have sent a navy or air force to the coasts of Britain, but could have used other means, such as rocket technique. We are filled with determination to use force to crush the aggressors and to restore peace in the East. We hope you will show the necessary prudence and will draw from this the appropriate conclusions.³⁹³

The threat of nuclear war appeared evident.³⁹⁴ Although Eden did not take the message literally, it did rattle many in the American Government.³⁹⁵ Without the public splitting of the Anglo-American alliance, it is hard to conceive Bulganin would have even

³⁹² Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1973), 432.

³⁹³ Eden, *Full Circle*, 554.

³⁹⁴ Charles Bohlen did not believe this message contributed to the agreement of Eden to a cease-fire. He writes, “Eisenhower also sent harsh notes to London and Paris demanding that the invasion be called off. It was this pressure, I believe, rather than the Soviet threats, that forced the British and French to call a cease-fire the day after the landings,” Bohlen, 433.

³⁹⁵ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series Box No. 8 Dulles, Foster Nov. '56, Folder 2.

contemplated sending such a menacing warning. However, the Soviets did not stop there, on the same day in Moscow Ambassador Bohlen received a message from Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dmitri Shepilov for forwarding to Eisenhower.³⁹⁶ As Bohlen describes, “the note proposed that the United States and the Soviet Union join in a common action – the implication was military action – if necessary against France and Britain, America’s two closest allies.”³⁹⁷ White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams summarizes the communication the same. He states the message proposed that, “Russia and the United States should form a military alliance to stop the British and French invasion of Egypt.”³⁹⁸ Although the White House called the proposal “unthinkable” in a statement on the letter, the mere attempt of such a bizarre proposal only reiterates how much the United States had left their European allies to twist in the international wind.³⁹⁹

In the predawn darkness of November 6, over two hundred ships waited at battle stations for sunrise.⁴⁰⁰ Not far from this massive Anglo-French armada lay around fifty vessels of the U.S. Sixth Fleet.⁴⁰¹ Remaining aloof, the American naval ships, now finished with their evacuation mission, rode anchor waiting for orders. Kyle Keith writes, “The long shadow of the Sixth Fleet, the ever-present symbol of American disapproval, fell ominously across the path of [Operation] Musketeer.”⁴⁰² If commanded to stop the invasion the Americans were ready -- but not willing. As Admiral Burke cautioned the State Department, “We can stop them but we will have to blast the hell out of them.”⁴⁰³ He continued, “If we are going to threaten, if we’re going to turn on them, then you’ve got to be ready to shoot. We can do that. We can defeat them.”⁴⁰⁴ Thankfully, cooler heads in Washington prevailed; orders soon arrived calling for the

³⁹⁶ DDE, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series Box No. 8, Dulles, Foster Nov. '56 Folder 2; Bohlen, 432.

³⁹⁷ Bohlen, 432.

³⁹⁸ Adams, 258.

³⁹⁹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 90.

⁴⁰⁰ Neff, 407.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² Kyle, 413.

⁴⁰³ Quoted in Neff, 409.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

American Fleet to sail to calmer waters.⁴⁰⁵ At this critical moment, the Anglo-American dispute mercifully stayed cold.

With the arrival of first light, the shelling of Port Said began; British troops landed shortly afterward.⁴⁰⁶ The moment the Americans, Russians, and Egyptians had fiercely worked against and fundamentally feared finally arrived; the British lion, despite their best efforts, roared. Quickly cutting through initial Egyptian resistance, the vanguard of the expeditionary force was already fighting their way through the streets of Port Said as the bulk of the Anglo-French forces streamed ashore.⁴⁰⁷ By mid-day, all the preliminary objectives were met with the strategic city fully in the hands of the British. Armor columns thundered through the desert, hell-bent on capturing the entire Suez Canal.⁴⁰⁸ Victory seemed assured. Then a little after 1 p.m. (Egyptian time), the commander of the expedition, General Charles Knightley, received a peculiar order from London. It changed everything.

From the outset of the crisis, Harold Macmillan, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had been one of the most vocal members of the British government advocating military intervention against Nasser.⁴⁰⁹ However, by November 6, this viewpoint of the Chancellor radically changed; seemingly overnight this vicious hawk had transformed into a callow dove. Throughout the months of September and October 1956, the foreign dollar reserves of the United Kingdom had fallen to respectively 57 million and 84 million.⁴¹⁰ With concern over the potential state of the British economy if the Suez Canal closed and general investor uncertainty, these losses were in Macmillan's estimation

⁴⁰⁵ Carter, 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Kyle, 461.

⁴⁰⁷ Neillands, 345.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas, 14.

⁴⁰⁹ Howard Dooley writes, "Harold Macmillan quickly emerged as the leading 'hawk' on the Egypt Committee . . . Energized by the prospect of a great adventure, he was quick to volunteer ideas about co-operation with Israel, grand strategy for the reshaping the Middle East, and military plans for the campaign in Egypt." Howard J. Dooley, "Great Britain's 'Last Battle' in the Middle East: Notes on Cabinet Planning during the Suez Crisis of 1956," *International History Review*, Volume 11, No. 3 (August, 1989), 495.

⁴¹⁰ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 164.

“tolerable.”⁴¹¹ However, in the first week of November intense pressure on the sterling put Britain’s financial well-being into dire straits. Due to the massive selling of the pound on international markets, the losses to the British monetary reserves estimated in November “were to be \$279 million, if not wholly, in the first few days.”⁴¹² This figure constituted a loss of over one-eighth of their remaining total -- gone in less than a week.⁴¹³

A run on sterling seemed inevitable due to the precarious international situation Britain found itself in, however, the amount of selling points to market manipulation by an influential group, namely, the American government.⁴¹⁴ In his memoirs, Macmillan speculates that the United States Treasury might have played a hand in this massive dumping of the pound. He also states, “the selling by the [U.S.] Federal Reserve Bank seemed far above what was necessary as a precaution to protect the value of its holdings.” Facing a looming currency crisis or a forced devaluation of the pound, the United Kingdom needed a massive loan of foreign capital quickly to save its economy from utter ruin. Sadly, for Britain, America held the purse strings.

Even more troubling to the fate of the United Kingdom, but only just a little less immediate, was its ability to purchase oil. Even as British land forces rushed to seize the Suez Canal, their mission, in one aspect, was already a failure. Prior to the Anglo-French invasion, Nasser already ordered the sinking of numerous ships throughout the waterway, incapacitating it for the foreseeable future. Even with the speedy capture of the Canal, it would take the British and French weeks to restore it to working order. In this interval, the U.K. required petroleum from Western Hemisphere sources. Unlike the Middle Eastern nations that accepted the pound for oil, the countries in the Americas -- including the United States -- required payment in American dollars. By November 6, with the Bank of England bleeding foreign capital in order to keep the pound afloat, the nation simply did not have the funds to pay for this vital import of oil in dollars. With strategic

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Kunz, 131; Kyle, 465.

⁴¹⁴ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 164.

reserves of petroleum running low, it was only a matter of time until the British Isles ground to a halt.

The British government had two options in attempting to gain the treasuries it desperately needed. These consisted of either a direct loan from the United States or withdrawing the British quota from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) -- money the U.K. had already paid into the fund.⁴¹⁵ On both fronts, Macmillan met stalwart resistance by the Americans. During a telephone call on November 6, Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey told him help would only be forthcoming if the British agreed to an immediate cease-fire.⁴¹⁶ In addition, news reached Macmillan that the U.S. vetoed British withdrawals from its IMF fund.⁴¹⁷ No other avenues were left for Britain to turn down; point blank the nation needed American financial assistance. Only, as the United States government made crystal clear, none was forthcoming unless Eden called off the invasion. With Anglo-French incursion still only hours old, Macmillan, once one of the firmest advocates for military intervention, headed into a Cabinet meeting on November 6 determined to promote an immediate cease-fire. In the meeting, Eden, now showing signs of severe physical illness, relented to the inevitable.

Without consulting his French or Israeli allies, the British prime minister ordered a cessation of hostilities and for an informal cease-fire to begin at midnight November 7.⁴¹⁸ Although dissenters in the Cabinet urged for pushing on at all costs, their pleas fell on deaf ears. While Eden later lamented that maybe he had ordered the armistice too soon, at the time escalating economic and diplomatic pressure seemed insurmountable.⁴¹⁹ In addition, with the British finally bowing to the urgent requests from the United States for a cease-fire, Eden believed that Eisenhower would now support and protect the interests of the United Kingdom going forward. Writing on this point, Macmillan states, “We hoped that the United States would now pursue, if not a friendly, at least neutral and

⁴¹⁵ Nicholas, 251.

⁴¹⁶ Kingseed, 124; Dutton, 442.

⁴¹⁷ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 164; Nichols, 251.

⁴¹⁸ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 5.

⁴¹⁹ Anthony Eden writes, “We would have taken a second, and maybe a third, look at the problem had we understood what was to come.” Eden, *Full Circle*, 558.

perhaps even a constructive course.” As he later confessed, he was dead wrong on that supposition: “We could hardly foresee that the United States Government would harden against us on almost every point and become harsher after the cease fire than before.”⁴²⁰ On November 6, with the actual fighting coming to a halt, the crucible that Great Britain endured was not quite over.

Humiliation and abject failure seemed the only penance the Americans were willing to accept from the British for the failure of their not bending to the expressed will of the United States during the Suez Crisis. As Macmillan writes, “We were now forced along a slow retreat on almost every point, accompanied by humiliations almost vindictively inflicted upon on us at the instance of the United States Government.”⁴²¹ This anti-British policy of the United States surfaced almost immediately after the cease-fire. Wounds over the crisis ran deep on both sides; however, only the Americans were in a position to administer immediate revenge.

In a conciliatory phone on the evening of November 7, Eden sought to mend fences with the newly reelected Eisenhower; the previous day they had spoken when Eden told Eisenhower about his decision to submit to the U.N. ordered cease-fire.⁴²² The November 6 conversation had been tense and to the point. Worried about surviving a forthcoming no-confidence vote in the Commons, Eden told Eisenhower, “If I survive tonight I will call you tomorrow.”⁴²³ In the next day’s exchange, hoping to reinforce the Anglo-American relationship publicly, the Englishman suggested to the American president that they meet in Washington for talks in the near future.⁴²⁴ Eisenhower, in a jovial mood over his day’s overwhelming election victory, readily agreed to such a meeting. He also urged Eden not to fret over their disagreements for “after all it is just a

⁴²⁰ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 167.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 5.

⁴²³ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 5.

⁴²⁴ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 5.

family spat.”⁴²⁵ For Anthony Eden it appeared the road to reconciliation seemed assured. Yet shortly after the phone conversation, a message arrived stating due to pressing internal affairs the proposed conference between the two leaders must be postponed indefinitely.⁴²⁶

Even with an official cease-fire in place, the British still occupied the territory they had captured from the Egyptians. Eden believed that this continued presence near the Suez Canal remained the only bargaining chip for his nation in exacting any concessions for its extremely expensive, but short, military endeavor. Eisenhower found this position totally unacceptable. Over the forthcoming days, the United States continually demanded the complete withdrawal of the 22,000 soldiers now positioned in and around Port Said. Tethering this insistent request with the offer of financial assistance to the British economy, the Americans effectively sought to blackmail the United Kingdom into complying with this U.S. stipulation. “The Americans,” Macmillan states, “not content with the ‘cease-fire,’ were now demanding an immediate evacuation.”⁴²⁷ He goes on to write, “[Secretary of Treasury] Humphrey made it clear to me that he would maintain his opposition to any drawing from the International Monetary Fund or support means of loan, until the British and French troops had left Egypt.”⁴²⁸ As on November 6, the Americans were again tightening the economic screws to their European ally.

At the United Nations, the British did not fare any better. In resolutions calling for the withdrawal of the Anglo-French forces from the Sinai Peninsula, America voted again with the Soviet Union and against the United Kingdom. As Eden writes of his opinion on this turn of events, “The United States and Soviet Russia joined together in the General Assembly to issue their instructions on Suez . . . the fact that the United States and Russia were together did not mean that they were right.”⁴²⁹ However, by then Eden’s objections or disapprovals mattered little to those holding real power over the

⁴²⁵ DDE, Ann Whitman File, International Series Box No. 21, Eden 7-18-56 to 11-7-56, Folder 5.

⁴²⁶ Kingseed, 129.

⁴²⁷ Macmillan, *Riding the Storm*, 167.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Eden, *Full Circle*, 572.

situation; leverage held by Eisenhower, and now also Nasser, guaranteed the eventual capitulation of the British position.

Here again, the United Kingdom's dependence on foreign oil contributed significantly to its defeat. Eden's order to halt the invasion prior to British forces gaining control of the Suez Canal thwarted Anglo-French plans to clear it. After the cease-fire, seventeen sunken ships and two destroyed bridges still blocked any passage through the waterway.⁴³⁰ Nasser declared that no attempts to clear the canal would start until all Anglo-French forces left Egyptian soil.⁴³¹ Without the reopening of the Suez Canal, limited access to Middle Eastern oil still left Great Britain needing petroleum from sources in the Western Hemisphere. Here Eisenhower again did not relent; Eden states, "The United States would not extend help or support to Britain until after a definite statement on withdrawal had been made."⁴³² Left with little choice, British forces started withdrawing to bases in Cyprus on December 3. Three days before Christmas, in an unceremonious departure reminiscent of another only seven months prior, British armed forces again vacated their presence in Egypt.⁴³³ Only then, on December 27, did Nasser order clearance on the Suez Canal to begin.⁴³⁴ This last defeat ended the Suez Crisis.

⁴³⁰ Walker, 163.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Eden, *Full Circle*, 572.

⁴³³ Lloyd, 235.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

FORTINBRAS RISING

“Far-called, our navies melt away; on dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday, is one with Nineveh and Tyre!”
Rudyard Kipling, *Recessional*

“A little more than kin, and less than kind”
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

On November 16, as the workings of the British withdrawal from the Suez were still under way, Selwyn Lloyd visited John Foster Dulles at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington D.C.⁴³⁵ On November 2, the American Secretary of State, suffering severe abdominal pains, had admitted himself to the hospital.⁴³⁶ It confirmed the start of one situation the wily Dulles could not negotiate himself out of; the yet undiagnosed cancer eventually proved terminal. In the meeting with Lloyd, he appeared friendly to his British counterpart, but not willing to concede any favorable terms to the Anglo-French position. Unexpectedly, as Lloyd recounts, Dulles, “with a kind twinkle in his eye,” asked the Englishman a stunningly blunt question that left Lloyd dumbfounded. Staring directly at Lloyd, the American asked, “Selwyn, why did you stop? Why didn’t you go through with it and get Nasser down?”⁴³⁷ Lloyd writes of the moment, “If ever there was an occasion when one could have been knocked down by the proverbial feather, this was it.”⁴³⁸ Responding to the query, Lloyd told Dulles, “Well, Foster, if you had so much as winked at us we might have gone on.”⁴³⁹ To this, Dulles with a smile said he could have never done that.⁴⁴⁰

One not reveling in the failure of the British cause due to unrelenting American pressure was Anthony Eden. Having also taken violently ill, the prime minister on

⁴³⁵ Lloyd, 219.

⁴³⁶ Hoopes, 380.

⁴³⁷ Lloyd, 219.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

November 19 retreated to Jamaica in a bid to recuperate.⁴⁴¹ When he returned to Britain, his days as leader of Her Majesty's Government were effectively numbered. Unlike Gamal Abdel Nasser and Dwight Eisenhower, who went on to lead their respective nations for years to come, Eden paid the ultimate political price for his failure. On January 9, citing ill health, he resigned in disgrace and was succeeded by Harold Macmillan.⁴⁴² However, the stigma of the failure of Suez did not die with the departure of Eden like Banquo's ghost it lingered over the British Isles for many years to come.

With Eden quietly exiting stage left, the man who first heeded to American pressure to halt the Suez invasion now governed Britannia. Walking lock step with the United States during his premiership, Macmillan kept Britain consistently tethered to the interests of America. Eden later stated that the foreign policies of his successor relegated the mighty British Empire to the 51 state of the USA. British historian John Darwin argues, "The 1960s were a dismal decade for British diplomacy. Despite the boastful proclamation of Harold Macmillan and his successors that Britain would remain a global power come what may, the reality was an unbroken diet of humble pie."⁴⁴³ Macmillan's refusal to risk another Suez-like confrontation with the United States over continued attempts of the British to hold onto their overseas colonies swung the door wide open for these territories to gain their independence. The "winds of change" Macmillan initiated swept the Empire almost clearly off the face of the map.⁴⁴⁴ Without the substantial leverage of its colonies, a united Europe now seemed an inviting avenue for the British to venture down.

The day that Eden under American economic pressure ended the invasion, Guy Mollet -- frustrated over the abandonment of his nation by the U.S. -- found solace in the words of the Prime Minister of West Germany Konrad Adenauer. The German told Mollet that a united "Europe would be his revenge;" meaning with the consolidation of the trading and political powers of the European nations in a collective organization

⁴⁴¹ Dutton, 447.

⁴⁴² Eden, *Full Circle*, 583.

⁴⁴³ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: the Historical Debate* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 74.

⁴⁴⁴ Sandbrook, *Never Had it so Good*, 293.

America would not be able to run roughshod over France anymore.⁴⁴⁵ David Reynolds states, “France’s irritation with NATO and its enthusiasm for a European Community were both greatly accentuated by the crisis.”⁴⁴⁶ The idea appealed to many British as well and undoubtedly influenced their decision to join the European Common Market in 1973. Also, with the specter of Suez firmly imprinted in its psyche, the United Kingdom found a little molecule of revenge against its American ally. As the war in Vietnam reached its height in the late 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson sought British military forces to join in the anti-communist cause.⁴⁴⁷ Prime Minister Harold Wilson resoundingly refused.⁴⁴⁸ The reversal of fortune from 1956 to 1968 for the Americans only served, in some respects, as fitting justice.

Despite the trauma the Suez debacle played on the British psyche, not all of its effects lasted endlessly. In 1982, a different dictator sought to “nationalize” the Falkland Islands. As in 1956, again the British lion roared. Unlike Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Argentina Junta did not survive its fury. Like Anthony Eden another Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, laid the prestige of the British nation on the line; but contrasting Eden, Thatcher succeeded. Then in 1990, with the Gulf War, and again in 2004, with the controversial invasion of Iraq, the British army, the Royal Navy, and the RAF returned to the Middle East to once more do battle with an Arabic tyrant.⁴⁴⁹ Regarding this last event, many critics of Tony Blair have even made a comparison of his actions leading up to the Iraqi war with those of Eden’s during 1956.⁴⁵⁰ The battle scars of the British disaster at Suez were long lasting, yet as with all things, time had erased -- for good or ill -- some of their lingering influences.

⁴⁴⁵ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century*, (London: Longman House, 1991), 205.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Rhiannon Vickers, “Harold Wilson, the British Labour Party, and the War in Vietnam,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2 (Spring, 2008), 46-47.

⁴⁴⁸ Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties 1964-1970* (London: Abacus, 2009), 337.

⁴⁴⁹ Martin Woollacoot, *After Suez: Adrift in the American Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 117, 139.

⁴⁵⁰ British Broadcasting Corporation Television, *The Other Side of Suez* (2006).

From the earliest days of Great Rapprochement to the Cold War era of the Special Relationship, Anglo-American relations rested on mutual interests. On the vast majority of occasions the United States and Great Britain found common cause in their foreign relations and worked together to achieve a communal goal. Countless battles during the World Wars attest to this fact. However, when the national advantage of one of these powers stood opposed to the other, the Atlantic alliance rapidly and unceremoniously broke down. Here the disputes over Indochina, American challenges to the British gaining an atom bomb, and the disagreements over China and First Offshore Crisis confirm this supposition. William Pearson writes, “While tied together by a mutual fear of Soviet expansionism, it is clear that London and Washington were bound to come into conflict in the 1950s.”⁴⁵¹ With Egypt and the Suez Canal playing such a vital role in the maintenance of the British Empire, it made logical sense for the Anglo-American struggle to flashpoint here. As the U.S. government sought to gain allies against the Soviet Union, Egypt, and its leader Nasser, naturally appeared as prime candidates.

As the crisis heated up, appearances mattered more and more to the United States and Great Britain. To turn back once the United Kingdom initiated mobilization for a forthcoming Egyptian invasion would give the impression of failure. Once Anthony Eden assembled the dogs of war, they needed unleashing; anything less than that reeked of appeasement. On the other side of the Atlantic, perceptions spurred the United States to halt its ally at practically all costs. Fearful of labeled a supporter of British colonialism in the eyes of the world, Eisenhower believed the U.S. needed to stop Eden from achieving Britain’s goals during the crisis. The events of the second half of 1956 proved Eisenhower successful. “Looking backward to those days,” the American president writes of Suez, “it is easy to see that the British and French won battles but nothing else.”⁴⁵² On that point, thanks to efforts of himself and his nation, Eisenhower is exactly right.

An unsentimental review of the Anglo-America diplomacy leading up to 1956, a stark look at the British position in Egypt, and a recounting of the events of the actual

⁴⁵¹ Williamson, 6.

⁴⁵² Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 98.

crisis proves overwhelmingly that the United States -- for selfish motives -- systematically guaranteed the failure of the United Kingdom in achieving its objectives during the Suez Crisis. The argument is abundantly clear; however, the supposed justification for the actions of Eisenhower and Dulles might need elaboration. One could argue that the Americans had a moral duty to prohibit their ally from violating international law. However, it is difficult to give much credence to this supposition when examining the historical facts. On this basis, the United States could hardly play the role of upright protector for national sovereignty. In fact, encroaching into the affairs of an autonomous nation never seemed to bother Eisenhower prior to the attempt by Eden to remove Nasser. In the consecutive years of 1953 and 1954, the American government vigorously pursued and achieved the overthrow of two world leaders they deemed unsuitable. The Central Intelligence Agency's participation in regime changes in Iran and Guatemala cannot be discounted. While it might first seem reasonable to take the moral high ground in defending the American actions during the Suez Crisis, it is unfortunately not that black and white.

The story of the Suez is far from having its last chapter written. Writing over forty years ago, Geoffrey Murray bemoaned, "So much has been written about the steep hill of Suez that anyone presuming to comment after seventeen years is bound to feel a sense of emptiness on the subject."⁴⁵³ Times, however, has proven Murray a bit off the mark. His attempt in closing the book on the historiography of the Suez Crisis remains premature. Even now in the twenty-first century, the wealth of scholarly and popular works on the subject grows steadily each year. As the desert winds still swirled under the blades of departing helicopters taking the last British troops back to Cyprus, Suez began capturing the imagination of journalists and historians, and that captivation has yet to diminish. Much of this interest and fascination comes from the cinematic allure of the crisis to American and British enthusiasts. Numerous commentators have cited aspects of the affair that rival those of then contemporary spy novels and latter-day techno-

⁴⁵³ Geoffrey Murray, "Glimpses of Suez 1956," *International Journal*, Volume 29, No. 1 (Winter, 1973/1974), 44.

thrillers. As more and more previously held classified material of various governments involved in this mystery open to public eyes, layers of the onion peel away. Yet as increasingly factual documentation is unearthed, it remains a tale with the potential of morphing into a legend. Not unlike classical works based on actual events, the elements of a great tragedy are present at Suez.

In the last act of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the titular character takes up arms against the forces tearing away his birthright and destroying the kingdom of Denmark. Beset by powerful enemies from the beginning, the prince, after much handwringing, finally seeks his revenge. In the final scene he gallantly gives his life in this effort, losing everything but his sense of duty. Anyone only slightly familiar with the story of Hamlet knows these basic series of events. However, an often forgotten plot point of the play is who inherits the throne and kingdom that Hamlet sacrifices in order to preserve. For the pathos of the story, it is but a minor detail; the audience comes for the tale of the "mad prince" not the political situation left in his wake. Cut from almost all productions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the real foil of the protagonist, Fortinbras of Norway. Heralded as an imposing leader and a constant danger to the security of the kingdom, the often forgotten Fortinbras is literally the last man standing as the curtain falls. In Shakespeare's original version, directly after the tragic death of Hamlet, Fortinbras, having done nothing to support or aid the hero, enters and claims Hamlet's mantle as his own.

Although Anthony Eden is certainly no Hamlet in the parable, America eases quite effortlessly into the role of Fortinbras. After the British fiasco at Suez, the United States effectively took over the mantle of the West in the eyes of the world. As Britain fought to retain its Anglo-centric Empire, the U.S. at the very least only waited to pick up the pieces. During the Suez affair the Americans did far worse, there they actively sought the ruin of British interests. Here a cynical individual might say they actually played the part of a treacherous Iago over the opportunistic Fortinbras. Granted, the warning signs were always flashing for Eden and the British. Countless times Eisenhower and Dulles implored their Atlantic cousins to restrain themselves, but the ominous messages went disregarded. Yet as the Gotterdammerung of Suez fell upon the

British Empire, the American Republic did not lament the flames engulfing their defiant ally.

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