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**THE SUEZ CRISIS 1956
AMERICAN ATTITUDES AND POLICIES**

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In loving memory of a great man
“my father

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ABSTRACT

The present work looks at the United States early and mid-1950s Middle Eastern policies with a view to try to determine their contribution to the 1956 Suez Crisis as a whole, and to American attitudes and policies during the Suez War, in particular.

Undeniably, the most striking thing about this crisis remains the stunning US posture vis-à-vis the attack led by Britain, France and Israel against Egypt, in late October 1956. The Eisenhower administration had not only refused to side with its French and British allies, but did also take the lead in the United Nations to halt their military campaign and force their withdrawal from Egypt.

The object of the present research is to try to establish that the reason of this peculiar American stand was that, despite repeated US warnings against the use of force regarding the issue created by President Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Maritime Canal, France and Britain had conspired with Israel to unseat the Egyptian President seeking, thereby, to face America with a *fait accompli*. Yet, their concerted military operation not only threatened to bring down the entire Western position in the region, but had also ruined America's own geostrategic plans for the area. Those plans which Washington had put forward to make up for the failure of its policies between 1953 and 1956, to enlist the Arab world, especially Egypt, into a regional defense system for the protection of Western interests in the Middle East against Soviet attempts to penetrate it.

American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis should have earned the U.S. an ever-lasting sympathy in the heart of the Arabs. Yet, that had not been the case in regard of America's conflictual relations with the Middle East today; relations that keep on deteriorating, regularly verge on confrontations and increasingly verse in bloody wars. Therefore the question is: why did the U.S. not build up on the goodwill that had been generated by its actions and posture during the Suez Crisis and the Suez War? Part of the object of the present research is to bring an answer to this question, too.

RESUME

Le présent travail est une étude des politiques Moyen-Orientales américaines au début et au milieu des années 1950, avec pour objectif d'essayer de déterminer leur contribution à la Crise de Suez , d'une manière générale, et à l'attitude des Etats Unis durant la guerre de Suez, plus particulièrement.

Le fait le plus marquant concernant cette crise, demeure indéniablement l'intrigante prise de position américaine vis-à-vis de l'attaque menée par la France, la Grande Bretagne et Israël contre l'Egypte, en 1956. L'administration Eisenhower avait non seulement refusé de soutenir ses alliés français et britanniques, mais avait aussi pris l'initiative au sein des Nations Unies pour mettre fin à leur campagne militaire et forcer leur retrait d'Egypte.

La présente recherche tentera d'établir que la raison de cette attitude US était due au fait que, transgressant ses avertissements réitérés contre tout recours à la force dans la crise née suite à la nationalisation du Canal de Suez par le Président Nasser, la France et la Grande Bretagne avaient conspiré avec Israël pour provoquer la chute du Président Egyptien et placer, ainsi, les Etats-Unis devant un fait accompli. Cependant, leur opération militaire avait non seulement menacé les intérêts et les visées occidentales au Moyen Orient, mais aussi ruiné les plans géostratégiques américains pour la région. Rappelons que ces plans, mis en avant par l'administration Eisenhower, avaient pour but essentiel de compenser l'échec des politiques américaines menées entre 1953 et 1956 pour amener le monde Arabe en général, et l'Egypte en particulier, à adhérer à un système de défense régionale, et ce afin de protéger les intérêts occidentaux au Moyen Orient contre la menace des poussées expansionnistes Soviétiques.

L'attitude de l'Amérique, ainsi que sa politique durant la Crise de Suez, auraient du lui valoir une reconnaissance éternelle dans le cœur des Arabes. Mais cela ne fut pas le cas au regard des relations conflictuelles des Etats-Unis avec le Moyen Orient aujourd'hui. Pourquoi ? Le présent travail a pour objectif aussi d'essayer d'apporter une réponse à cette question.

ملخص:

في أواخر شهر أكتوبر ومطلع شهر نوفمبر سنة 1956 ، توغلت كلّ من القوات الفرنسية و البريطانية على مصر بتواطؤ مع إسرائيل، و كان الهدف من هذا الهجوم الإطاحة بالرئيس المصري جمال عبد الناصر و استعادة السيطرة على قناة السويس البحرية التي كان الرئيس المصري قد ألغها حين أممّ الشركة الفرنسية لقناة السويس في 26 جويلية 1956 . و لقد أثار هذا التوغّل الثلاثي على مصر غضب حكومة الرئيس الأمريكي أيزنهاور الذي رفض مؤازرة حلفائه فرنسا و بريطانيا، بل طالبهم و إسرائيل بإنهاء عملياتهم العسكرية و الخروج من مصر عن طريق هيئة الأمم المتحدة.

و إنّ موقف أمريكا هذا، يفسره التواطؤ الذي لجأ إليه حلفاؤها مع إسرائيل للهجوم على مصر بُغية وضعها أمام الأمر الواقع، على الرغم من التحذيرات الأمريكية المتكرّرة بعدم اللجوء إلى القوة فيما يخصّ " أزمة قناة السويس". بيد أنّ عملية الحلفاء العسكرية لم تكن تهدّد بالقضاء على المصالح الغربية في الشرق الأوسط فحسب، بل إنّها أفسدت كذلك الخطّ الجيوستراتيجي الأمريكي في المنطقة، هذه الخطط التي كانت الحكومة الأمريكية قد وضعتها سالفًا لتدارك فشل سياستها ما بين 1953 و 1956 لإعادة هيكلة العالم العربي على العموم و مصر على وجه الخصوص، ضمن جهاز دفاع جهوي لحماية المصالح الغربية في الشرق الأوسط ضد المآرب التوسعية السوفييتية

كان من الم فروض أن يخلف موقف أمريكا و سياستها خلال أزمة قناة السويس شعورا كبيرا بالامتنان على مرّ العصور من طرف البلدان العربية، و لكن هذا لم يحصل نظرا للعلاقات المتأزّمة بين الولايات المتحدة و الشرق الأوسط في الوقت الراهن. لماذا؟

إن هذا العمل يحاول إيجاد إجابة على هذا السؤال.

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Introduction:

The Suez Crisis in 1956 was one of the most important events of the Cold War era which irrevocably changed the history of the Middle East, and unprecedentedly plunged the Western alliance in an Abyss of discord and dissension

Initially triggered by the nationalisation of the Anglo-French owned Suez Canal Company by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's Premier then, the crisis evolved into a Tripartite Invasion led by Britain, France and Israel against Egypt in the closing months of 1956.

The Anglo-French and Israeli action, respectively nourished by imperial colonial and expansionist motives, sought to make Nasser "disgorge"¹ the Canal Company. Such aims were reinforced by British, French and Israeli long-held grudges against the Egyptian President, whose nationalist policies were most appealing to the colonized world, but most disturbing to them.

In effect, the British rendered President Nasser's nationalism and Pan-Arab campaigns responsible for their declining influence in the Middle East and their ejection from Egypt and the Suez Canal base. While the French government of Guy Mollet, die-heartedly, believed him to be the instigator of the Algerian Revolution which was threatening France's colonial rule in its North African colony. As to the Israelis, their expansionist policies in Palestine added fuel to their conflict with the Arabs. A conflict that has been raging ever since the emergence of the state of Israel on the Arab land of Palestine, on 14 May, 1948.

The aggression on Egypt immediately aroused waves of protests and disapprovals that had emanated from different borders within the United Nations Organization (UNO). The newly emerging Afro-Asian countries that had only

¹ A term first used by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, on 31 July 1956 when he met British and French officials, in London, to convene on the first London Conference of 16 August 1956 to discuss the setting up of an international agency for operating the Suez Canal, with among other objectives the nullification of Nasser's act of nationalisation of 26 July 1956.

recently ridden themselves of the yoke of servitude, long imposed on them by the West European powers, in general, and France and Britain in particular, fiercely denounced such evident colonial practices. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India declaring: “I cannot imagine a worse case of aggression...The whole future of the relation between Europe and Asia hangs in the balance” asked the non-aligned movement countries (NAM)² “... to join in public condemnation of the aggressors”, called on Dag Hammarskjold (the UNO Secretary General) “... to ensure that the procedures of the United Nations were swifter than those of invasion and aggression”, and urged “... the United States to intervene.”³

In the on-going Cold War that had opposed the United States and the former Soviet Union and created a totalitarian East and a liberal West, the communist bloc led by the Soviets largely echoed the Afro-Asian group’s condemnation of the tripartite invasion. Intent on scoring points against the West, gaining more nations to the communist cause and furthering its influence in what had till then been an exclusively western-dominated strategic zone _ the Middle East _ the Kremlin threatened the invaders with the use of rockets should they fail to comply with the UN resolutions calling for cease-fire and withdrawal from Egypt.

However, the most stunning reaction was by far that of the United States. Washington had not only refused to side with Britain and France, its NATO allies since 1949, but was the initiator of the UN supported resolutions for cease-fire and withdrawal from Egypt.⁴ Occurring in an international context highly

² NAM, or the Non-Aligned Movement, was elaborated after WW II by the newly independent Asian countries. The NAM members founding principle was to keep off the Cold War contest via a policy of non-partisanship. The founding countries, also known as the Colombo powers and whose Prime Ministers had first met in Colombo in 1954, were: India, Burma, Pakistan Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

³ Nehru to Dulles, 31 Oct. 1956, MEA Files, Roger W.M Louis & Roger Owen, *Suez 1956, The Crisis and Its Consequences*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p.185

⁴ At 4.a.m. on 2 Nov 1956, the UN General Assembly adopted the US sponsored resolution calling for cease fire in and withdrawal from Egypt. Memo. From President to Dulles, 1 Nov. 1956, Dulles Papers, WH Memo Series (1956), Box 3, File 1, *ibid.*, p. 209

conditioned by the East-West contest, the US position puzzled the world and embittered the French and the British who were coerced by the Eisenhower administration (1952-1960) to roll back their force and withdraw from Egypt. Worse though for these European powers, their inability to face up to America's political, economic and financial pressures did, in effect, equally force them both to withdraw from regional politics and world power status.

Britain, in particular, was most resentful towards the US administration because the Suez Crisis was originally an American creation. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles's decision to withdraw the US funding offer for the construction of the High Aswan Dam in Egypt on 19 July, 1956, had brought about the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company by President Nasser a week later. In fact, however occurring in the closing months of 1956, the Suez Crisis was the culmination of a series of complex issues which had been simmering for years, but which American Middle Eastern policies between 1953 and 1956 had greatly helped complicate.

Over concerned with the threat of communist expansion in the Middle East where, its British ally's imperial presence and the Arab-Israeli conflict nourished Arab anti-Western attitudes and menaced to jeopardize the West's strategic position and interests in the Arab world, America moved in the area with a view to stabilize it and thwart any communist thrust there. Basically, both London and Washington shared the common concern of preventing a Soviet encroachment in the Middle East to safeguard the West's oil lifeline. Still, while Britain saw in its partnership with the Americans a means for stopping the erosion of its influence in the region, US policymakers aimed at allaying Arab fears and distrust of the West, which the United Kingdom's (UK) imperial policies as well as the Arab Israeli conflict had generated in the area. Britain's manoeuvres to maintain its empire at all costs caused the failure of Anglo-American policies and convinced the Eisenhower administration to pressure London to modify its policies which greatly hindered an improvement of Arab

perception of the West.⁵ This particularly applied to the Anglo-Egyptian dispute over the evacuation of Britain's military presence from the Suez Canal base, which maintained Egypt's strong enmity towards the British and equally nourished Arab anti-Western feelings.

In reappraising its country's policies in the region, the Eisenhower administration basically sought to avert any move that might antagonize Egypt _ by far the most influential of the Arab states _ or rekindle Arab anti-Western sentiments.⁶ Such objectives were in US policymakers' understanding, essential prerequisites for the preservation of Western interests in the Middle East _ oil lifeline, defense bases and investment markets _ and for the successful organization of the Arab countries into a Western defensive formula for the protection of the region against the communist threat.

The 'new look' cast by the Eisenhower administration on Middle Eastern matters would trigger a major shift in US policy in the region and command American moves towards the most crucial issues besetting the area. Such moves principally included America's role in ending the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base dispute (1954), its implementation of the Northern Tier strategy (1953) _ which aimed at enrolling some Arab states for the defense of the region against Soviet expansionism _ and the promotion of project ALPHA (1954-1955) for the achievement of an Arab-Israeli peace.

Implementing its new Middle East policy objectives, the US administration would hasten the demiss of the British from Suez, and set the stage for the formation of the controversial Baghdad Pact (1955) _ a regional British-dominated and Western-inspired defense alliance. It would also try to influence Egyptian foreign policy and attempt to "curb" Nasser's non-aligned commitments, by trying to coerce him into becoming an active participant of the Northern Tier strategy, and force him to agree to a peace treaty with Israel; an

⁵ Steven Z. Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez: the Rise of American Power in the Middle East*, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 1992, p. 11

⁶ Dulles to Eisenhower, May 17, 1953, Eisenhower Library, Ann Whitman File, Abilene, Kansas, *ibid* , pp. 52-53

example which Washington hoped other Arab states would imitate. American moves would also equally strain Anglo-American relations, revive Egyptian-Iraqi as well as Saudi-Iraqi intra-Arab rivalries, exacerbate Nasser's Arab nationalist tendencies and neutralism, and eventually help bind Egypt to the Soviet Union.

In seeking to enroll Egypt and its president into the Western strategy for the area, the State Department used coercive measures and large scale inducements of which the US stalling on arms sales to Egypt and the offer to help fund the construction of the High Aswan Dam were the most significant ones. Eventually, the former led President Nasser to consider the Czech option for purchasing arms with which to strengthen his country's national security and uphold Egypt's leadership position in the Arab world. While the US administration's retrieval of the Dam offer on 19 July, 1956, triggered the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company which in turn brought about the Anglo-French and Israeli attack on Egypt, three months later.

As such, 1956 Suez displays many interesting facets which however interesting are not always easy to explore. The difficulty is roughly due to the complexity of Middle Eastern issues and their irreconcilable character: the fall outs from the Anglo-Egyptian century-based antagonism as well as the omnipresent tension inherent to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US ambivalent stands and the Anglo-American controversy regarding the Baghdad Pact, Western divergence over Arab monarchies, with the British supporting the Hashemite crowns of Iraq and Jordan, and America's preference for the Ibn Saud on the Arabian Peninsula. Add to this Washington's NATO partnership with colonial France and imperial Britain on the one hand, and the Eisenhower administration pledge to the Arabs to end the last vestiges of colonialism, on the other hand. Not to forget the nationalist mood of the fifties in the Third World, in general, and in the Arab one, in particular, where the two world powers

sought to secure themselves further strategic zones of influence and investment markets, by harvesting local and regional nationalist forces and sympathies.

Obviously, the Crisis of Suez did not start with the tripartite invasion against Egypt, nor was it lunched by the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company.⁷ It started long before, when the Western powers, especially the United States, attempted to enlist the Arab world, in general and Egypt, in particular, in their strategy for the protection of Western interests against the Soviet communist threat in the Middle East. In seeking to implement its policies, the United States dismissed any stands that cast doubt on the containment of communism or allowed the Soviets to exploit events to advance their ideology. It is in this respect that the US stance during the Suez Crisis must be analysed. America's opposition to the use of force to reverse President Nasser's nationalisation of the Canal Company as well as its strong stand against its allies during the Suez War basically sought to prevent French and British colonialist aims from superceding America's Cold War objectives and Containment policy. By the same token, the Eisenhower administration could not allow the USSR to pose as the champion of the weakest against the strongest.

The severity of the US stance, during the Suez War did also spring from the fact that the allies Suez military expedition had ruined America's own secretly planned operations for the control of events in the Middle East, via removal or isolation of those Arab leaders who opposed American policies, such as President Nasser and his Syrian ally President Sheikri al-Quwatly. President Eisenhower's fury with the allies and Israel's conspiracy at Suez was because it had not only aborted American plans regarding the Egyptian President, but did in the end, produce the opposite of the desired effect; Nasser's military defeat was turned into a political victory, while he himself was portrayed as the hero of Arab nationalism and a leading Third World figure, still to reckon with.

⁷ Amin Hewedy holds the same view in "Nasser and the Crisis of Suez", Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 161

Understanding American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis, one has to go through the US political record in the Middle East, in the years leading to the crisis. American policies whether in partnership with the British, or independently, had undoubtedly marked the issues simmering in the region between 1953 and 1956, and decisively influenced their development until their culmination in the 1956 crisis.

What was the nature of the Anglo-American partnership in the Middle East in general, and in Egypt in particular, prior to the shift in US priorities there? What vision did the Western Powers hold about Egypt's role in the region? How far did the Cold War context influence American perception of the issues at work in the region? What were the immediate events behind the change in US policy objectives in the area? How did they contribute to the build up of the Suez Crisis? What were the motives that had inspired the American position during the Suez Crisis? What significance did the US stance during the Suez War bear for the future of the region? Finally, were American policies, in the end, a success or a failure?

The present thesis is an attempt to answer these questions with a view to analyse American early and mid-fifties Middle Eastern policies, and try to determine the extent of their contribution to the 1956 Suez Crisis, as well as to America's stunning attitudes and policies during the Suez War.

It is not the first time I try my hand at this topic. An earlier attempt had resulted in my graduation memoire which bore the same title. That first draft seems to me, today, simplistic in its approach and somehow naïve in its conclusions. Yet, the quest has remained the same: to try to understand the origins of America's conflictual relations with the Middle East; relations that keep on deteriorating, regularly verge on confrontation and increasingly verse in bloody wars. Some may argue that the U.S. recognition of the state of Israel in 1948 was the one thing that had irrevocably spoiled Arab-American relations. However, investigating the Suez Crisis, I have come to the conclusion that the

Eisenhower administration had genuinely tried to make up for President Truman's *de jure* recognition of Israel, via a non-partisan approach and daring Middle Eastern policies that looked forward to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, one would think that the US stand during the Suez War should have earned America a privileged place and an ever-lasting sympathy in the Arab world. Yet, that had not been the case. Therefore, the question is: why did the United States not build up on the goodwill that had been generated by its actions and posture during the Suez Crisis and the Suez War? Part of the object of the present research is to try to bring an answer to this question, too.

For a clear assessment of the part played by the United States in the Suez Crisis, first, a brief insight in the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base dispute seems most essential to cast the light on British imperial policies, Egyptian reactions to them and the impact they would ultimately have on arousing the Truman administration's early 1950s interest in the area and its involvement in Middle Eastern problems. This is dealt with in Chapter one.

Chapter two investigates the United States mid-fifties policy objectives and priorities in the Middle East as a whole, and with regard to Egypt most particularly. It also, deals with the Eisenhower administration's handling of President Truman's Middle Eastern legacy, and probes the administration's new approach to the area and its issues. Focus in this Chapter is set on the impact of the Eisenhower administration's Middle East policy approach on Anglo-American relations as well as on the regional structure and its different protagonists. More importantly, the Chapter establishes the link between the US new Middle East policy objectives and the setting in motion of key events that did actually pave the way to Suez 1956. Such events included the ejection of the British from the Suez Canal base, the creation of the Baghdad Pact and the failure of the Anglo-American ALPHA peace project.

Chapter three looks at the three immediate causes leading to the Suez Crisis namely, the Czech Arms Deal, the Aswan Dam affair and the

nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company which were all by-products of the Eisenhower administration's Northern Tier strategy and ALPHA policies. The Chapter especially investigates the impact of the Czech Arms Deal on the reorientation of American foreign policy towards Egypt, and the formulation of plan OMEGA which aimed at isolating President Nasser by reducing his influence in the Arab world.

Chapter four covers America's reaction to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company and the impact of US policies, during the ensuing crisis, on the course of events and the different parties to the crisis, namely: Britain, France and Egypt. The Chapter also deals with the unease between the westerners which had been fostered by their opposed stands regarding Nasser and nationalisation. More importantly, the Chapter will try to show the build up of Anglo-French frustrations with America's handling of the crisis which held them back from moving deeply their force into Egypt to unseat President Nasser. Anglo-French frustrations with US attitudes and policies and their divergence with Washington regarding the Suez issue, set the stage for their collusion with Israel to invade Egypt without American knowledge on 29 October, 1956.

Chapter five unveils the Western crisis within the Suez Crisis which the tripartite invasion against Egypt had created. Focus in this Chapter is set on the US response to the allies and Israel's attempt to face America with a *fait accompli* at Suez. Particular interest is devoted to the way Washington had decisively coerced its allies, particularly the British, via intense UN diplomatic efforts as well as drastic political, economic and financial measures, to back down and retreat from Egypt. More significantly, the Chapter exposes the *nouvelle donne* in the Middle East which the Suez Crisis actually gave way to, but which American attitudes and policies had contributed to shape and impose to all, including to Britain, the United States ally and Middle Eastern partner.

The bulk of the present work deals primarily with American policies in the Middle East in the years leading to the Suez Crisis and with American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis and the Suez War. Therefore, it is not concerned by the detailed account of the Anglo-French and Israeli military preparations or the minutes of their military campaign. Nor does it endeavour to go into the detailed description of French, British, Egyptian or Israeli policies. The latter nations political stands and declarations are studied and analysed only in so far as they affected American actions and moves in the area before and during the Suez Crisis. By reason of the Anglo-American partnership in the Middle East in the early 1950s and right before the Suez Crisis, greater attention is devoted to Anglo-American relations, reactions and policies. France's role in the Suez Crisis was minor if compared to the Anglo-American political, economic and military investments in the region, and had only emerged following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on July 26, 1956.

The present research bears much to history as the subject deals with an early Cold War event that intimately bound to the rise of Arab and Third World nationalisms, the decline of British power in the Middle East and America's early and mid-1950s interest and involvement in Middle Eastern issues. As such, a descriptive approach to the events retracing the thread to the Suez Crisis was most essential if not unescapable. Analysis of those events and the policies pertaining to them, helped single out the true causes of the Suez Crisis and their major consequences. Analysis of Anglo-American policies then, had also uncovered the necessity for some comparative approach to American and British Middle Eastern policy objectives and the reasons for their viability or failure. Arguments served both to shed the light on the extent of America's contribution to the Suez Crisis, and to sustain the real motives behind its policies. Argumentation equally served to show the true impact of those policies on the different regional and global actors of the crisis as well as on the emergence of a new regional structure in the Middle East.

CHAPTER I: THE TRUMAN MIDDLE EAST LEGACY

The Suez Crisis had, as its center-piece, Egyptian rejection of continued British imperial presence and Western meddling not only in Egyptian destiny but in the entire Arab world as well. Egyptian anti-British feelings in the 1950s bore an unprecedented and uncompromising character that had mobilized not only all of Egypt but almost all of the Middle East too.⁸ This is not to say that Egyptian resistance to British imperial manoeuvres lacked energy prior to the fifties. It was just that the Egyptian action between 1950 and 1956 was more effective because it was evolving in a different international context that the aftermaths of the Second Great War had imposed to all.

When the Second World War ended, the world was already going through a series of changes that were to transform the international arena for ever after. Such changes were, in fact, the new structures for a world in complete chaos to develop upon. The shift which did occur in the old world order partly but, mainly because of the eclipse of the Imperial Powers – especially Britain and France – gave way to huge transformations which knocked over the established world patterns in favour of new and different ones. One representative pattern of change was national consciousness. It quickly set up the process of colonial devolution in motion, adding therefore to the burden of the old colonial powers which had been heavily exhausted by the havoc of the war. The other major world change was undeniably the emergence of communist Russia and liberal America to world leadership. The new world giants almost immediately engaged themselves into a frenzied race for the propagation and extension of their respective ideologies and ambitions for hegemony in the world.

In a sharp contrast with its pre-war policies based on the 1930s credo of keeping off world and European entanglements, post-1945 America took an active part in the changes that beset the world. American foreign political

⁸ Roger Louis & Roger Owen, *Suez 1956, The Crisis and Its Consequences*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p.171

choices under the leadership of President Harry S. Truman (1945-1952) and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson set the tune for the Western Hemisphere, and imposed a political line in the Cold War. The world had, thus, to compose with the US political partition, which primarily sought the protection of the liberal ideology and the preservation of the West's zones of influence from communism.

In Europe, the immediate outcome of the ideological contest between the Soviet Union and the United States was the splitting of the old continent into East under the grip of the ex-USSR, and West under the domination of America. Each in his camp, both world leaders engaged themselves into building up their satellites into powerful bullwarks to contain each others influence. In Western Europe, America threw its fantastic economic and financial weight behind the reconstruction of its West European partners, notably via the Marshall Plan _ a gigantic economic and financial aid program _ and the foundation in 1949 of the military alliance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that has tied the western states in mutual security with the United States.

Elsewhere in the world, the East-West fight reflected itself in the Chinese war which ended in 1949 with the victory of the Peoples Republic of China, while the pro-American régime of Chiang-Kai-Shek retreated to the small island of Formosa _ today Taiwan. Likewise, the Korean War (1950-1953) translated the same pattern of ideological contest which resulted in the emergence of West-oriented South Korea and Soviet-Chinese backed North Korea.

Closer to Europe were the events in Greece and Turkey _ two traditional zones of Western influence _ where the British backed monarchies faced attempts of subversion by communist supported groups. The threat posed by communism to Greece and Turkey, and Britain's incapacity to help them forced the United States to adopt a more interventionist role in these countries through the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947.

Britain's financial difficulties and economic plight _ the direct outcome of

the havoc of W.W.II _ made it more and more difficult for the UK to meet its vast imperial commitments.⁹ The UK's receding power was also made compound by the mounting wave of national consciousness that was sweeping the colonized world, and where the spokesmen of nationalism were increasingly questioning the old European powers rules and their presence in the colonies.

Such trends were particularly virulent in Britain's Middle Eastern empire. Anti-British feelings ran high among the different Arab states whom the UK had antagonized first because of false promises of independence during and after W.W. I ¹⁰, and second because of Britain's bad record in Palestine,¹¹ which in effect, allowed the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The ensuing Arab-Israeli war that had ended with the defeat of the Arab states, increased Arab resentment and hostility towards the West's interference in the Middle East in general and towards Britain's imperial presence in particular. British hardships in the region were particularly furthered by the Foreign Office's failure to negotiate the revision of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian alliance treaty.

The building of the Suez Canal in the mid-nineteenth century had significantly promoted the Middle East to transportation pre-eminence, and highly reinforced Egypt's geostrategic importance in the area. In recognition of this, the British first occupied the country in 1882 to assure their easy access to India, and second constructed a large military base in the Egyptian desert near the Suez Canal, to ensure the protection of their imperial holdings and maintain their power position in the region.

In 1936, however, the ever-growing fear of war with Germany in

⁹ Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 24.

¹⁰ When Turkey entered WWI on the side of Germany, Britain and France helped foment rebellion among Turkey's subject peoples and encouraged Arab leaders to break away from Istanbul's grip. Britain in particular led them to believe that it would support their independence, while it was party to the secret Sykes-Picot Treaties for the partition of the Middle East at the end of the First World War.

¹¹ According to the San Remo Conference of July 1919, Britain was given the Mandate for Palestine, formerly under Turkish suzerainty. The Middle Eastern territory was living in continuing unrest, a consequence of conflicting British promises of statehood given to Arabs and Jews in 1916-17 (the Balfour Pact). Britain's successive failing policies in and partition plans for Palestine were met by Jewish terrorist operations against British troops. This plunged the Arab state into bloody confrontations, and forced the UK to abandon the mandate to the UNO , in February 1947, and to announce its retreat from Palestine for the following year.

Europe coupled with the invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini¹², incited Britain to enter into alliance with Egypt. Intent on preventing Egyptian nationalism from siding with the Axis _Germany, Italy and Japan_ and seeking the preservation of its communications link with the Empire via the Suez Canal, the British allowed some “concession” to Egyptian nationalism. Most significant of all were: Egypt’s joining the League of Nations under British mediation in 1937, the prospect of a limited British presence in the Canal Zone, as provided for in Article I which states : “The military occupation of Egypt by the forces of His Majesty the King and Emperor is terminated ...” , and renegotiation of the Treaty (which was to run for twenty years from its signature) with the consent of both parties and under the mediation of the League of Nations (if necessary), as embodied in the last part of Article XVI :

... with the consent of both High Contracting Parties, negotiations may be entered into at any time after the expiration of a period of ten years after the coming into force of the Treaty with a view to (...) revision¹³

If the 1936 alliance had legalized Britain’s military presence in Egypt, it had also equally legitimised Cairo’s calls for the revision of the treaty in 1945. Yet, Britain’s war hardships and its receding might made it all the more essential for the UK to stick to its Middle Eastern possessions.¹⁴ Thus, Egypt’s calls for the revision of the 1936 Treaty were most unwelcome to the Foreign Office whose post-war strategies were all based on the perpetuation of the UK’s stronghold in the region, vital as it was for Britain’s post-war reconstruction and the restoration of its declining prestige and power-status.¹⁵ The key to the British

¹² Benito Mussolini was founder then chief of the Italian Fascist party in 1919. He came to power in Italy in 1922, and allied with Hitler’s Germany during the Second World War.

¹³ Parliamentary Papers, Cmd 5360, The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, August 26,1937, Gorst & Johnman , *The Suez Crisi*, pp. 7-9.

¹⁴ Public Record Office,Cabinet Papers (PRO CAB)21/1800. ‘Future Defense Policy’ 22 May 1947,ibid, pp.20-1.

¹⁵ In 1947, the British Chiefs of Staff warned that “... if Russia secured control of the area (ie, the Middle East) ... it would be fatal to our security. It is therefore vital that we must retain a firm hold in the Middle East. This can only be achieved by our physical presence there in peace and by tangible evidence of our intention to remain.”, PRO CAB 21/1800 ‘Future Defense Policy’ 22 MAY 1947,ibid.

position in the area, after referral of the Palestine Question to the UNO,¹⁶ was precisely Egypt. It was, indeed, the only Arab country that boasted the kind of military facilities – the Suez Canal base – worth sustaining a British military presence strong enough to thwart any threat to British interests in the area. Anglo-Egyptian failure to renegotiate the 1936 alliance added to the two nations century-based mutual antagonism and put them in dispute.

For the next five years, there was to be an almost uninterrupted dialogue between the two governments, yet with no agreement. The British, focusing on the importance of the Suez base for their empire and for the protection of the Suez Canal, insisted on retaining a military base in Egypt. For their part, the Egyptians replied that they were capable of looking after the defense of their country including the Canal, provided they possessed the arms with which to carry this out. In 1947, the Foreign Office was pressurised by Russia's moves towards Greece and Turkey and Britain's announced retreat from Palestine, to resume negotiations with Cairo under condition, however, of setting up a regional defensive formula that could maintain Egypt within the UK's imperial network. British strategists reasoned that only under cover of some regional defense strategy could facilities for British armed forces be maintained in Egypt to safeguard Britain's Middle Eastern holdings and position.¹⁷

Egyptian nationalist advocates, outspokenly anti-British, denounced the UK's attempts to coerce their country to give in Britain's imperial policies that were solely devoted to up-holding western interests in Egypt as well as in the rest of the Arab world. Anglo-Egyptian failure to come to terms over the revision of their alliance increasingly led to bloody confrontations between British troops and the Egyptian population. This but added to the volatile mood and instability of the Middle East, and seriously aroused American fears of a Soviet take over where the British might default. US fears about communist

¹⁶ When abandoning the Palestine mandate to the UNO in February 1947, the UK thus renounced to its Military base in Palestine .

¹⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* , p. 22

inroads in areas of strategic importance to the West in general, and to American security and interests in particular did, in effect, bring about American intervention wherever Western interests were at stake.

Russia's threat to British oil fields in Iran in 1946 marked the first crisis opposing East and West and requiring US exercise of political pressure for the protection of Britain's imperial oil assets. Oil, which had greatly contributed in deciding about the outcome of W.W.I and over which W.W.II had largely been fought¹⁸ would likewise constitute an element of omnipresent contention in the battle opposing the East to the West, especially in the Middle East .

As early as W.W.I, American policymakers acknowledged the importance of oil to ensure American national security. W.W.I demonstrated, indeed, that the Allied powers victory owed much to their advantage in oil.¹⁹ W.W.II for its part, showed that Hitler's expansionism basically sought the control of the oil fields near the Black and Caspian Seas, and that Japan's campaigns in the East Indies translated Tokyo's quest to end dependency on American oil. The importance of oil in the strategy of war elevated American concern regarding Middle Eastern oil,²⁰ and prompted Washington as early as 1943, to issue a statement asserting that the security of Saudi Arabia was vital to the defense of the U.S.A. Accordingly and as the Lend-Lease²¹ legislation required, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered direct aid to be extended to Saudi Arabia.

From then on, and particularly with the beginning of the Cold War, American officials became extremely sensitive to anything that might disrupt

¹⁸ Historian H.W. Brands puts it clearly that : ' It would stretch the truth but perhaps not tear it to tatters to say that the Second World War was fought over oil' . , *Into the Labyrinth: the United States and the Middle East 1945-1993* , McGraw-Hill Inc. , the USA , 1994 , p.8 .

¹⁹ In the 1920s, France and Britain enjoyed a sizable lead in oil concessions in promising areas like the Middle East.

²⁰ The Americans did not worry about running short of oil themselves. In 1938, they produced 60 % of the global oil out put. By comparison, Iran pumped less than 4 % and Iraq less than 2 % . While in Saudi Arabia ,the first commercial production was just coming on line .

²¹ Lend-Lease was an American program for sending military supplies to nations designated by the US President as vital to American security.

access of America or its allies to Middle Eastern oil, vital as it was for the reconstruction of Western Europe, the effectiveness of the NATO alliance and the balance of the Cold War. Washington's growing concern about Middle Eastern oil would, in turn, bring American political involvement and intervention in the area and in its many problems.

One such problem for the Americans was Britain's incapacity to resolve the Suez base issue. The Anglo-Egyptian dispute not only comforted the Arabs into more entrenched anti-western attitudes, but did equally worry US officials who feared the creation of a power vacuum in the area that the Soviets would be eager to fill. Chapter I exposes how such fears were reinforced by State Department's reports about Soviet expansionist designs in the Middle East, and how they prompted Washington between 1950 and 1952 to assist its British ally implement its Middle Eastern policies. The US assistance, primarily an extension of the US containment policy, translated itself in the Truman administration's partnership with the British for the support of the Tripartite Declaration and the Middle East Command structure which were the main plans devised by the Foreign Office to maintain Britain's presence and interests in the Middle East region as a whole, and in Egypt in particular. Egypt, which both Washington and London saw, albeit for different reasons, as the West's "key and gate" in the Middle East.

1. IN PURSUIT OF CONTAINMENT:

Following the Iranian Crisis (1945-1946)²², a State Department report ordered by Loy Henderson, US director of the State Department's Middle East Division, produced a map which showed three likely Soviet thrusts in the region: one aiming at Turkey and the Turkish Straits, a second one heading for

²² At the end of W.W.II, the Soviet Union refused to withdraw its troops from Iran which had been partitioned between British and Soviet troops during the war, as a fallback position for the Allied Forces against Germany. The British, who feared a Soviet take over in Iran would endanger Britain's oil operations and interests in the country, insisted on staying too. Equally worried about the Kremlin's scheme for the creation of a buffer state in separatist Azerbaijan, of the kind it was creating in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Washington pressured diplomatically Moscow to clear Iran from Russian troops.

Bagdad and central Iraq and a third one pointing towards the oil fields in the Arab-Persian Gulf . The report's conclusions together with the events in Greece and Turkey (1947) confirmed American officials interpretation of Soviet moves towards the Turkish Straits as a campaign for expansion to control Turkey. In which case, Loy Henderson warned in his report, the U.S. would find it "extremely difficult if not impossible to prevent a Soviet take over in the entire Middle East"²³. The dispatch of a naval force to the vicinity of the Straits by President Truman translated America's pro-Turkish position. Yet, Russia's hand in encouraging communist activists in Turkey maintained pressure high on the British-backed government of Ankara, so that by February 1947, London informed Washington that the UK was financially unable to support the governments of Greece and Turkey. US officials belief that the fate of the two countries was closely intertwined with the fate of the surrounding region originated in State Department's conclusions that "Greece and Turkey form the sole obstacle to Soviet domination in the Eastern Mediterranean". In other words, if Turkey or Greece went down, State Department experts assured, there would be "the most unfavourable repercussions in all those areas where political sympathies are balanced precariously in favour of the West and against Soviet communism."²⁴ The American response to the British *démarche* of February 1947 came in the form of \$ 400 million in aid to Greece and Turkey, and the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine whereby the US president declared that "... it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."²⁵ This, in effect, gave birth to the US Containment policy.

Containment, which became the corner stone of American Cold War policies, fit in the US post-1945 liberal internationalist ideology that hoped for a

²³ Henderson Memorandum with attachment, Oct 21 1946, State Department File 868.00, National Archives, Washington , *Into the Labyrinth* ,Brands, p. 15 .

²⁴ Henderson Memorandum ,*ibid*.

²⁵ Public Papers of the President, 1947, pp. 178-9, *ibid*, p. 16 .

post-war world resting upon collective security, free trade, national self-determination and the rule of law under American leadership.²⁶ Designed to create a stable environment for the growth of economic prosperity for the U.S. and its European allies, Containment sought to discourage Soviet subversive attempts in Western areas and to combat communist expansion.

The Soviet Union's detonation of an atomic bomb in August 1950 prompted President Truman to authorize in January 1950, a study to develop a thermo-nuclear weapon and to call for a review of American defense policy. This resulted in the April 1950 National Security Council 68 (NSC 68). The report mostly written by Paul Nitze, director of the State Department policy planning staff, called for a radical shift in US global defense ideology with large increases in military expenditures to fight global tension, Soviet expansion and communist aggression.²⁷ Paul Nitze also called for preserving America's military superiority via development of hydrogen bombs, and a rapid build up of its conventional military forces.

At about the same period the Truman administration was debating the implementation of NSC 68, the Pentagon reported that in the event of war with the Soviet Union, the U.S. would be unable to help Britain protect vital military bases in such strategic areas of Western interest as Egypt and Iraq.²⁸ The Soviet Union's aborted inroads towards the Arab- Persian Gulf and the Turkish Straits together with the events in Greece and Turkey did confirm American fears about communist designs in the Middle East, which Loy Henderson and Paul Nitze had predicted. The threat posed by the Kremlin's moves reinforced the Truman administration's determination to thwart any communist threat in the Middle Eastern zone because, as historian Brands put it:

²⁶ David Mayers & Richard A. Melanson, *Reevaluating Eisenhower : American Foreign Policy in the 1950s* , Edited by Melanson & Meyers, Illinois, 1989, p. 33.

²⁷ National Security Council : 68, April 1, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* , 1950, I, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982 , pp. 89-126.

²⁸ Geoffrey Aranson, *From Sideshow to Center Stage : U.S. Policy Towards Egypt, 1946-1956*, L . Rienner Publishers , Boulder, Colorado , 1986, p. 15

From the American perspective, no worse disaster short of nuclear war could befall the “free world” than for the Soviet Union or some country sympathetic to Moscow’s designs to monopolize the oil resources of the Persian Gulf region.²⁹

As a consequence of the April 1950 Pentagon report about Britain’s inability to defend the Middle East upon which, a healthy and strong Western Europe utterly depended, and which in turn kept the US economy in expansion, thereby, allowing for the defense spendings suggested by NSC 68, President Truman and his advisers decided to support Britain’s plans for the Middle East region.

2. THE TRIPARTITE DECLARATION:

Until the early 1950s, US officials recognized the UK as the pre-eminent power in the Middle East. Britain’s position, however, was more and more subject to harsh attacks from Arab nationalist advocates who, since the loss of Palestine and the defeat of the Arab armies by Israeli troops in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, resented Britain’s presence more than any time before. This was particularly so in Egypt where the dispute opposing the two nations over the revision of the 1936 alliance treaty largely contributed to a heightening of Arab anti-British feelings and reinforced the Arab world into more anti-Western attitudes.

The Foreign Office which had been toying with the dispute with Egypt ever since the end of W.W.II , kept on its negotiating tactic which primarily sought _ as a condition for treaty revision _ to keep a military presence in the Suez base via the establishment of a regional security system for the region in partnership with Egypt. British focus on Egypt was obviously due to the strategic location of the Suez Canal and base on Egyptian lands. Moreover, Egypt was considered as the Arab world’s political capital due to the fact that it

²⁹ Brands, *Into the Labyrinth* , p. 8

sheltered the site of the Arab League's headquarters. What is more, as the most influential of the Arab states, Egypt also seemed a likely candidate for membership in a regional alliance against the Soviets and could, therefore, set an example for other Arab states to follow.

Failure to enlist Egypt in a British-dominated defense structure brought Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and his advisers to devise a formula whereby not only Egypt but other Arab states as well, even Israel, could "assist the defense of the Near East in case of Soviet aggression." To achieve such an arrangement, Foreign Office strategists reasoned, a "resumption of the Arab-Israeli conflict must be prevented" via restraint on arms sales to the parties to the Arab-Israeli issue.³⁰ Consequently, at the London Conference of April 1950, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin's proposal that Arabs and Israelis be allowed to purchase arms for internal security resulted, a month later, in the May 1950 Tripartite Declaration supported by the three governments of the UK, the U.S. and France. The Declaration called for formal assurances from Middle Eastern states receiving Western military equipment, that it would be used only for assuring their internal security and self-defense, and not against other states in the area. Most importantly, the three signatory states, pledged to "take action both within and outside the United Nations, to prevent [...] violation"³¹ of boundaries and armistice lines, in the region. The irony was that Britain, a signatory state of the Tripartite Declaration together with France, and its principal instigator would not only encourage Israeli violation of armistice lines and boundaries in the invasion of Egypt in October 1956, but would also veto the US-sponsored UN resolution that would call on Israel to retreat from Egyptian territories.

Anglo-American support of the Tripartite Declaration did aim at averting resumption of Arab-Israeli hostilities. Yet it had also been designed to prevent

³⁰ National Security Council (NSC) 65, March 28, 1950, FRUS, 1950, I, p. 132, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 20

³¹ Ibid.

any Soviet arms pouring in the Middle Eastern area.³² American approval of the British scheme simply fit in the administration's containment policy which naturally supported anti-Soviet strategies. Still, London and Washington did so in pursuit of strictly national goals, too.

Given domestic political pressures from pro-Israeli groups, the Truman administration sought to limit Arab strength by countering British arms sales to the Arabs. For its part, the Labour government of Clement Attlee could not sell arms to Israel for fear of further alienating the Arab states where growing nationalist activism together with Arab resentment of Britain's role in the loss of Palestine threatened to bring down the UK's position and interests in the region. Under cover of the Tripartite Declaration, however, President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee did find out the parade to regulate the flow of arms to their countries's respective clients in the region, thereby mollifying the domestic political pressure on the former's administration, and fitting in the foreign policy plans of the latter's government. Yet, apart from satisfying the foreign policy goals of the British government and lessening the tension exercised on the Truman administration by local Jewish pressure groups, the Declaration did nothing to ease the tension prevailing between London and Cairo.

First Egypt objected to Britain's use of the Tripartite Declaration to deny Egypt access to American weaponry. Second, the Egyptians denounced the Foreign Office's use of the arms purchasing regulations set for in the Declaration, as a pressuring means in the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations over the Canal base, as translated by the Labour Government's decision, in September 1950, to cancel Cairo's order for 65 jet fighters and to delay the delivery of 16 Centurion tanks which had already been paid for. Moreover, by implying an offer of military aid to all those states that accepted to play their part in the

³² The Americans and particularly the British feared that if they refused to sell arms to Middle Eastern states, the Soviet Union would surely accept to do so. Indeed, in the spring of 1948, Israel had received much of its arms supply with which it had fought its first war with the Arabs (Oct 1948- Jan 1949) from the Soviet bloc, which hoped to ease out the British from the M.E. and prevent the U.S. from becoming a political player there.

defense of the area, the declaration was clearly designed as a Foreign Office coercive negotiating tactic in the dispute opposing it to the Egyptian government. In fact, the offer mainly served London's and Washington's plans for the implementation of an Anglo-American defense plan for the Middle East which sought to establish a "combined US-UK Command structure to stimulate co-operation among the Near Eastern states", for the sake of preserving the area from the threat of communism.³³ Intelligence reports about possible Soviet encroachment in the Turkish Straits and the Suez Canal area in 1951, reinforced such US-UK co-operation and led the Truman administration, which feared for the loss of Turkey to the Eastern Bloc, to extend NATO membership to both Turks and Greeks on 30 April, 1951.³⁴ As to the British government, the Foreign Office approved Turkish membership in NATO only in return for Ankara's adherence to the concept of an Anglo-American Middle East Command structure (MEC)³⁵. In British officials' view, the plan's inclusion of extra-members such as the U.S. and Turkey, would give no grounds to Egyptian nationalists' objections that it was British-managed. Furthermore, it would replace the Anglo-Egyptian treaty and allow the maintenance of not only British but also US and Turkish troops in the Suez base. In other words, The MEC structure would provide a solution to the Anglo-Egyptian dispute without evicting British presence from the Suez Canal base.

3. THE MIDDLE EAST COMMAND FAILURE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES:

With the primary aim of fulfilling America's Cold War and Britain's imperial goals, The Middle East Command proposal was presented to the Egyptians on 13 October 1951, by Herbert Morrison _ the new British Foreign

³³ Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs to the Secretary of State, December 27, 1950, . FRUS, 1951, V, p. 6, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 22.

³⁴ Agreed Conclusion and Recommendations of Conference of Mideast Chiefs, Mission, Istanbul, February 14-21, 1951, *FRUS, 1951, V*, pp 58-60, *ibid*, p.23

³⁵ Memorandum of conversation by the Acting Secretary of State for European Affairs, July 6, 1951, *FRUS, 1951, III*, (Washington D.C. , 1957), pp. 544-545, *ibid* .

Minister, since March 1951. In historian Terry Wilbur Lindley's words, the proposal addressed only "...the single issue of how to keep the Canal in Western hands by preventing the abrogation of the 1936 Treaty", and did "...not consider the Command structure other than to assure the Egyptians that they would have a position of high authority and responsibility within the Allied Middle Eastern Command."³⁶ Not surprisingly, the Egyptian government under the leadership of the Wafdist Prime Minister Nahas Pasha, rejected the Anglo-American offer, with full support of the Arab states. Egypt which had witnessed the return of the nationalist Wafd party to power in January 1950, was even more adamant on the withdrawal of all British troops from the country. A week before his government was presented with the MEC proposal, Nahas Pasha announced Egypt's unilateral abrogation of the 1936 Treaty and the 1899 Sudan Agreement,³⁷ and proclaimed Farouk King of both countries. The announcement led to a state of guerrilla in the Canal Zone where British forces were concentrated, and to various other attacks against British troops and installations in Egypt. With the unofficial backing of the Egyptian army, a virtual state of undeclared war prevailed through the country and was to remain so until 1952.³⁸

The American reaction to Egypt's rejection of the Western defense proposal marked a turning point in US involvement in the Middle East in general and in Egypt in particular. Far more serious than its rejection of the MEC proposal, Egypt's abrogation of the 1936 Treaty brought American officials who, taking note of the failure of British plans and, henceforth, the failure to check Arab neutrality in the Cold War, decided to consider charting themselves a separate course from their ally, the UK.³⁹

³⁶ T.W Lindley , '*The Tag End of Diplomacy : American Policy in the Near East , 1949-1953*', Ph.D. Dissertation ,Texas Christian University Press, Texas, 1985, p. 134.

³⁷ Sudan had been a source of friction between Egypt and Britain for a number of years and by 1945 had been turned into a protectorate by the British who, by so doing, nullified the 1899 Agreement whereby Britain and Egypt held Sudan as a condominium.

³⁸ M. H Heikel , *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 20

³⁹ Dean Achson , *Present at the Creation: My Years at the State Department*, Norton & Company, New York, 1987, p. 661

The American decision came as the direct outcome of the failure of British policies to resolve the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base dispute. Herbert Morrison's hope to keep the Canal in Western hands via the MEC frustrated Egyptian national feelings and henceforward, only further helped discredit the MEC. As to America, US officials desperately wanted the Middle East region to calm down particularly now that another front of nationalist assertiveness threatened to bring down the British position in Iran. The Iranian Majles's (lower house of parliament) decision in March 1951, to nationalize the Iranian oil industry, which was in great part under British monopoly, led to popular demonstrations which indicated widespread support for such an action and brought the spokesman of Iranian nationalism, doctor Mohamed Mosaddeq, to the position of Prime Minister. The precedent created by the Iranian nationalisation was regarded by both London and Washington as a dangerous one. According to historian Brands, the British especially feared that:

If the Iranians could get away with taking over the Anglo-Iranian Company's assets, which included the world's largest oil refinery of Abadan, what would prevent the Egyptians from seizing the Suez Canal ?⁴⁰

Furthermore, the Iranian action did also send a wave of revived nationalist fever throughout the Middle East, where the British were equally, if not more unpopular with Arab nationalists. Such developments did not go unnoticed by the American administration.

The MEC failure did also demonstrate that the Truman administration was not yet ready for a clear and direct American political and military involvement in the Middle East.⁴¹ Yet, it did reflect growing differences between the U.S. and the UK particularly with regard the Anglo-Egyptian dispute. For American strategists, the MEC was primarily designed to check Arab neutralism in the

⁴⁰ Brands , *Into the Labyrinth* , p . 37.

⁴¹ Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez* , p. 24

Cold War and help solve the Anglo-Egyptian issue. While the Foreign Office saw in the MEC a strategy whereby to pressurise Cairo to accept British conditions – the establishment of a defensive Middle Eastern structure including Egypt – in the negotiations over the Suez Canal base. It was in the light of all these failures that US officials started the debate over the Middle East, in late November 1951. The American decision was reinforced by some prominent State Department’s officials’ recommendations warning that “... the need for harmony with our Western allies must not blind us to the urgent need for reform in some of the colonial foreign policies of our allies.”⁴² Harold B. Hoskins, Acting Regional Planning Adviser for the State Department, further argued that Washington should advise London against pressurising the Egyptians over Suez, as such tactics might lead to antagonisms that would spoil the West’s interests in the entire region.

Taking notice of the failure of British policies in Egypt, and endorsing Hoskins recommendations, the Truman administration issued National Security Council 129/1. Entitled: “United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab States and Israel”, NSC 129/1 differed from previous ones in that it identified the major danger facing the West in the region as arising

... not so much from the threat of direct Soviet military attack as from acute instability, anti-Western nationalism and Arab-Israeli antagonism which could lead to [...] a situation in which regimes oriented towards the Soviet Union could come to power.

The document also stressed the Anglo-Egyptian dispute and the Arab-Israeli conflict as the basic issues that required American initiatives, and recommended the U.S. to take an increasing role in the area while “providing as much support as possible to the British”.⁴³

⁴² Memorandum by the Acting Planning Adviser, Harold B. Hoskins, to Henry Byroade, April 7, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-54, Vol IX, Part I*, (Washington D.C., 1986), pp. 204-13.

⁴³ NSC 129/1 : United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab States and Israel, April 24, 1952, *ibid*, p. 223

If NSC 129/1 still recognized the Middle East as a primarily British responsibility, a memorandum issued a month later putting the stress on the UK's incapacity for its defense, concluded that:

... without suggesting any derogation of [the] UK
... it would appear that the United States will
have to provide more assistance and bring its
influence to bear [if it looked] forward to a
significant strengthening of the situation in the
Middle East.⁴⁴

This memorandum together with NSC 129/1 set forth the foundation of American policy in the Middle East by defining the primary issues the U.S. had to attend to. Conforming to the foreign policy goals stated in NSC 129/1, Washington's role in the Middle East did, in effect, considerably increase in 1952. Following a State and Defense Departments' committee of experts' study of the Arab world and its conflict with Israel, ordered by Secretary of State Dean Acheson in late 1951, Egypt was chosen for an operation due to its important influence in the Arab world. The Truman administration responded favourably to the prospect of a coup in Egypt, hoping it would help resolve the Anglo-Egyptian crisis, and foster Egyptian adherence to a regional defense group with the West. Moreover, the US leadership increasingly wanted Egypt and the UK to solve their problems in Suez and the Sudan,⁴⁵ for fear that continued friction between the two would encourage the Arab states into even more entrenched neutral and anti-Western attitudes. This could but engender further hostility towards Western interests and policies in the area. Accordingly, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) agent Kermit Roosevelt was sent to Egypt where his March 1952 meetings with Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser – a leading figure of the Free Officers group that was to overthrow the Egyptian monarchy in July 1952 – settled the question of US aid for the implementation of a coup to \$ 3

⁴⁴ Memorandum prepared by the Policy Planning Staff, May 21, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-54, IX, part I*, pp. 233-234.

⁴⁵ Cairo which objected to London's plan to grant the Sudan independence and self-government wanted Sudanese resources, and demanded political union between Cairo and Khartoum. The Egyptian especially resented British attempts to demonstrate the benefits of colonialism.

million.⁴⁶ On 23 July 1952, under General Naguib's leadership the Free Officers overthrew the Egyptian monarchy and assumed effective control of Egypt.

America's involvement in the Egyptian coup was badly received by the British who resented Washington's support of the military régime in Cairo.⁴⁷ At this stage, however, American officials were more concerned by State Department's experts' warnings to Assistant Secretary of State Henry Byroade, that the Anglo-Egyptian dispute together with the U.S. "continuing moral, material and military support to Israel" were weakening the US position in the region. More significantly, they called for a reassessment of US policy in the area before the Soviet Union took advantage of an expanding vacuum there.⁴⁸

Consequently, Washington set about upgrading its image and stature in the region by supporting the new régime in Cairo. The Egyptian Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) welcomed the American stand but insisted that selling the U.S. to the Egyptian public required financial and military assistance from Washington. The Free Officers readiness to make secret commitments "...concerning objectives [...] including a Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO) and or partnership with the United States",⁴⁹ did prompt President Truman to agree to sell Egypt \$ 10 million in military equipment. The next day, however, the administration withdrew its offer pretexting General Naguib's government's refusal to provide the secret assurances agreed to earlier. In reality, and however reassessing its Middle East policy and its association with the UK, Washington was not yet ready to operate a break with its British ally's policies.

⁴⁶ Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 27.

⁴⁷ In *Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*, M.H Heikel reports that 'When the revolution took place[...] all the foreign embassies were taken by surprise, none more so than the British embassy, which was supposed to be better informed than the others', p. 29.

⁴⁸ Memorandum, Hoskins to Byroade, July 25, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-54, Vol IX, Part II*, p. 257. In historian J.C. Hurewitz's book, *Middle East Dilemmas: The Background of United States Policy*, p. 222, it is reported that Between 1949 and 1952, Israel formally received from the United States \$ 86.5 million in grants and \$135 million in loans as economic and military aid, and that during the same period, Israel received \$ 450 million in donations from world Jewry, mostly from the U.S. In 1951 alone, Israel sold up to \$ 52 million in bonds in the U.S., too.

⁴⁹ Caffery To Acheson, September 8, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-54, Part I, Vol IX, Part II*, p. 1860.

More disagreement impeded Anglo-American relations particularly concerning the political line to observe towards Egypt. Prime Minister Winston Churchill's Conservative government adopted a hard policy line in the negotiations over the Suez base,⁵⁰ insisting that the U.S. should give economic aid priority over arms sales to Egypt. While the argument developed by Dean Acheson held the opposite view, stressing that being a military régime General Naguib's government needed Western military armement to remain in power. The rethoric concerning military aid to Egypt contributed to a deterioration of Anglo-American relations in the Middle East over the four following years, ultimately bringing Cairo under President Gamal Abdel Nasser's leadership to consider the Soviet option for arms supply in 1955. Thus, the Western powers's failure to agree on military aid first to General Naguib's government, and to Colonel Nasser's later on did, in effect, saw years earlier one of the main seeds that were to precipitate the 1956 Suez Crisis.

As a consequence of its joint policies with London, the Truman administration didn't succeed in aligning the Arab states with the West, thus reducing the prospect of Arab affiliation to its anti-communist cause. American officials reassessment of their country's policy in the region also failed to correct Arab perception of the US stands as pro-Israeli in Palestine⁵¹ and pro-British in the Suez Canal talks. This failure was mainly due to America's continued support of Israel as well as to its incapacity to force a break with its British ally. The resulting situation was a growing Arab anti-Western and neutralist movement which the State Department viewed as a clear invitation to Soviet penetration.

⁵⁰ The first contacts between the Free Officers and the British representation in Cairo were not encouraging. "When Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Fawzi, met Ambassador Stevenson and asked him about the state of negotiations, he was presented with a paper which informed him that, while the British government was anxious to go as far as it could to meet Egyptian aspirations, it had to insist on the validity of the 1936 Treaty." Mohamed.H Heikel, *Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*, p. 33.

⁵¹ Arab anti-American feelings originated in the Arab peoples anger and resentment following President's Harry S. Truman's "de jure" recognition of the state of Israel on the Arab land of Palestine, less than 15 minutes after the Israeli announcement was made at the United Nations, on 14 May 1948.

Such was the Middle Eastern political legacy inherited by the Eisenhower administration in January 1953. The freshly elected White House team was aware that the new régime in Egypt offered “perhaps the first real opportunity for a reasonable settlement of the problems which threaten the stability of the Near East”,⁵² namely: settling the Suez base dispute, enlisting the Arab states and particularly Egypt in a regional defense structure in partnership with the West, and initiating peace between Arabs and Israelis by inducing the Egyptians to take the lead in starting talks with Tel Aviv. That would set up a precedent Washington hoped other Arab states would imitate. Yet, President Dwight David Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were equally aware that unless the administration moved decisively to end the Anglo-Egyptian dispute and defuse the tension inherent to the Arab-Israeli conflict, American strategic plans for the containment of Soviet expansion in the region would be met with the same failures encountered by the previous administration, particularly in view of the mounting power of Arab nationalism which Egypt’s dispute with Britain and the frontiere incidents with Israel only further exacerbated .

⁵² Perkins to Dulles, December 31, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-54, Vol IX , Part II*, pp. 1928-1934.

CHAPTER II: THE EISENHOWER APPROACH TO MIDDLE EASTERN ISSUES

Upon becoming president, in January 1953, Dwight David Eisenhower sought to reconstruct the containment strategy which had faced many setbacks by then. The events in Greece and Turkey (1947), the Berlin Blockade (1948)⁵³, the success of the Chinese Revolution (1949) and the Korean War (1950) rendered it urgent to reboost Containment. The administration basically pledged itself to thwart further communist expansion, strengthen economic and political ties within the free world and protect American institutions from international instability.⁵⁴ However endorsing the broad outlines of the Truman-Acheson Containment strategy, the 'New Look' promised by the Republicans in foreign policy did also seek to liberate 'captive' peoples in the Communist Bloc and support emerging nations in the Third World, rather than merely containing the Soviet Union. Implementing such a policy, US strategists would exploit America's "atomic and aerial superiority", expand the Central Intelligence Agency's activities, work out a series of regional defense pacts, and use the threat of 'massive retaliation' as a deterrent to rope off the communist world.⁵⁵

The administration's anti-communist line was reinforced by the Soviet Union's early 1950s interest in East Asian and North African nationalist activisms which were challenging European colonialism. It equally strengthened America's will to deny Western Europe to communism so as to avert a shift in the world balance of power in favour of the Soviet bloc.⁵⁶

Concern for Western Europe increased the American administration's interest in Middle Eastern oil, vital as it was for the economic and military

⁵³ In late 1948 the Soviet authorities of East Berlin blockaded West Berlin then under Western rule. Supplies of food to West Berliners had to be airlifted until the issue between East and West was defused in 1949.

⁵⁴ Richard .A Melanson , *The Foundations of Eisenhower's Foreign Policy : Continuity and Consensus* , p. 43, in

R.A. Melanson and David Mayers, *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s*, Edited by Melanson & Mayers , Illinois, 1989.

⁵⁵ Philip J. Briggs, *Making American Foreign Policy : President-Congress Relations from the Second World War to the Post-Cold War*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., Maryland, 1994, p. 72 .

⁵⁶ Melanson , pp. 49-50.

health of America's Atlantic allies and their postwar reconstruction. Therefore, Eisenhower immediately began expanding the US commitment in the Middle East region where the British were reluctantly retreating from their old colonial empire. Talks with Egypt about revision of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty had made no progress, and General Naguib's government was facing opposition from younger officers of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), such as Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was most critical of the General's lukewarm anti-western stance.⁵⁷

British hardships in the region were made compound by a crisis with Saudi Arabia over the Buraimi Oasis,⁵⁸ and by the issue of the 900,000 Palestinian refugees ousted from their lands by the Israelis during and after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.⁵⁹ Mounting hostility and increasing frontier raids, especially on the Egyptian-Israeli borders, added to the instability of the region, thereby seriously threatening Western interests and further eroding British power-position.

In January 1953, Eisenhower realized that "supporting the British in the newly emerging Third World would cause Washington a good many problems."⁶⁰ But it was equally true that to preserve its economic health and stability, it was essential for America to assist its allies in their colonies. This created contradictions in American foreign policy especially given Washington's vocal encouragements to world nationalist trends in general, and to Arab ones in particular⁶¹, bent as it was on preventing their loss to world

⁵⁷ Before Nasser became vice premier in June 1953, a power struggle had developed within the RCC as Nasser and other officers were deceived by Naguib and his civilian ministers' lack of vigor to drive the British out of Suez

⁵⁸ Located in the south-eastern tip of the Arabian peninsula, Buraimi was under the joint rule of Abu Dhabi, Oman

and Muscat, Britain's client states. The belief that the Oasis might contain vast oil reserves led the Arabian-American's (ARAMCO) management to encourage Saudi occupation of Buraimi in 1952.

⁵⁹ Heikel and Freiberger report that the number of Palestinian refugees after the 1948 war was about 700,000. In the early 1950s, the figure rose of about 200,000 more Palestinians who had either fled Israeli oppression, were displaced from their homes or compelled to refugee-status, because of the prevailing insecurity in Palestine.

⁶⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, *Dwight David Eisenhower: The Eisenhower Diaries*, R H. Ferrell, New York, 1981, p. 223.

⁶¹ According to Mathew Holland, 'From the beginning the administration put the region on notice that the United States would take the leading role in eliminating the last vestiges of imperialism and acting as an impartial

communism which, according to Eisenhower, “was taking advantage of the spirit of nationalism to cause dissension in the free world.”⁶² To a large extent, it was the very absence of a clear US position in the struggle opposing nationalism and colonialism which caused Washington a ‘good many problems’ with world nationalism, and dissension within the Western alliance, and not so much the threat posed by communism.

America’s middle of the road position between sympathy towards the advocates of nationalism and French and British colonialism was in the end to alienate both. Nowhere was it more so than in the Middle East where Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, deeply resented America’s efforts to usurp British power. While in Arab nationalists’ eyes, the U.S. was but the heir of European colonialism.

Britain’s imperial failures and Arab entrenched anti-Western stands led American officials to reassess their country’s policy. This resulted in Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s Middle East fact-finding tour, in May 1953.

Dulles’s findings overwhelmingly pointed to the weakness of America’s position in the region. On 18 May, he reported from Baghdad that: “...bitterness towards the West, including the United States is such that while Arab goodwill may still be restored, time is short before [its] loss became irretrievable.” Describing the Anglo- Egyptian situation as the most critical of all, Dulles warned that if persisting it would “... find [the] Arab world in open and united hostility to the West and in some cases receptive to Soviet aid.”⁶³

With regard to the régimes’s position in the Cold War, Dulles was told in his 11 May meeting with Colonel Nasser that “the Arab Collective Security Pact (ACSP) was directed solely against Israel.” When Dulles referred to the communist threat, Colonel Nasser argued that he “couldn’t see the Soviets

broker between the Arabs and Israelis.’ , Mathew F. Holland , *America and Egypt : from Roosevelt to Eisenhower* , Praeger Publishers , Westport, Connecticut, 1996 . p.41

⁶² Ferrell , *The Eisenhower Diaries* , p. 319 .

⁶³ Dulles to Eisenhower, # 1373, May 17, 1953, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box # 1, Eisenhower Library, Abilene Kansas, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez* , p.52 .

attacking the heartlands of the Middle East except in the event of a global war.”⁶⁴ This confirmed Dulles’s conclusions that the UK and Israel were Egypt’s major concerns not the Soviets, and that a Middle East Defense Organization was bound to Egyptian interpretation as a way to retain Britain’s empire.

On July 9, 1953, the National Security Council adopted NSC 155/1. Based on Dulles’s findings, the document recommended the administration to

... assist in finding solutions to local problems which involve its relations with the [UK] ... help settle the most outstanding issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict and...develop secret plans for the defense of the area.

The document also recommended that Israel would not receive preferential treatments⁶⁵ and would have to agree to boundary concessions and repatriation of and compensation for Palestinian refugees, because the U.S. “goal is to show our interest in the well-being of all Arab states and Israel”. Concerning the UK, the document held that “... U.S. security interest is for the U.K. to assume much responsibility.... Although the trend is for the U.S. influence to replace British influence in the area...” The paper also called for solving the Suez issue in regard of the fact that “...the continuation of British forces on Egyptian soil is an impossibility.”⁶⁶ As a consequence, the administration immediately started pushing for a solution of the Suez issue believing that once settled, Egypt would adhere to the US plans for solving other key regional problems.

The present Chapter probes the Eisenhower administration’s approach to solve Middle Eastern issues via a policy aiming at stabilizing the region and

⁶⁴ Mohamed H. Heikel, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes*, Andre Deutch, London, 1986, p. 39.

⁶⁵ The State Department Memo prepared after Dulles’s trip recommended the U.S. to ‘ seek every possible means to allay fear in the Arab world over future Israeli objectives and to convince the Arab world that the United States is operating upon a policy of true impartiality’.

⁶⁶ United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East, National Security Council: 155/1, July 14, 1953, Eisenhower Library, White House Office for Special Assistant for National Security Council, Affairs Near East (2) Box #5. Frieberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, P 54.

organizing its defense against the communist threat. The Chapter will also deal with the impact such an initiative would have on the course of events in the area, and on Anglo-American relations in particular. In the end, the Chapter will try to establish the relation between the fallouts from the new administration's policies, and the setting in motion of key events that were to pave the way to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and lead to the October 1956 Suez War.

1. SETTLING THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUEZ BASE DISPUTE

The Anglo-Egyptian stalemate in the Suez negotiations distressed the Eisenhower administration over the course of events in Egypt and its impact on Western interests and position in the region. Broadly speaking, the U.S. shared the UK's view that any settlement between London and Cairo would involve an agreement on a phased withdrawal of troops and the up-keep of a base in the Canal Zone to be immediately reactivated in the event of war. Britain's over-concern with retaining its power position in the region and its insistence on enrolling Egypt in a MEDO tutored by the West became a major stumblingblock, however.

With a view to help work out Anglo-Egyptian differences in the Suez talks, Washington dispatched US Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs Henry Byroade to London, during the first week of January 1953. Although broken down into three cases, the British position adamantly stuck to Case A which provided for the UK to:

retain control of the management of the principal installations in the base, [that] ... the base functions in peace time for the maintenance of some of our forces [5000 personal for the army and 2000 for the R.A.F.] in the Middle East, [and]...is nominally available for immediate use on the outbreak of war.⁶⁷

Prime Minister Winston Churchill was most skeptical about reconciliation

⁶⁷ CAB 129/61, 'Egypt : Defense Negotiations' , 7 July 1953, C. (53) 192, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 58

with the Egyptians. Yet, his Foreign Minister held a different reasoning. Recognizing that the UK was in serious breach of the 1936 Treaty, particularly with regard to the 81,000 troops located in Suez, despite the 1936 Treaty limiting them to 10,000, Eden rejected continued British occupation of Egypt and explained before the Cabinet that ‘We cannot afford to keep 80,000 men indefinitely in the Canal Zone.’⁶⁸ Still, however accepting Britain’s retreat from Egypt, Eden did share the Prime Minister’s view that any settlement of the base dispute implied Egyptian enlisting in a MEDO. In a memo prepared for the Cabinet in February 1953, Eden stressed that the UK would not withdraw from Egypt until a “MEDO was a concrete reality.”⁶⁹

Britain’s adamancy on Egyptian participation in a MEDO hindered progress in the Suez talks. Moreover, London’s objections to American military aid to Cairo further complicated the situation and translated a perceivable mesentente between the two allies. On 19 February, the State Department informed the Egyptian leadership that Egypt qualified to receive US military aid specifically limited to training. This highly upset Churchill who dispatched Eden to Washington to try to convince the U.S. to take part in the Suez talks so as to pressure Cairo to acquiesce in British conditions for the creation of a MEDO.

In principle the Eisenhower administration opposed providing London with veto power over any kind of aid to Cairo and was convinced that an immediate “response to General Naguib’s request for aid was essential to reduce Egyptian military opposition to Naguib” and help advance negotiations over the Canal base.⁷⁰ The US administration did not share Eden’s strategy which sought to use a “phased release of arms as an effective bargaining weapon to extract from Egypt some sort of package deal on evacuation and Egyptian participation

⁶⁸ CAB 129/59, Memorandum by Eden, ‘Egypt : the Alternatives’, 16 Feb.1953, C. (53) 65, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ PRO CAB 128/26, C.C (53) 12, Feb.17,1953, Memorandum to the Cabinet, Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, *ibid*, p. 53-54.

⁷⁰ Gifford to the Department of State, January 3,1953, *FRUS, 1952-54, Vol IX, Part II*, pp.1952-1953.

in a MEDO.”⁷¹ US officials opposed such an idea concerned as they were about distancing their country from the taints of British imperialism.⁷² What is more alleging the administration’s concern to avoid “the charge of forming bilateral combinations” Dulles held that American participation in the talks would be contingent on Egyptian invitation,⁷³ and that the U.S. would work behind the scenes but would not openly side with Britain and be portrayed as an imperialist stooge.⁷⁴

In reality the U.S. was not the ‘honest broker’ it had pretended to be in the Anglo-Egyptian dispute. Eisenhower’s decision not to grant military aid to Cairo until it resolved the Suez issue, allowed Britain virtual veto power over US arms sales to Egypt. The US failure to operate a break with British policies would plague the administration’s moves in the region as it created contradictions in American Middle Eastern policy. Worse still, such a strategy would prove fatal to the West as it led Nasser to recourse to Soviet arms, signaling thereby the end of the West’s arms monopoly in the area which would, in effect, set the stage for the Suez crisis.

Securing veto power over US military aid to Egypt was not satisfactory to Churchill who, according to historian Mathew Holland, “... now requested written assurances that the administration would provide no economic or political support to the Egyptians without prior approval of Her Majesty’s Government.”⁷⁵ This infuriated Eisenhower who told Dulles that “if it ever got out Congress would go through the roof if they thought that we had surrendered our independence of action.”⁷⁶ As a result, utterly angered by Churchill, the pro-British Eisenhower sent General Naguib a letter offering him total American

⁷¹ Caffery to the Department of State, January 2, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 1937-1938.

⁷² Holland, *America and Egypt: From Roosevelt to Eisenhower*, p.41. See also Freiberger’s *Dawn over Suez*, p. 75. According to Freiberger, in commenting Churchill’s calls for US participation in the Suez talks President Eisenhower told Dulles that: ‘... the British always think that their colonialism is different and better. Actually, what they want us to do is go along and keep their empire.’

⁷³ PRO CAB 128/26, CC. (53)17, Eden’s Report from the United States, March 9, 1953, Freiberger, pp. 63-64 .

⁷⁴ Holland, p. 42.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁷⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, 4 March 1953, *FRUS 52-54, Vol IX, Part I*, pp. 349-350.

support _ in the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base negotiations _ if his government concluded a Suez agreement with the British.

Towards the end of October 1953, the British and the Egyptians agreed that the new treaty would last only seven years. But the Foreign Office now called for including Turkey and Iran in the list of countries which if attacked would trigger reactivation of the base. The Egyptians retorted that availability of the base could not involve countries other than those in the Arab Pact. To this new issue was added the hindering point of whether British technicians at Suez could remain in uniform.⁷⁷ All in all, Britain's manoeuvres to delay the negotiations infuriated Dulles who was most concerned about yet another problem in the area: Egypt's trend towards neutralism.

Following Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Cairo in June, for the promotion of his country's policy of nonalignment and neutrality, the Egyptian leadership announced Cairo's adherence to the concept of positive neutrality to promote peace, avoid dependency on the West and increase the influence of small nations like Egypt. Such declarations prompted the State Department to inform Cairo that the U.S. would supply Egypt with \$ 50 million in military and economic aid provided a successful Suez agreement was reached. In reality, Dulles sought to use US aid to defuse Egyptian neutralist drives.⁷⁸

The Eisenhower administration's frustrations with Britain's imperial obsession reached a peak, following Churchill's early December 1953 letter to Eisenhower in which he threatened to recognize China if America did not back London against Cairo in the Suez talks, adding that his government did not have "the slightest intention to make any more concessions to Egypt." An outraged Eisenhower reminded the British Prime Minister how disastrous British policies in the region had been in recent years, citing Iran as an example, and

⁷⁷ For Eden, 'Technicians and others who would run the installation [would] be members of the armed forces entitled to wear uniforms and carry personal arms.' PRO CAB 128/26, C.C (53)12, Feb 17 1953, Louis & Owen, *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences*, pp. 53-54.

⁷⁸ Holland, *America and Egypt*, p.48.

stressing that Egypt might well kick Britain out in similar “humiliating circumstances”. As to China, with whom the UK had developed a most lucrative trade, Eisenhower retorted that America would cancel aid for Egypt if Britain did the same in China.⁷⁹ Yielding to US pressure, British Ambassador Ralph Stevenson met Colonel Nasser in Cairo, on 24 December, 1953, where he conceded the uniform issue while Nasser agreed to allow reentry to the base in the event of an attack on Turkey.

Further disagreement between the two Atlantic allies aroused at the beginning of 1954 when British intelligence reports about an internal struggle between General Naguib and Colonel Nasser⁸⁰ led the Foreign Office negotiators to drag feet in the Suez talks. This obviously ran counter to Washington’s objectives in the Middle East. Seeking a quick resolution of the base dispute, as a primary step to foster peace talks between Egypt and Israel so as to stabilize the region, consolidate the West’s presence there and deny it to communism, US officials worried about the consequences of the upheaval at work in Cairo on their strategy. Moreover, in Washington’s view, the Suez talks were now vital to consolidate Colonel Nasser’s rule and secure his receptiveness to US plans. Henceforth, at the very time the State Department sought strengthening Nasser’s régime, via resolution of the Suez issue, London instructed the Foreign Office to stretch out the negotiations.⁸¹ Still resentful of the US refusal to side with the UK in the Suez talk, the British were, in fact, increasingly suspicious of Washington’s designs in the area. Hence, a real rift of anger and distrust started driving the two allies wide apart.

In September 1954, some stumblingblocks in the Suez talks could be

⁷⁹ Churchill to Eisenhower, 19 December 1953, *FRUS 52-54, Vol IX, Part II*, p. 2177; Eisenhower to Churchill, 20 December 1953, *FRUS 1952-54, Vol IX, Part II*, pp. 2178-80.

⁸⁰ On 25 February 1954, General Naguib resigned and the next day Nasser was proclaimed Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council and Prime Minister. General Naguib was placed under house arrest and new elections were announced for 23 July 1954. The elections, which in effect meant that the revolution was ended, consecrated Nasser as the first elected Egyptian President.

⁸¹ PRO CAB 128/26, C.C. (53)54, State of Negotiations with Egypt, October 2, 1953, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 69.

overcome partly due to Colonel Nasser's anxiety to secure Western economic and military assistance and partly due to Washington's pressure on London to meet Egyptian concessions. This mainly concerned British attempts to extend duration of the agreement to twenty years, while previously accepting the seven-year Egyptian proposal which both the Foreign Office and the State Department had agreed to. Hence, on 19 October 1954, Britain and Egypt signed the "Heads of agreements" _ initialled in Cairo on 27 July_ as a final settlement of the Suez base dispute. The new treaty was a seven-year agreement which called for the withdrawal of British troops from Suez over a period of twenty months, with the base to be run by a civilian board of British technicians acceptable to both countries, but under Egyptian authority. The base was also to be placed on a war footing for effective operation, in case of an armed attack on an Arab state, Turkey or the Suez Maritime Canal which both nations recognized as "an integral part of Egypt" and also as "a waterway economically , commercially and strategically of international importance...."⁸²

The eviction of British troops from the Canal Zone was a real national achievement for Colonel Nasser which strengthened his government locally, added to his popularity within Arab nationalist circles, and confirmed Cairo's pre-eminence in the Arab world.⁸³ Egypt's position in the area was of high interest for the State Department and central to the U.S. strategy for ending the issues behind Middle Eastern instability and hindering the creation of a Western regional defense structure. Washington's "hands-off" stance in the Suez talks sought to end the Suez dispute and dissociate itself from Britain's imperial image, with a view to gain Colonel Nasser's adherence to the US peace scheme for the region. Therefore, the administration avoided antagonising the Egyptian

⁸² Parliamentary Papers, Cmd. 9586, 1954, 'The Suez Canal Base Agreement' , 19 October 1954 , Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez Crisis* , pp. 32-3 .

⁸³ According to Rashid Khalidi, (Q in Louis and Owen, p. 14), 'Securing British military withdrawal from Egypt after seventy two years of occupation was a great achievement for Nasser and had a powerful resonance in an Arab world still dotted with French bases in Tunisia Morocco and Algeria, British bases in Lybia, Jordan Iraq and Aden and the Gulf, and American bases in Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Lybia.'

leader whose nationalist pan-Arab drives precluded Arab meddling in Western alliances which he perceived as disguised colonialism. Thus, Britain's next policy move to bring Iraq into the regional defense structure of the Baghdad Pact _ seen by Eden as the only tool for the UK's survival as a major regional power after the loss of Suez _ did nothing to lessen Nasser's distrust of the West. What is more, the U.S. ambiguous stands towards the Baghdad coalition would generate yet another set of frictions, that added to the resentment that had tainted the two Atlantic allies' relations during the Suez Talks.

2. FROM THE 'NORTHERN TIER' TO THE BAGHDAD PACT.

Central to America's involvement in Middle Eastern affairs was its concern about communist incursion in an area of high strategic interests for the West. Since the Truman years, America's primary objective had been the creation of an anti-Soviet grouping that would thwart any communist thrust in the area. Likewise, the Eisenhower team sought organizing Middle Eastern defense so as to shut the Soviets out and protect Western Europe's oil lifeline there. Egypt's pre-eminence in the Arab world increased Washington's interest in strengthening the régime in Cairo in return for, US officials hoped, an open Egyptian endorsement of US plans for the region.

Part of secretary of state Dulles's May 1953 Middle East tour's findings was the fact that "the political situation is such that the Arab states will not at this time openly join defensive arrangements ..." and that Washington give up the hope "... of making Egypt the key country in building the foundations for a military defense in the Middle East." Instead, Dulles produced 'the Northern Tier' which called for the establishment of a defense grouping enlisting certain Middle Eastern states, with a view to counter the communist threat in the Eastern Mediterranean. Dulles explained his strategy before the NSC in the following way:

The general concept is that ... Pakistan could be made a strong loyal point. So obviously could

Turkey.Syria and Iraq realized their danger, and could probably be induced to join us . As for the countries further south, they were too lacking in the realization of the international situation Iran was the obvious weak spot in what could become a strong defensive arrangement of the northern tier states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan.⁸⁴

The novelty in the US policy was the aim of organizing Middle Eastern defense via the achievement of separate bilateral treaties that, State Department officials hoped, could be turned into a larger defense grouping for the region. This in turn would be a first step for developing a MEDO of Turkey, Pakistan Iraq and Iran based on a NATO model. Moreover, aware of Egypt's hostility towards entangling in any foreign alliance or the coming of any Arab country under Western tutelage of any kind _ as translated by Cairo's position in the Anglo-Egyptian Suez talks _ Washington emphasized that in such a grouping the Western powers would be "associated not domineering", as the whole concept was designed to set up an "association of indigenous forces under an indigenous command" would imply "no direct or overt Western participation... and no Arab state would be allowed to join except for Iraq"; in return, those states willing to cooperate with the West would receive American military aid.⁸⁵ America's new plans for the defense of the Middle East resulted in Pakistan and Turkey's adherences, in September, to the support of the "Northern Middle East Defense Pact". Washington rewarded both countries with the promise of a military aid program to begin before the end of 1953. Appealing as they were to the Turks and the Pakistanis, such plans were neither applauded by the British, nor welcomed by the Egyptians, however.

During the Suez talks, Washington's opposition with respect to a British MEDO, led Colonel Nasser to assume that it would support Cairo's scheme for

⁸⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 147th Meeting of the National Security Council, June 1, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-54, Vol IX, Part I, pp. 379-386.

⁸⁵ Jernegan to Henderson, November 9, 1953, *ibid* , pp. 424-428.

developing an Arab regional defense grouping. Nasser's concern about Arab unity and independence from Western patronage and his vision of an Arab world acting in unison to counter all forms of dominations and aggressions_ the pan-Arab philosophy_ rendered him impermeable to any defense concept other than the Arab Collective Security Pact (ACSP), so far directed against Israel. During his May 1953 meeting with Nasser Dulles had approved the Egyptian leader's scheme for strengthening the ACSP, but he changed his mind about it afterwards, labelling it a "union of positive neutralists", to be best countered by such a strategy as the Northern Tier.⁸⁶ The prospect implied in the 'Northern Tier' calling for enlisting such Arab countries as Syria and Iraq, upset Colonel Nasser who worried about the fundamental split in the Arab world such a policy would bring about. Nasser's concern specially centered round Iraq where the pro-British Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Said, sought to make use of the US plans to advance his own Arab world leadership ambitions.

According to Mohamed H.Heikel, Nuri "was Britain's man in the Middle East".⁸⁷ Nuri wanted to exploit the Northern Tier to develop a formula whereby Iraq would end the Anglo-Iraqi 1932 alliance treaty _which was subject to increasing attacks from Iraqi and Arab nationalists calling the government to turn against it_ and serve as the link between the Arab world, its northern and eastern neighbours (respectively, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan which were all part of Dulles's strategy) and the Western powers. Thus, Baghdad would replace the security blanket offered so far by the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, which had greatly helped in maintaining the Hashemites in power, by the Northern Tier shield that would equally serve to protect the Iraqi Crown from leftists and nationalists affiliated to Nasser, and whom Nuri perceived as the real threat to his government. So, on 25 April 1954, Washington and Baghdad announced Iraq's support for the Turkish-Pakistani Pact whereby Iraq signed a military agreement

⁸⁶ Miles Copeland , *Game of Nations:The Amoralty of Power Politics* , Simon & Shuster , New York , 1970 , p. 194.

⁸⁷ Heikel , *Cutting the Lion's Tail* , p. 53.

with the U.S. Two months later, Baghdad formally called for the revision of the 1932 Anglo-Iraqi treaty.

America's new plans for the Middle East highly upset the British who resented Washington's incursion in an area where they felt they had greater expertise. On working out the Turkish-Pakistani adherence to the Northern Tier, Washington notified London, indeed, that it was being informed not consulted.⁸⁸ US officials feared the UK would exploit Pakistan's membership in the British Commonwealth to push for pact-membership for itself. Whereas Dulles insisted that the Northern Tier concept would prohibit the participation of the U.S. or any Western power, to ease adherence of Iraq and Iran, deter criticism from Arab nationalists in general and Egypt in particular, and avoid one of the major obstacles that had undermined previous MEDO schemes, that is, Arab nationalists interpretation that it was but disguised colonialism.⁸⁹

Dulles's position collided with Eden's Iraqi centered Middle Eastern policy. Eden's focus on Iraq was given further primacy by Nasser's unyielding attitude in the Suez talks. Nuri al-Said was, thus, the only alternative left to aid in retaining British power in the region and fulfill the Foreign Office's long-sought objective of enrolling the Arab states into a MEDO. Such states included Northern Tier countries themselves encouraged by Dulles to form an anti-Soviet regional grouping. If such a scheme could be worked out, the British Foreign Minister thought, it would in turn convince the U.S. to join the Baghdad grouping, isolate Nasser in the area and fulfill Nuri's dream of Arab leadership. Most importantly, it would allow the UK to recapture control of regional defense planning from the U.S. and restore British hegemony in the M.E.⁹⁰ Like Nuri then, Eden sought to make use of Dulles's strategy to advance his country's own plans and ambitions in the region.

⁸⁸Public Record Office, FO 371/111002, Hooper to Falla, February 24, 1954, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.89.

⁸⁹Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern South Asian and African Affairs, January 6, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-54, Vol IX, Part I*, pp. 444-446.

⁹⁰Public Record Office, FO 371/111000, Paul Falla Foreign Office Minute, September 20, 1954, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 97.

The Anglo-Iraqi plans could not fit in the US strategy. The State Department's role in bringing Iraq in the Northern Tier had upset Nasser in a number of ways. First, concern for Arab political cohesion which the Northern Tier concept was clearly aiming at hindering increased Nasser's suspicion of the West. On 9 January 1954, he declared that Egypt's foreign policy would now be based on " ... the establishment of an Arab bloc free from imperialist influence to protect the interests of Islamic , Asian and African peoples ..." and called for " ... an African bloc which would include all African countries still under the imperialist yoke."⁹¹ Earlier, Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Fawzi had also announced that Egypt would pursue a policy of "non-cooperation in the Cold War."⁹² Such declarations translated Nasser's frustration with America because the long promised US weapons were not showing up. They did also originate in Nasser's strong opposition to any Western policy designed to tie the Arab world up to a non-Arab alliance. Washington's tactic to pressurise Cairo into more concessions in the Suez talks and less opposition to becoming part of a MEDO was not overlooked by the Egyptian régime. Furthermore, the US move towards Nuri aroused Nasser's fears lest such Western tactics aimed at promoting Iraq to isolate Egypt in the Arab world. Consequently, with a view to lessen Egyptian fears and tone down Nasser's attacks against Iraq's coming membership in the Turkish-Pakistani pact, the U.S. reiterated opposition to any Western or further Arab membership in the Northern Tier. In other words, Washington could not back up Anglo-Iraqi plans for the region.

On 24 February 1955, the Turkish-Iraqi Pact was signed with the full endorsement of the Americans and British who immediately supplied the two signatory states with arms. The new alliance was a heavy blow to Nasser's principles of nationalist philosophy and pan-Arab vision. Worse still, the Pact greatly reduced Egypt's slim chances of acquiring weapons from the West as

⁹¹ Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958*, Yale University Press , New Heaven, Connecticut, 1986, p . 195.

⁹² Ibid.

Washington and London would not also arm an Egypt-led coalition of Arab states. What is more, the Anglo-American support of the pact confirmed Nasser's fears about the West's aim to isolate him via the promotion of Nuri, who was now inviting other Arab states into the Northern Tier.

Baghdad's differences with Cairo reached a peak when the Iraqi Prime Minister started calling for British adherence to the Turkish-Iraqi Pact. This coincided with the UK's desire to reassert its power over Middle Eastern affairs and block Washington's attempt to supercede Britain's position in the region.⁹³ Far more important than this, however, the Anglo-Iraqi plans coincided with a spectacular reversal in US foreign policy then. After almost a year and a half of strong American opposition to Western membership in the Northern Tier, Eisenhower informed Eden, on 9 February 1955, that "The United States understands that [if] the UK prefers to accede after the signature of the proposed pact, the U.S will concur in this view."⁹⁴

The Foreign office, which was negotiating the Anglo-Iraqi 1932 Treaty revision welcomed the change in the US position as this would allow Britain to exchange a bilateral treaty for a multilateral alliance which would, in turn, help recapture control of a strategic area where Arab nationalism and American assertiveness were the leading moving factors. Moreover, the British assumed they had now clear American support to expect the U.S. to join the alliance, extend the pact to other states in the region, such as Jordan and Lebanon, and thus end Nasser's claims to Arab leadership which were most hostile to British presence in the region.

The shift in Washington's position was greatly due to its frustration because the Northern Tier plan inevitably stumbled on Colonel Nasser's uncompromising nationalism, growing neutralism and convinced pan-Arabism. Dulles particularly resented Nasser's appeal on Arab states to condemn Iraq's

⁹³ PRO, FO 371/111000, Paul Falla Foreign Office Minute, September 20, 1954, Freiberge, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 97.

⁹⁴ Public Record Office, FO 371/115488, Makins to Foreign Office, February 9, 1955, *ibid*, p. 100.

membership in the alliance offered by the Northern Tier, which according to him “no Arab state should join ... [for] it ignores the interests of the Middle East and ... frustrates the work of the Arab League.”⁹⁵

Dulles also resented the massive propaganda campaign which the Egyptian president had initiated in the area against Iraq, following signature of the Turkish-Iraqi Pact, and which stirred up talk of American and British imperialism⁹⁶. The American move did also come as a reaction to Egypt’s neutralist moves. Nehru’s visit to Cairo in February 1955, to discuss plans for the Afro-Asian Summit in Bandung, was badly eyed by the Americans who, in Mohamed Heikel’s words, pointed to President Nasser “what bad company [he] would find himself in there...” and that it “would be a mistake... to waste...energies on talks about national liberation movements and Afro-Asian solidarity...”.⁹⁷ The change in the US position did, in effect, prompt London to accept Iraq’s proposal for the creation of the Baghdad Pact, itself an extension of the Turkish-Iraqi Pact. But it did also strengthen Colonel Nasser’s mistrust of the West.

Nasser’s frustration with the West reached new heights on 28 February, when Israel attacked the Gaza Strip killing 38 Egyptians and wounding 33. Israel’s raid, Washington’s Northern Tier policies and London’s expected accession to the Baghdad Pact deeply affected the Egyptian President. The newly appointed US Ambassador to Cairo, Henry Byroade, reported that Nasser “sincerely feels he was cast aside by the U.S. in favor of Nuri of Iraq” and viewed Iraq’s adherence to the Bagdad Pact as a direct challenge to him.⁹⁸ Worse though, the raid on Gaza unveiled Egypt’s urgent need for arms which the West had been denying it since 1952. But it brought a reaction from the Russians who, while condemning all acts of hostility, commented Cairo’s

⁹⁵ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p. 196.

⁹⁶ Dulles to State Department, February 24, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XIV*, (Washington D.C., 1989), p. 70.

⁹⁷ Heikel, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail* P.69

⁹⁸ Byroade to State Department, March 1, 1955, *FRUS 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 78-79.

attitude towards the Baghdad Pact as inspired by a genuine spirit of independence.⁹⁹ The Kremlin could not fail to take advantage of the situation to undermine the Pact which was about to allow the West to mass Iraqi, Turkish and Pakistani troops along its south-western borders.

Back in Washington, both Eisenhower and Dulles were outraged by the Israeli raid which caused high tensions in American-Israeli relations and led Dulles to instruct the State Department to suspend all discussions for a bilateral security agreement which Tel-Aviv had sought to achieve for months.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the Israeli attack jeopardized the administration's ALPHA plans which sought to initiate peace talks between Egypt and Israel as a first step to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. Likewise, the Foreign Office was upset by the Israeli raid on Egypt because it renewed Iraqi nationalists diatribes against Nuri's allegiance to the West which the emerging Baghdad Pact so obviously symbolized.

In the Arab world, the Israeli attack comforted the nationalists in their hostile attitude towards the Jewish state and their distrust of the West. It also brought about an Arab-wide condemnation of Israel and an equally tremendous sympathy towards Egypt. As a very first reaction to the Israeli attack Colonel Nasser met with the US Ambassador and presented him with a long list of all the times when Egypt had asked America to supply it with arms.¹⁰¹ Next, he proclaimed an alliance with Syria, on 2 March 1955, whereby the armies of both countries were merged and put under a unified command. A few days later, Saudi Arabia and Yemen joined too, and a new Arab Pact was issued for the protection of the Arab world against Israeli aggressions. Meeting with Byroade, the Egyptian President warned that the recent western policies might "lead him to seek neutrality and general non-cooperation with the West". Nasser's warning corroborated Byroade's earlier conclusions conveyed to the State Department

⁹⁹ Heikel, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p.69.

¹⁰⁰ Dulles to Lawson, March 9, 1955, *FRUS 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁰¹ Heikel, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 67.

and recommending Washington to show “relative disinterest” to both Arab pacts, and to discourage “British, Jordanian and Lebanese adherences to the Baghdad Pact.”¹⁰²

In April 1955, Nasser attended the Bandung Conference which marked the birth of the Nonaligned Movement. In Indonesia, the Egyptian President did a real diplomatic triumph, emerging from the Summit as one of the prominent Third World leaders. The spirit of Bandung particularly matched his quest for non-entanglement in Western alliances.¹⁰³ Furthermore, still fueled with irritation because of the Israeli incursion into Gaza and the role of the U.S. and the UK in initiating the Baghdad Pact, Nasser had gone to Bandung deeply doubtful about any western move to supply Egypt with arms. During the Conference, therefore, he secretly sought arms from the Russians, via the Chinese Foreign Minister Chou En-Lai. The latter recommended Mao Tse Dong’s government to sell arms to Cairo as this “victory would be in the interest of the socialist camp [and] would thwart all attempts of the western imperialists to complete the encirclement of the Eastern camp”¹⁰⁴. The Chinese mediation proved successful because a month later (19 May 1955), Daniel Solod, the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo, informed President Nasser that his country was willing to sell arms to Egypt via Czechoslovakia.

America’s Northern Tier strategy was a complete failure because it resulted in the opposite desired effects in the entire region. By promoting Iraq’s adherence to the Northern Tier concept, the Eisenhower administration exacerbated intra-Arab rivalries which in turn led the Egyptian leader to develop another pole of countries that reinforced dedication to the common Arab cause and not to the West.¹⁰⁵ Dulles’s scheme of ending Arab neutralism in the Cold

¹⁰² Byroade to State Department, March 8, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 29-32.

¹⁰³ The five principles adopted at the Bundung Conference were: territorial sovereignty, non-agression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality of all nations and peaceful coexistence.

¹⁰⁴ Heikel, *Sphynx and the Commissa : The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Arab World*, Collins, London, 1978, pp. 57-59.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Louis and Roger Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 170.

War via establishment of a MEDO and enlisting such countries as Iraq and Syria in the Northern Tier could not be achieved. Instead, it unveiled the U.S. and UK's goals for isolating Egypt in the Arab world with a view to exert pressure on President Nasser's government to acquiesce into Western policies in the area. Denying Egypt Western armement with which Nasser sought to strengthen the army – the mainstay of his régime – defend his country against Israeli raids and up-hold his hopes for Arab leadership was part of the US strategy to force Egyptian affiliation to the Western cause. Yet, President Nasser's stance towards Iraq's partnership with the West not only rallied more Arab opinion to his nationalist philosophy but did also confirm Cairo as the center of pan-Arabism. Moreover, Israel's raid on the Gaza Strip revived Arab hostility towards Israel, confirmed Arab suspicions about the West and drove Nasser to seek arms that the U.S. had been denying him for years, from the East. Hence, the Northern Tier strategy failed to achieve the very objective it was originally set for, namely shutting the Soviets out of the Middle East. Furthermore, the US reversal towards the Baghdad Pact not only distorted the Northern Tier concept, but did also further alienate Nasser, rendering his receptiveness to America's ALPHA plan for peace talks between Cairo and Tel Aviv, most unlikely.

3. IN PURSUIT OF “PEACE”: THE ALPHA PLAN.

Chief among the Eisenhower administration's Middle East policy goals was the objective of ending the Arab-Israeli conflict which was generating tensions that were highly detrimental to Western interests and presence in the region. John Foster Dulles's May 1953 Middle East tour conclusions, prompted President Eisenhower to instruct his administration to reverse the previous administration's pro-Israeli trend so as to make up for President Truman's recognition of the state of Israel in 1948. More formally, National Security Councils 155/1 and 5428 embedded the Republican administration's resolutions for ending the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base dispute, and finding solutions to the

Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁰⁶ The White House policymakers sought to alter Arab perception of America as pro-British in the Anglo-Egyptian dispute and pro-Israeli in Palestine; an image widely vehicled by the Truman administration's Middle East policy. Eisenhower wanted to gear Arab allegiance to the West's anti-communist crusade to secure Western position and interests in the area. Part of this pattern was the US role in hastening the demiss of the British in Suez with a view to induce Egypt and its widely popular Arab leader Gamal Abdel Nasser to become part of a regional defense alliance, as well as to engage into peace talks with Israel so as to end the Arab-Israeli conflict and the anti-Western tensions it was generating.

The American peace project was officially launched in April 1955. Yet, as early as July 1954, the State Department hinted to the idea of American involvement in a peace initiative for the Middle East.¹⁰⁷ At that time Washington was observing a policy of strict impartiality towards Arabs and Israelis,¹⁰⁸ and equally withholding arms sales from both sides with a view to prevent resumption of the 1948 war, and pressurise Cairo and Tel-Aviv into more cooperative attitudes.¹⁰⁹ Increasing border incidents between Israel and its Arab neighbours brought both Washington and London to combine their efforts to develop a joint strategy to prevent a worsening of the situation. A mediation team formed of British Under Secretary for Middle Eastern affairs Evelyn Shuckburgh and the State Department representative Francis.H Russell was set up in December 1954 to plan ALPHA _ the Anglo-American sponsored plan designed to work out a peace treaty between the Arab states and Israel .

¹⁰⁶ Policy Statement by the National Security Council, NSC 5428, July 23, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Vol IX, Part I*, pp.525- 536. NSC 5428 retained the essential elements of NSC 155/1 (Op Cit., p. 44), and basic US policy towards the region was not changed until January 1957 with the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

¹⁰⁷ The U.S. was involved in other peace initiatives , the best known being the Johnston mission , designed to create an agreement over water usage in the Jordan Valley so as to pave the way for a resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem by assisting in developing the Jordan River Valley to provide a large area for Palestinian refugee resettlement.

¹⁰⁸ In the United Nations Security Council debates dealing with such issues as Israeli raids, israeli plans to divert the water of the Jordan river, Egyptian restrictions on Suez Canal transit and the debate on the border situation, Washington showed a more evenhanded approach than it had under the previous administration.

¹⁰⁹ In application of the 1950Tripartite Declaration. op cit., pp. 20-23

Britain's interest in a peace initiative emanated from pure concern for its imperial holdings and posture in the Middle East. The Foreign Office's Iraqi centered policy sought expanding the Baghdad Pact into a regional alliance. This was contingent upon a rapprochement between the Arabs and the Israelis. An Arab-Israeli peace would leave no ground to Arab nationalists' diatribes against the Baghdad Pact for being a threat to Arab unity or another tool aiming at promoting British imperialism. It would, on the contrary, strengthen Nuri's position and induce other Arab states to join, particularly Jordan. Moreover, for the British, ALPHA might bring US adherence to the Baghdad Pact as Washington would be unable to use pro-Israeli domestic pressure, as an excuse for not joining the coalition.

For their part, the Americans saw in a peace treaty between Israel and the Arab states a means to make President Nasser more cooperative in encouraging Arab support for a regional defense alliance, worth securing oil supplies upon which Western economies were dependent, and reducing tensions between the UK and certain key Arab countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Both Arab states opposed the Baghdad Pact which sought to isolate Egypt in the Arab world by promoting Ibn Saud's enemies – the Hashemite Crowns of Iraq and Jordan. Last but not least, mounting Israeli resentment towards London's and Washington's Northern Tier policies – as Tel Aviv was not invited to be part of the defensive plan – coupled with Israeli frustration over Western denial of weapons, and fear that Egypt might strike Israel using the Suez base, increased Israeli pressure for Anglo-American security guarantees. Most importantly, Dulles urged Russell to proceed with ALPHA given the coming US presidential election (November 1956) which not only mandated a peace treaty by January 1956 but also required greater sympathy for Israel, as “the Zionist voters would make it impossible for the United States to continue with a policy of strict impartiality”¹¹⁰.

¹¹⁰ Public Record Office, FO 371/115866, Bangkok to Foreign Office, February 23, 1955, Freiburger, *Dawn Over*

From the start, however, the peace initiative was doomed to failure. First, the Western powers could not agree on a proper time to approach President Nasser about ALPHA. Aware of the Egyptian leader's wrath following the Gaza raid, and the Western powers role in easing Baghdad's accession to the Turkish-Pakistani treaty, State Department officials advised waiting "until the dust raised by the Turkish-Iraqi Pact began to settle."¹¹¹ While the Foreign Office held the opposite view and called for encouraging "...as many Arab states as possible to join the Baghdad Pact no matter if it makes it more difficult for Nasser to proceed with ALPHA".¹¹² The British feared the US peace proposals would be met with Nasser's condition of discouraging further Arab membership in the Baghdad Pact. What is more, the Foreign Office was not ready to provide Israel with the security guarantees implied by the ALPHA plan as this would ruin the British position in Iraq which was among the most hostile Arab states to Israel. But Dulles rejected the British view arguing that additional Arab adherence to the Pact "... would further isolate and embitter Nasser, and would give the Israeli government the occasion for claiming that the United States had put its... weight behind Israel's neighbours and therefore against Israel."¹¹³

As a consequence, on April 3, Dulles instructed Byroade to discuss the peace project with President Nasser causing the British to accuse the U.S. of weakening the mediation effort (via Shuckburgh and Russell). Furthermore, Britain's access to the Baghdad Pact on April 5 increased American frustrations with British policies and led Dulles to warn the Foreign Office against pushing for "Jordan's accession to the Pact... at a time which might endanger the success of ALPHA", and to emphasize that Washington would allow no aid to any Arab country that joined the Pact.¹¹⁴ Again the U.S. was reversing its stand causing British bewilderment and anger. Such contradictory objectives brought the two

Suez, p. 115.

¹¹¹ PRO, FO 371/115866, Stevenson to Shuckburgh, March 16, 1955, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 116.

¹¹² PRO, FO 371/115866, Beely to Shuckburgh, March 24, 1955, *ibid*.

¹¹³ Memorandum of a Conversation, March 24, 1955, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XIV, pp. 118-119.

¹¹⁴ Memorandum from MacArthur to Hoover, April 7, 1955, *ibid*, pp.146-147.

Atlantic allies to exchange mutual accusations which were made compound by Egyptian and Israeli distrust of Britain's Baghdad Pact policies. In effect, the Israeli leadership's belief that, the UK's pro-Arab views should disqualify London from being a mediator,¹¹⁵ and Nasser's hostility towards Eden's alliance with Nuri brought the US leadership in late April 1955, to consider acting on its own to advance its plans and prevent British imperialism from undermining American Middle East plans.

Thus, on June 8, the State Department decided to make a public statement on ALPHA to present the US view about an Arab-Israeli peace. As expected, the British disliked the idea because, as newly appointed Foreign Minister Harold Macmillan said, the risks involved "would fall to a large extent on Great Britain by reason of her commitments in the area."¹¹⁶ The British feared the speech might trigger violent reactions that would damage their relations with the Arabs, lead to the downfall of Nuri and ruin the Baghdad Pact. Washington's promise to join the Pact upon conclusion of ALPHA, and its readiness to make a substantial contribution towards the supply of British tanks to Iraq, ultimately induced the British to support the ALPHA statement on July 14.

Dulles delivered his Middle East policy speech before the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, on 26 August. The US plan sought to develop a solution for the Gaza Strip and its refugees via Israeli repatriation of Palestinian refugees and or compensation _ with a US supported international loan _ for those who chose not to return. The plan also provided for setting up a geographical link between Egypt and Jordan through Israeli cession of the southern part of the Negev desert, and U.S. participation in formal treaties to protect boundaries between Israel and its Arab neighbours.¹¹⁷

The British publically supported the US plan promising to contribute to any loan to Israel designed to compensate Palestinian refugees. Israeli

¹¹⁵ Dulles to the Department of State, May 12, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XIV*, pp . 185-186 .

¹¹⁶ Memorandum of a Conversation, August 3, 1955, *ibid* , pp . 335-336 .

¹¹⁷ Memorandum by Dulles to Eisenhower, August 19, *ibid*, pp . 368-369 .

Ambassador to Washington Abba Eban, informed Dulles that while Israel had no intention of ceding the Negev, “frontiere adjustments should not be made an obstacle to a security guarantee.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, Nasser translated Cairo’s readiness to consider the American proposals, but he required time to study them further.

The key to the Israeli and Egyptian responses to ALPHA was their aim not to antagonize Washington. The Israeli leadership under the rule of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion increasingly pushed for US security guarantees_ particularly a bilateral security agreement with the U.S. as well as Israeli access to US weapons _ and so did not repudiate the ALPHA proposals, although determined not to cede an inch of the territories Israel occupied.¹¹⁹ Likewise, President Nasser who was about to close an arms deal with the Russians wanted to defuse the expected angry American reaction by showing interest in the US plan.

Washington’s ALPHA project was unrealistic in that it could not prevent the Israeli raid on Khan Yunes on August 31; that is four days after Dulles had made his speech in New York and after Israel had approved the idea of peace negotiations with Egypt. The raid not only heightened the Middle Eastern arena, thereby, destroying all US efforts for the creation of a favourable atmosphere for peace, but made it also even more difficult for any Arab leader, including President Nasser, to make peace with Israel. In addition to this, the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and Israel’s recourse to excessive military force to deal with border incidents, conformed some Arab states and Egypt in particular, into looking East for arms with which to defend themselves; arms that the Eisenhower administration persisted to deny Egypt in the hope that such a policy would force Nasser to come into an anti-communist regional alliance.

Furthermore, Washington’s reversals and ambivalent stands regarding the Northern Tier strategy and the Baghdad Pact respectively exacerbated existing intra-Arab rivalries, fostred Egyptian-Israeli distrust of US schemes and

¹¹⁸ Memorandum of a Conversation, September 6, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XIV*, pp. 451-453 .

¹¹⁹ Public Record Office, FO 371/115868, Nicholls to Macmillan, May 10, 1955, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.130

deepened Anglo-American differences over Middle Eastern issues. What is more, ALPHA's objective of lessening tensions in the region and fostering Egyptian cooperation with the West against communism, was negated by both Egypt's recourse to Soviets weapons, and Israel's reprisal policies which but translated Tel Aviv's determination to circumvent any peace initiative.¹²⁰ The striking point in the US Middle East policy course, was also US policymakers adamancy on enrolling Egypt into a Western-sponsored defense group not minding or rather minimizing Nasser's nationalist fight and pan-Arab ambitions, which precluded entanglement in extra-Arab alliances, commanded freedom in foreign affairs and non-alignment in the Cold War.¹²¹ In fact, the administration wanted to pressurise Cairo _ just as the Foreign Office had during the Suez talks _ into a MEDO disregarding Nasser's objections that the Arab world was threatened by Israel not the Soviet Union. It is ironic, therefore, that the U.S. leadership, which had criticized the British démarche at that time, did not draw any lesson to help implement its own policies in the region. American blindness to the truth of the dynamics shaping Arab anti-Western attitudes drove the Eisenhower administration into misleading political choices that achieved in the end, the opposite of the purposes they were originally set for .

The Northern Tier strategy, the Baghdad Pact and the ALPHA plan were all three produced by the Eisenhower administration with the basic common objective of shutting the Soviets out of the Middle East. Far from achieving this goal, they resulted in the Egyptian premier's decision to purchase weapons from Czechoslovakia so as to break the Western arms embargo over the region, fight back Israeli attacks, and uphold Egypt's pre-eminence in the Arab world, which Western policies in the area sought to jeopardize. To do so, Cairo would not only allow the Soviets an important inroad in the Middle East, but would also

¹²⁰ In a F.O document , FO officials concluded that throughout 1955, 'the Israeli government of Ben-Gurion had been sabotaging their discussions with Nasser by setting up an aggressive reprisal policy that had created an atmosphere that was detrimental to peace'. PRO, FO 371/115883, Shuckburgh to Nicholls, December 2, 1955, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.111

¹²¹ Louis and Owen , *Suez 1956: the Crisis and Its Consequences* , pp. 32-33 .

upset the order previously existing in one of the most important areas of Western global strategy. How would America react to Egypt's arms deal with the Soviet bloc? And what would be the impact of the deal on the power politics of the region? More importantly what was the co-relation between the Czech Arms Deal and the break out of the Suez Crisis? These questions bring us to the object of Chapter III which endeavours to probe the events that had paved the road to Suez.

CHAPTER III: THE ROAD TO SUEZ

Up to the Spring of 1955, the State Department was confident in its peace initiative between Egypt and Israel. The success of ALPHA was most improbable, however, due to a number of factors. The Eisenhower administration's over-obsession with the coming presidential election, wanted a Middle East peace agreement before November 1956. Dulles, indeed, did not want the Democrats to make capital out of the Arab-Israeli conflict to secure their candidate American Jewish votes. Accordingly, both Eisenhower and his Secretary of State sought to move ahead with ALPHA, while the situation in the Middle East required a longer course of action, especially after the February 1955 Israeli raid on Gaza.

American policymakers also mistakenly persisted into the belief that satisfying Nasser on the Palestinian refugees chapter would secure the Egyptian leader's endorsement of an American MEDO and entitle the White House to influence Cairo's foreign policy. Such a reasoning was revealing about Washington's and most particularly Dulles's adamancy on viewing the Arab nationalist struggle through East-West eyes, despite the administration's earliest conclusions that Arab anti-Western stands had more to do with Arab rejection of Britain's century-based imperial policies _ which had provoked the Arab-Israeli conflict _ than with being an expression of communist affiliation. In addition to this, US officials overlooked how strongly the Gaza raid had altered Egypt's relations with the West.¹²² The attack confirmed Nasser's worst suspicions about Anglo-American objectives in the region; namely that they were directed towards weakening his régime, withholding arms from Egypt to coerce it into an alliance with the West and preventing Arab unity. The resulting consequence was the "Czech Arms Deal" of September 1955, which brought the Soviets into Middle Eastern affairs and into a Western zone of influence.

The deal heightened existing tensions in the area and decided the

¹²² Heikel, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, pp. 60-64-65., See Holland too, *America and Egypt*, p.64.

Americans to take immediate action to contain the communist incursion. Washington's reaction to the arms deal was behind the administration's effort to help finance the construction of the High Aswan Dam in Egypt, as well as the decision to pursue the peace project in order to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the wake of implementing these policies, the State Department reassessed the U.S. policy objectives with regard to Egypt, and adopted a harsher line towards President Nasser. Washington's decision to cancel aid for the Aswan Dam project exemplified the American foreign policy shift towards Cairo. But it did also precipitate the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, thereby setting the whole process of the crisis of Suez in motion .

Chapter three deals with the West's reaction to what came to be known as the "Czech Arms Deal" that most historians describe as the one event which not only marked a turning point in Egyptian-American relations, but did actually lead to the Suez Crisis. The Chapter, thus, examines the consequences of the arms deal on America's new Middle East policy orientations as well as its relationship with the Anglo-American involvement in financing the High Aswan Dam project whose failure caused Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company which, in turn, triggered the Anglo-French and Israeli aggression on Egypt in late October 1956.

1. THE CZECH ARMS DEAL

American promises of arms delivery to Egypt dated back to General Naguib's days, when the State Department sought to use US military aid as an inducement to foster Egyptian cooperation for ending the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base dispute. However critical of the Foreign Office's insistence on withholding arms from Egypt as part of a package deal providing for evacuation of the base against Cairo's adherence to a British MEDO, the State Department ultimately ended up using the same coercive tactic to force Nasser to share in American Middle East policy plans. The Egyptian President's refusal to receive US

military missions,¹²³ which the Mutual Security Act provided for, as a condition regulating American military aid to foreign nations, drove US officials to provide Egypt with other forms of aid, mainly economic. Yet, being in charge of a military régime, the Free Officers needed modern military equipment with which to strengthen the army and stay in power. Failure to obtain American military aid fueled Nasser's irritation with the West's embargo on arms, which the 1950 Tripartite Declaration¹²⁴ had imposed on the region and which, in effect, provided the Western powers with a powerful bargaining position for achieving their goals and promoting their interests in the area. The Turkish-Iraqi-Pakistani Treaty, broadened into the Baghdad Pact, well-exemplified this tactic whereby Washington offered military assistance programs and equipment to Middle Eastern countries which subscribed to the Northern Tier strategy.

Anglo-American promotion of Iraq via the Baghdad Pact posed Nuri al-Said as a rival to Nasser's Arab leadership aspirations. This not only heightened Egyptian resentment towards Western meddling in Arab affairs, but also confirmed Nasser's growing suspicions of Anglo-American policies, which he viewed as a means to prolong Western imperialism in the Arab world. Such feelings were furthered by the Israeli Gaza raid of February 28, which transformed Egypt's quest for armement into "a matter of life and death"¹²⁵ and brought the Egyptian president to seek Soviet assistance to overcome the West's veto on arms sales. Nasser's negotiations with the Soviets disturbed the Eisenhower administration whose policies basically rested upon preventing the kind of overtures the Egyptian leader was providing the communists with. Yet, and however irritated by Nasser's actions, US Officials moved to influence his decision to deal with the communist bloc by intervening on key regional and

¹²³ According to Heilkel, after securing the evacuation of British troops from Suez, Nasser did not want any more foreign military troops on Egyptain soil. Dessouki too holds the same view in Louis and Owen.

¹²⁴ Op Cit., pp. 20-23

¹²⁵ After he had made the announcement on the Czech arms deal, Nasser declared: ' we would have preferred to deal with the West, but for us it was a matter of life and death.' , from records of the US State Department, Decimal File, 774. 56/ 1-10-55 (National Archives,Washington, DC), Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 35.

local issues which were of great concern to the Egyptian President.

Thus, upon learning that Russia was positively considering Cairo's demand for purchasing Soviet weapons, Francis Russell proposed on 18 May 1955 to "woo" Nasser with a deal based on a settlement with Israel, in return for western financing of the High Aswan Dam project.¹²⁶ Dulles's concern at that time was two-fold: to avert Egyptian recourse to the communists for arms sales, and to manage a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel before the pending presidential election of November 1956. Therefore, he immediately concurred with Russell's proposal saying that:

If the State Department does not have an established position in the Arab-Israeli issue by the end of this year, both political parties will take extreme positions in the elections which would result in the loss of the Arab world to the West.

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Over-concerned with the Baghdad Pact coalition and increasing Israeli border attacks, Nasser responded by reiterating complaints to US Ambassador Henry Byroade over Washington's stalling on arms sales to Egypt for the past three years, declaring that he "should accept the Russian offer of military equipment", because "the Russians at least would not blockade the Arab world attempt to get arms."¹²⁸ Dulles, however, preferred to ignore Egyptian arms requests, even though reports from Byroade confirmed the Russian offer of MIG fighter planes to Egypt during Dimitri Shepilov, the Soviet Foreign Minister's, visit to Cairo on July 23. Nasser renewed efforts to try to close an arms deal with the United States but Dulles chose stalling again arguing that the Egyptian leader was using his "Russian card" to force the U.S. to respond favourably to Egypt's arms demands. When the CIA confirmed Nasser's seriousness, Dulles

¹²⁶ The Aswan High Dam project was a gigantic undertaking, expected to require 12 years to build and cost some \$ 1.3 billion of which, \$ 900 million in local currency were to be provided by Egypt, and \$ 400 million were to be in hard currency through a loan from The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the U.S. and the UK.

¹²⁷ Francis Memo, 18 May, 1955, *FRUS 1955-57, Vol XIV*, pp. 204-5.

¹²⁸ Byroade to State Department, 9 June 1955, *ibid.*, pp. 327-40.

dispatched Kermit Roosevelt to try to talk Nasser out of going behind the Iron Curtain for weapons; but it was too late.¹²⁹ By then (the closing week of July), other decisive events motivated President Nasser .

Ben-Gurion's confirmation in office as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, following the July 26 general election in Israel, not only maintained the hard-wing Israeli political click in power but did also render the prospect of Israeli-Egyptian military confrontation inevitable. In addition to this, France's diversion to Israel of six squadrons of Mystere IV jet fighters _ initially destined for NATO_ with US consent, further conformed Nasser's determination for closing the deal with the Soviets. Objecting to the help Egypt was giving the Algerian Revolution (that had broken out on 1 November, 1954), and the nationalist movements in Tunisia and Morocco, France demonstrated its resentment by giving increased aid to Israel, not hesitating to withdraw troops also allocated to NATO to send them to Algeria. Viewing this as an act of aggression by the whole NATO against the Arabs, Nasser responded by using Radio Cairo to launch vitriolic campaigns against Western imperialism and by calling all the Arabs to stand up to the colonial powers and their policies .

Upon learning of the arms deal¹³⁰ on September 27, 1955, Dulles _ who was in charge of the administration because Eisenhower was ill_ became furious. The deal did, in effect, translate the West's loss of its role of sole distributor of arms in the region, and could now encourage other Arab states to appeal to Moscow for help. This in turn, would lead to a regional arms race that could further hostilities between Arabs and Jews, causing therefore the collapse of the Western position in the region. Furthermore, intelligence reports' conclusions about the Soviet arms deal put it plainly that it would "complicate [...] the achievement of the two major objectives in the Middle East: an Arab-

¹²⁹ Heikel ,*Cutting the Lion's Tail* , p.77.

¹³⁰ According to State Department sources of Sept 23rd, the Egyptians had contracted for 200 jet aircrafts (including 37 medium jet bombers, the rest being Migs), 6 jet training planes, 100 heavy tanks, six torpedo Patrol boats and 2 submarines., *FRUS, 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 507-508.

Israeli settlement and the creation of effective regional defense arrangements against communism”, encourage Israel to resort to a “preemptive war”, and affect Saudi-American relations, possibly causing the loss of a reliable source of oil as well as the US Dhahran air base , whose lease needed renewal in 1956.¹³¹

Yet, for all the fury caused by President Nasser’s move, and despite these conclusions, the US Secretary of State surprisingly declared at a press conference on October 4, 1955 (that is a week after Nasser’s Arms Deal announcement), that “It is difficult to be critical of countries which feeling themselves endangered, seek arms which they sincerely believe they needed for their own defense”.¹³² In addition to this, hints about a Soviet offer to help build the Aswan Dam, further prevented Dulles from using pressure against the Egyptian leader. Financing the project was indeed, favoured by the administration as a means to persuade Nasser to be more cooperative in reviving the ALPHA process and end the Arab-Israeli conflict. Also, Washington could not write off Egypt or its leader because, as CIA director Allen Dulles put it if the West turned its back on the Egyptian leader, he would receive further Soviet aid and “probably with a good chance of success ... bring Syria and Saudi Arabia along with him.”¹³³ The Eisenhower administration’s over concern with reversing Soviet penetration of the area, as well as preventing future Soviet proposals to build the Aswan Dam compelled the US leadership to opt, in the end, for a policy of rapprochement with President Nasser. So, on December 1, 1955, the United States decided to “contribute substantially to the financing of the ... High Aswan Dam.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Special Intelligence Estimates, SNIE, 30-3-55, October 12, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 77- 86 ,

¹³² Department of State Press Release, # 588 and 589, October 4, 1955, Seely G. Mudd Library, John F. Dulles Papers, Box 95, Freiberger, p. 124. Freiberger also mentions that in a conversation with Eisenhower on Oct. 21, Dulles said in reference to the Czech arms deal that ‘ We are in the present jam because past administrations always dealt with the area from a political standpoint and had tried to meet the wishes of the Zionists in the country and that had created a basic antagonism with the Arabs We must develop a national non-partisan policy or we will be apt to lose the entire area, and possibly Africa.’ , Memcon, Oct. 21, 1955, Eisenhower Library, John Foster Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box # 10, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 126.

¹³³ Allen W. Dulles to John F. Dulles, October 29, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 679- 80.

¹³⁴ Memorandum of a discussion at the 268th Meeting of the National Security Council, December 1, 1955, *ibid*, pp. 812- 820.

The American position was supported by the Foreign Office as British strategists feared the arms deal would allow the Soviets a foothold in the region thereby directly threatening British oil assets and power position. The British, indeed, expressed repeated warnings that if the Soviets outbid the West regarding the Aswan project, the future of Africa would be at stake. Moreover, still adamant on expanding the Baghdad Pact and strengthening it with American membership _ yet contingent upon relaxation in the Arab-Israeli tensions _ Prime Minister Eden¹³⁵ could but concur with the State Department's strategy of using Western interest in the Aswan Dam, as an inducement to foster Egyptian participation in further peace negotiations.

As to the Egyptian leader, he agreed to reinvigorating the peace initiative given a number of reasons. With a view to minimize the effects of the arms deal on the West, President Nasser acquiesced in the US proposal in order to appease Washington, maintain Anglo-American interest in the Dam project and avoid war with Israel. Accordingly, he approved the US mediation effort via Robert Anderson, who was to conduct secret talks with him and with Ben-Gurion so as to reach an Egyptian-Israeli settlement. In return, Washington presented on 16 December, 1955, the Anglo-American offer to help finance the High Aswan Dam project in cooperation with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

2. THE ASWAN DAM AFFAIR

America's involvement in the Aswan dam affair was revealing about the administration's quest to avert further Soviet influence on Egypt as well as its desire to manage an Arab-Israeli peace worth safeguarding Eisenhower's 'peace candidate' image for the November 1956 presidential election. Setting the election as a time limit for such an achievement was unwise, however, because of the tense mood prevailing in the Middle East, which Western policies and

¹³⁵ Following Churchill's retirement in April 1955, Anthony Eden became Prime Minister while Harold Macmillan took over him at the head of the Foreign Office.

Israel's aggressiveness only maintained high. By another token, the Czech arms deal which but translated the elimination of the West's arms monopoly over the region also signaled for millions of Arabs Nasser's independence from Western influence and evidenced his Bandung principles of "positive neutrality", which called for disengagement from bloc politics and freedom of decision in foreign affairs.¹³⁶ Thus, Egypt's position was enhanced by the deal within the Arab world and beyond. In other words, Nasser remained the only Arab leader whose political prestige and regional strength could tolerate peace with Israel. Such facts were not overlooked by White House policymakers who hoped to use the Aswan Dam loan as an inducement to foster President Nasser's cooperation in the new peace effort, and lure him away from the Soviets.

With a view to advance ALPHA, Washington and London had agreed in the closing months of 1954, to use economic inducements to bring about Egyptian participation in the peace negotiations, and in this respect stated that "One of the most significant forms this could take, would be assistance in financing the construction of the High Aswan Dam."¹³⁷ The Czech arms deal, thus, added a new sense of urgency to the idea of financing the Dam project whose feasibility had been under study by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, since 1953.¹³⁸

In renewing interest in the Aswan Dam project in late October 1955, the Western powers awaited for Cairo to exhibit "a constructive attitude towards Middle Eastern problems" which, from their point of view, would take "substantial grant economic aid over the next ten years", providing Egypt with military equipment, pressurising Israel to conclude peace with the Arabs and supplying financial help for the construction of the Dam.¹³⁹ As to Nasser,

¹³⁶ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, '*Nasser and the Struggle for Independence*', Louis and Owen, p.37

¹³⁷ Russell to Dulles, May18,1955, *FRUS, 1955-57, XIV*, pp. 204-205.

¹³⁸ Completed in 1902, the original Aswan dam could store water for use only in the Spring not from year to year.

The purpose of the High Dam was to provide long-term storage of the Nile waters, and allow a million and a quarter more acres of land to come under cultivation. , Heikel, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 90.

¹³⁹ Department of State to the Delegation at the Foreign Ministers Meeting in Paris, October 25, 1955, *FRUS*,

Anglo-American officials wanted assurances that he would “turn away from Russia on the completion [of the] present arms deal” and “agree to open negotiations with Israel for a settlement.”¹⁴⁰ On November 17, Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Fawzi conveyed Nasser’s reply to US Ambassador Henry Byroade, and reported his country’s readiness to resolve Arab-Israeli issues. Although insisting on the secrecy of the process and the impossibility of face to face discussions with the Israelis, Fawzi who spoke for Nasser, declared that:

If matters could be moved to where Egypt believed there was a 51% chance of success, Egypt would at that time take [the] lead with other Arab states even at the risk of severe opposition.¹⁴¹

Regarding Egyptian requests, Nasser reiterated the basic Arab demand presented under ALPHA, i.e., territorial continuity between the Arab states via southern Negev, and an agreement for the Palestinian refugees. In return, the Arabs would lift their economic blockade of Israel and Egypt would allow Israeli ships to transit through the Suez Canal.

With the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major arms supplier for the Arabs, and the fear of a possible escalation of violence between Arabs and Jews whose repercussions might decisively influence the outcome of the coming presidential election, Eisenhower instructed Dulles and the State Department to facilitate negotiations between Egypt and the IBRD for the release of a loan for the Aswan Dam project. After several meetings between American, British, IBRD and Egyptian officials, Washington presented a formal proposal to finance the Asawn Dam on 16 December, 1955. This provided for an American contribution of \$ 54.6 million, a British offer of £ 5.5 million and a World Bank loan of \$ 200 million for the primary stage of construction. At about the same

1955-57, XIV, pp. 645-47.

¹⁴⁰ Delegation at the Foreign Ministers Meeting to the Department of State, November 3, 1955, *FRUS*,

1955-57, XIV, pp. 707-710.

¹⁴¹ Byroade to the Department of State, November 17, 1955, *ibid*, pp. 781-783 .

time, the administration also decided to proceed with the Anderson mission, the highly confidential diplomatic peace initiative, designed to promote an Arab-Israeli settlement which would help secure Western interests in the region and avoid an Arab-Israeli war that could be a political and economic disaster for the West.¹⁴² Washington also decided that London be excluded from the peace project, given its recent moves in the region, which aroused Egyptian and Israeli distrusts alike, thereby, threatening the very success of the mission.

Indeed, despite State Department opposition, the Foreign Office had started, in late 1955, to exert pressure on Jordan to adhere to the Baghdad Pact, sending General Sir Gerald Templer, Chief of the British imperial general staff to Amman to convince King Hussein to join the Pact. In reaction to the Templer mission, large anti-Baghdad Pact demonstrations burst out throughout the country, leading to a governmental crisis in Amman which only ended on 20 December with the resignation of Prime Minister Haza al-Majali_ a proponent of the Baghdad Pact.

Britain's move irritated both Israel and Egypt. Tel Aviv had long opposed the creation of the Baghdad Pact which allowed military aid and security guarantees _ that were denied to Israel _ to an Arab country. Furthermore, the Israelis were still resentful of Eden's 9 November, 1955 speech at Guildhall in London, where he had called for reimposing the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, meaning that Israel had to surrender the territories it had occupied since the 1949 armistice agreement. After the speech, Moshe Sharett, Israeli Foreign Minister, depicted Eden as an "Arabist", qualified his speech as a "disaster" and found Britain's argument for denying Israel the security guarantees it was providing the Arab states until a general settlement was reached in the region, "discriminatory."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Memorandum of a Conversation , January 11, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XV*,(Washington D.C. 1989), pp. 20-22 .

¹⁴³ Public Record Office, FO 371/115883, Shuckburgh to Nicholls , December 2 , 1955, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 130.

As to the Egyptians, they were now fully convinced of London's plans to isolate Cairo in the Arab world through the expansion of the Baghdad Pact and the consolidation of Nuri's position. Consequently, Nasser systematically attacked every British move for recruiting further Arab states in the Baghdad Pact, resorting to vast anti-Western radio propaganda campaigns through 'the Voice of the Arabs' broadcasting waves that denounced Britain's imperial manoeuvres as a threat to Arab sovereignty and unity .

The Egyptian and Israeli reactions to Britain's policies in the Middle East matched Eisenhower's appreciation of the Middle Eastern situation. On 10 January, 1956 _ a week before the beginning of the Anderson mission _ the US President noted that current Middle Eastern problems had been aggravated "by the fact that Britain and ourselves have not seen eye to eye in a number of instances...", referring to British pressure on Jordan to join the Pact and the resulting domestic mess in Amman, as examples of "London's foolishness" in the region.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, the US leadership decided to exclude its ally from the peace project as well as distance itself from British policies in the region. Eden's visit to Washington on January 30, and his failure to obtain American support for the effective reactivation of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration (as a retaliatory measure to Nasser's arms deal), the expansion of the Baghdad Pact and the UK's dispute with Saudi Arabia over the Buraimi Oasis, evidenced the administration's determination to proceed on its own, and independently from its Atlantic ally. Dulles, indeed, did not want the U.S. to be associated with British imperialist policies. Should the U.S. move militarily in the region, or help Arab membership in the the Baghdad Pact, this would lead to Nasser's rejection of the Aswan loan that was needed to block Soviet influence on Egypt. By another token, any US pro-Baghdad Pact move would also be met with increased Israeli pressure for a bilateral security agreement. Regarding the

¹⁴⁴ Dairy entry by the President, JAN 10,1956, Eisenhower Library, AW File, Eisenhower Diaries, Box #9, *Dawn Over Suez* , Freiburger, p. 137.

Buraimi issue, Eisenhower pressurised Britain to meet Saudi demands, particularly in view of the administration's new policy aiming at building up King Saud into a stonger position. Not to forget that British concessions over Buraimi would greatly aid the U.S. in its negotiations with the Saudis over the Dhahran air base.¹⁴⁵

British disappointments in Washington confirmed the pattern of disagreements that had been building up between the U.S. and the UK over Middle Eastern policies, since December 1955. True, the two allies appeared to agree on tactics and key issues, but their goals for the region were increasingly in conflict. The British maintained their interest in the peace process only to broaden the Baghdad Pact with the memberships of Jordan and the U.S. and uphold their position in the region. While the Americans feared such a policy would rekindle charges of Western colonialism that the Soviets would use to turn Arab hostility against Western interests, causing therefore the loss of vital oil sources and markets, and dangerously altering the balance of power in the region. The State Department's awareness of this pattern convinced Washington to implement its own mediation effort in late 1955, hoping it could reduce tensions in the Middle East, deflect Jewish political pressure in the November 1956 election and foster support for the creation of a US-dominated MEDO against Soviet incroachment in the area.

For that reason, the Anderson mission started on 17 January, 1956, when the US emissary met Nasser in Cairo to discuss the Egyptian position. The Egyptian leader reiterated Cairo's earlier demands about the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian refugees issue,¹⁴⁶ but also denounced the West's Baghdad Pact policy and London's pressure on Jordan to adhere to the Pact. Nasser specifically insisted on a six-month period following an agreement to prepare Arab public opinion, too, declaring that Egypt would be accused of "having sold

¹⁴⁵ Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1960, p. 373

¹⁴⁶ Op Cit., p.66

out to the Western powers”¹⁴⁷, otherwise.

For their part, Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett whom Anderson had met on January 23 and 24, rejected President Nasser’s territorial demands, but insisted on face to face negotiations to tone down Israeli suspicions. In addition to this, complaining again about the U.S. stalling on arms sales to Israel, Ben-Gurion objected to Nasser’s six-month period condition as this would, according to him, allow the Egyptian army more time to train on Soviet weapons.

Anderson’s two-way wiring between Egypt and Israel continued on the same pattern encountering the same complaints and uncompromising rhetoric from both sides. During the last meetings held on March 4 with Nasser and on March 9 with Ben-Gurion, the US mediator was presented with the recurrent demand for US weaponry from the Israelis while the Egyptians delayed decision on the Aswan Dam loan so as to get a better offer, but also because increasing military raids border infiltrations and the ensuing hostile propaganda, rendered it difficult for Egypt to sponsor an agreement with Israel. One event in particular definitely changed Nasser’s position towards concluding peace with the Israelis. During an earlier meeting with King Saud and Syrian Prime Minister Sheikri al-Quwatli about coordinating plans for peace and war for the Middle East, Nasser perceived how risky it would be for Egypt to adhere to a peace settlement with Israel.¹⁴⁸ Therefore he refused to risk his régime and Egypt’s position in the Arab world by sponsoring a peace agreement. In effect, Nasser’s changing position brought the Anderson mission to an end.

The failure of the Anderson mission coincided with the firing, on 1 March, 1956, of General John Glubb Pasha who had been the British officer in command of the Jordanian Arab Legion for 25 years. A further indicator of the erosion of British power in the region, the Glubb firing was blamed on Nasser’s

¹⁴⁷ Message from Anderson, January 19, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XV*, pp. 30-36.

¹⁴⁸ Message from Anderson to the Secretary of State in Karachi, March 7, 1956, , *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XV* , pp. 310-314

anti Baghdad Pact propaganda and Pan-Arab ideology. Prime Minister Eden die-heartedly believed the episode was orchestrated by President Nasser who was, according to him, operating for the Soviets to destabilise the Western position in the Middle East. Accordingly, he sent a message to Eisenhower on 5 March, insisting on the fact that “there is no doubt that the Soviets are resolved to liquidate the Baghdad Pact [and that] in this undertaking, Nasser is supporting them.... Recent events in Jordan are part of this pattern.”¹⁴⁹

The failure of the Anderson mission and the dismissal of Glubb Pasha brought about a major American policy change in the Middle East. Eisenhower called for developing a new course of action, noting that:

... We have reached the point where it looks as if Egypt, under Nasser is going to make no move whatsoever to meet the Israelites in an effort to settle outstanding differences. The Arabs absorbing major consignments of arms from the Soviets, are daily growing more arrogant and disregarding the interests of Western Europe and the United States in the Middle East region. It would appear that our efforts should be directed toward separating Saudi Arabians from the Egyptians and concentrating for the moment at least, in making the former see that their best interests lie with us not with the Egyptians and the Russians.¹⁵⁰

In effect, Eisenhower’s ideas resulted in a March 28 Memorandum by Dulles, which enclosed the basis of the new American policy in the Middle East. Code-named OMEGA, the paper basically stressed the new strategy of reinforcing the Saudis in the region, and notifying Nasser that his cooperation with the Soviets denied Egypt “most-favoured-nation treatment from the United States”. In general terms, this meant a hardening of US policy towards Egyptian economic and military demands. In real terms however, it meant “...delay[ing]

¹⁴⁹ PRO FO 371/121271, Eden to Eisenhower on Events in the Middle East , March 5,1956, Gorst & Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*,p.44 .

¹⁵⁰ Diary Entry by the President, March 8, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XV*, pp. 326-328.

the conclusion of current negotiations on the High Aswan Dam”.¹⁵¹ The implementation of this new policy line, brought the administration to rescind its offer to finance the Aswan Dam on 19 July, causing President Nasser to react by announcing the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company a week later.

3. NATIONALISATION

The collapse of the Anderson mission in early March 1956, ended the US leadership’s interest in using the Aswan loan as an inducement for Egypt’s adherence to an Arab-Israeli peace. In fact, State Department planners blamed President Nasser for the shortcomings of American policy in the region and produced OMEGA to replace the failed ALPHA.¹⁵² Clearly, the new plan signaled a major change of Western policy towards Egypt. At the NATO’s Foreign Ministers Meeting in Paris in early May, Dulles and the British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd agreed to let the Aswan offer “languish” hoping to bring pressure to bear on Nasser.¹⁵³ Also, a campaign by press, radio and other means was planned to minimize the Egyptian leader’s influence, convince other Arab rulers of his ambitions for hegemony in the region, and the risks from his ties with the Soviets and the threat it posed to Arab traditional régimes.¹⁵⁴ Further coercive measures included agreement to allow arms deliveries to Israel. Conscious of the approaching election, Dulles approved the sale of 12 French Mystere IV and 12 Mystere II jet fighters to Tel Aviv, and called on Canada to deliver other amounts of weapons too. A much more decisive move from the U.S. consisted in Dulles informing Egyptian Ambassador Ahmed Hussein in mid-May, that the administration had transferred the Dam funds to other uses because of the absence of a firm deal and that funding now would depend on future appropriations as well on congressional approval itself contingent on

¹⁵¹ Memorandum from the Secretary of State to the President, March 28, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XV*, pp. 419-421.

¹⁵² Memorandum by the Director of the Office for Near Eastern Affairs, March 14, 1956, *ibid*, pp. 353-357.

¹⁵³ Delegation at the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting to the Department of State, May 4, 1956, *ibid*, pp. 604-607, See also Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, pp. 318-319.

¹⁵⁴ Heikel, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, p. 104

improved relations between Cairo and Washington.¹⁵⁵

Growing Western disenchantment with Nasser's actions rendered an improvement in US-Egyptian relations most unlikely, however. Since March 1955, Anglo-American policies to induce the Egyptian premier to cooperate for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and to moderate his efforts to undermine the Baghdad Pact and the Western position in the Middle East had been disappointing for them. Resentment towards Nasser built up into real fury following the Czech arms deal, which imposed on the Western powers the supreme frustration of renouncing to any punitive recourse against him, for fear that sanction would push Egypt further into the Soviet orbit. Instead, they offered to help finance the Aswan Dam project hoping it would avert further Soviet influence in the region, and bring about Cairo's acquiescence in the peace initiative with Israel. With the failure of the Anderson mission, the U.S. and the UK decided not to rely on Nasser, whose neutralism and Pan-arab campaigns were inspiring nationalist resistance to Western policies in the Middle East and beyond. The events in Jordan and the firing of Glubb Pasha which coincided with the end of the Anderson mission not only evidenced the extent of President Nasser's influence, but also constituted the one last straw that angered Washington and London alike, resulting in their cooperation to implement OMEGA in late March 1956 .

The immediate outcome of OMEGA was the U.S. and UK's decision to keep the Aswan Dam offer in suspense. Throughout April, however, the Egyptian leader grew increasingly sceptical about Anglo-American intentions,¹⁵⁶ which Dulles's declarations to the Egyptian Ambassador in mid-May but clarified. These events together with the Western propaganda campaigns to undermine his position and the Anglo-American economic counter-measures

¹⁵⁵ When meeting Hussein after Egypt's recognition of China, Dulles told the Egyptian Minister that such an action had 'brought about an almost impossible situation' and that Nasser 'could hardly have found anything that would make it harder for us to continue good relations with Egypt.' Memorandum of a Conversation, May 17, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XV*, pp. 645-650

¹⁵⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace*, pp. 30-2, Louis and Owen, p. 192.

against Egypt brought the Egyptian premier to recognize the People's Republic of China on May 16, 1956. Nasser's move was also principally motivated by reports about U.S. approval of arms sales to Israel, as well as by the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev's April 27 statement in London, that his country would agree to a four-power arms embargo for the Middle East.¹⁵⁷ Nasser, thus, recognized China to secure a reliable alternative source of weapons for Egypt.

From the US point of view, Cairo's recognition of China "rendered it hard to continue good relations with Egypt"¹⁵⁸ especially given calls from Congress and State Department planners for a change of policy orientation towards Nasser. In Congress, there was significant opposition to funding the Dam from various pressure groups which were coalescing to block support for the project. First, the enormous amount of money required for the dam was clearly unpopular with Congress, whose senators and representatives dislike appropriations that are based on long-term commitment of funds such as those needed by the dam.¹⁵⁹ Second, Nasser's move towards China triggered a strong reaction from the China lobby that was still smarting from the loss of the Chinese mainland to communism in 1949. Additional congressional opposition existed on behalf of Israel too. Tel Aviv objected that Egypt was getting arms from the Soviets and the Dam from the U.S., while the Jewish lobby rallied opposition in the Senate to the Aswan dam proposal. There was also important opposition from the cotton lobby in Congress as American cotton producers opposed funding the High Dam for fear it would lead to greater cotton exports and therefore to competition from Egypt. Additional discontent with the US Dam policy was expressed by friendly countries in the area, mainly Iraq, which complained that Egypt was getting more US assistance by blackmail than they were by cooperation.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Heikel, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, p. 103

¹⁵⁸ Memorandum of a Conversation, (between Dulles and Ahmed Hussein), May 17, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XV*, pp. 645-650.

¹⁵⁹ Philip J. Briggs, *Making American Foreign Policy: President-Congress Relations from the Second World War to the Post-Cold War*, Roman Littlefield Publishers INC, Maryland, 1994, p. 89.

¹⁶⁰ Robert R. Bowie, 'Eisenhower, Dulles and the Suez Crisis', Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 195

As a consequence, in early June 1956 the US leadership realized that getting any funding from Congress would prove most difficult and seriously contemplated rescinding its offer. At this stage, Washington and London were of one mind. Still resentful of the Glubb affair and the dismissal of British troops ordered by King Hussein after that, the Foreign Office fully concurred with the US decision to stall on the Dam loan.¹⁶¹ Thus, in early June, the State Department and the Foreign Office seemed to be moving in the same directions and to be in general agreement on the new policy orientation signaled by OMEGA. Still, major differences existed between them particularly regarding their analyses of Nasser and their ultimate aims in the region.¹⁶²

In assessing the Soviet moves towards Egypt, London and Washington shared agreement that they were dangerous communist inroads that might exploit existing tensions in the area to challenge Western position and interests in the entire Middle East. The Foreign Office was quick in categorising the Egyptian leader as a Soviet tool working to sabotage Western influence and alliances in the area. Prime Minister Eden even compared him to “Hitler” charging him of the failure of the Templer mission and Glubb’s dismissal. Clearly, the Prime Minister blamed the Egyptian President for the erosion of Britain’s position in the region and explicitly displayed the goal of ridding the area of his presence.¹⁶³

The American view differed completely as Eisenhower refused “to close the door” on Nasser. A week after the failure of the Anderson mission, the US President’s appreciation of the events in the area translated his belief that it was true:

Nasser proved to be a stumblingblockOn the other hand the Israel officials...are completely adamant in their attitude of making no concessions whatsoever in order to obtain a

¹⁶¹ Aldrich to the Department of State, June 2, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XV*, pp. 705-706.

¹⁶² Robert R. Bowie, ‘*Eisenhower, Dulles and the Suez Crisis*’, Louis and Owen, p. 196

¹⁶³ Sir Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson, the Story of Suez*, pp. 31-35, *ibid*, p. 191.

peace. Their general slogan is 'not one inch of ground' and their incessant demand is for arms... Public opinion on both sides is inflamed and the chances for peaceful settlement seem remote.¹⁶⁴

Similarly, Dulles agreed to the U.S. resorting to "the stick rather than the carrot" policy implied by the OMEGA plan to pressurise Nasser away from "cosying up" with the Russians. Yet, in his March 28 memo to Eisenhower, the Secretary of State also stated that the U.S.

...would want for the time being to avoid an open break which would throw Nasser irrevocably into a Soviet satellite status and ... to leave [him] a bridge back to good relations with the West if he so desires.¹⁶⁵

Clearly, the US leadership adopted a less extreme analysis and objective than its British counterpart regarding the Egyptian leader. In addition to these differences, Washington and London still could not agree on a unified policy related to the Baghdad Pact. Under OMEGA, Dulles did call for showing greater support for the Pact, yet, without actually adhering to it.¹⁶⁶ America ultimately joined the Pact's economic and anti-subversive committees, but maintained opposition to widening it to other Arab states. The U.S. wanted to distance itself from Britain's colonial policies but also to avoid alliance with the Hashemite families of Iraq and Jordan, as such a move would upset the Ibn Saud whom Washington sought to build up to rival Nasser's leadership of the region. In commenting Dulles's March 28 memo, Eisenhower noted that because Nasser's growing ambition was becoming a fundamental problem, he had "... suggested to the State Department ... [to] begin to build up some other individual as a prospective leader of the Arab world" and that his "... own choice of such a rival is King Saud ... possibly as a spiritual leader. Once this was accomplished

¹⁶⁴ FRUS, B, 1988, Antony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, p 43.

¹⁶⁵ Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, pp. 318-323.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 323.

[the U.S.] might begin to urge his right to political leadership”¹⁶⁷.

Supporting the U.S. Saudi-centered policy was anathema to the British, particularly in view of the administration’s aim to pressurise the Foreign Office to satisfy the Saudis on Buraimi so as to lure them away from Nasser and build them up as regional leaders. For the British, “the Saudi situation was less immediate” than the Baghdad Pact coalition which was in greater need of US support and active cooperation.¹⁶⁸

Obviously, the U.S and the UK did share agreement on dragging feet in the Aswan loan to force Nasser to break ties with the Soviets. Yet, their analyses and objectives with regard the Egyptian leader, the Baghdad Pact and Saudi Arabia were very much in conflict. Such divergences spoiled discussions between Washington and London and strained their alliance, ultimately bringing it to breaking point during the Suez crisis.

In the meanwhile, Anglo-American stalling tactic in the Aswan loan allowed room for further Russian involvement in Egypt. On 17 June, 1956, Dimitri Shepilov presented the Egyptians with a \$ 400 million interest-free Soviet offer for the Dam construction. Though knowing of the Russian move in late June, and informed by Byroade on July 10 that Nasser _who had dropped the objections raised in February to the loan _ was sending Ambassador Hussein back to Washington to conclude an agreement for the Dam, Dulles in full agreement with the President, decided to tell Hussein about the administration’s shifting position towards the Dam project because of the situation in Congress. The US decision matched the Foreign Office’s view “to await developments before doing anything further in respect to the High Aswan Dam.”¹⁶⁹ The British did not have to wait long, however, as on his 19 July, 1956 meeting with Hussein, Dulles informed the Egyptian Ambassador of the United States decision to withdraw funding for the Dam. Britain and the World Bank followed

¹⁶⁷ Diary Entry by the President, March 28, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XV*, p. 425, see also Ferrell, pp. 323-324.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum of a Conversation, April 1, 1956, *ibid*, p. 435-445.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum of a Conversation, July 10, 1956, *ibid*, pp. 802-804.

suit the day after.

The U.S. withdrawal of the Aswan Dam loan did originate in mounting opposition in Congress to the project. Yet, it did also arise from the US leadership's growing discontent with Nasser. The Egyptian President's objections to the western peace process, his links with the Soviets and his recognition of China had totally frustrated America's efforts to keep the communists out of the region. The Eisenhower administration also saw in Cairo's plans for Egyptian-Syrian unity in early July,¹⁷⁰ and Nasser's 12 July meeting in Yugoslavia with the two other leading figures of nonalignment – Nehru and Yugoslavian premier Josip Broz Tito – further provocations to the West. Dulles, in particular, accused Cairo of trying to blackmail Washington by playing off East against West. What is more, the Secretary of State's anti-communist standards, which believed neutralism to be “evil and immoral”, were highly exacerbated by the Yugoslavia meeting.¹⁷¹ Therefore, in retrieving the Aswan Dam offer, Washington sought to inflict President Nasser punishment, but also humiliation for his many transgressions.¹⁷²

The Egyptian riposte was not long delayed. After a strong attack on American policy in a speech on 24 July, Nasser used the occasion of his annual speech on 26 July, to respond to the Western withdrawal of funding for the Aswan Dam. Stating that the U.S. and the UK were “punishing Egypt because it refused to side with military blocs”¹⁷³, Nasser announced his decision to nationalise the Suez Canal Company whereby “all money, rights and obligations are transferred to the State”. In return, “shareholders and holders of constituent

¹⁷⁰ On June 14, a new government was formed in Syria, with Sabri al-Asali as Prime Minister. Popular support in Syria for a union between Egypt and Syria grew in strength, leading the Syrian government of president Quwatly to adopt the principle of unity with Egypt, on 5 July, 1956. , Heikel , *Cutting the Lion's Tail* , p. 109.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁷² In Ali E. Hillal Dessouki's words, ‘ Nasser perceived the Anglo-American rejection as a deliberate move to embarrass him and his régime, domestically and regionally. It was also an insult to the emerging neutral countries; the decision was announced to the world while Nasser was attending a meeting in Yugoslavia with Tito and Nehru .’ , Louis and Owen , *The Crisis and its Consequences*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁷³ Nasser's Speech Presaging Nationalisation of the Suez Canal, 26 July 1956, Frankland (ed.), 1959, pp. 108-109, Gorst & Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, p. 53

shares [should] be compensated ...[and...payment of compensation [should] take place immediately the State recinds all the assets and property of the nationalised company”¹⁷⁴.

Embracing the principle of compensation to shareholders, Nasser’s nationalisation act did not usurp any right as it was within Egypt’s sovereign rights to nationalise an Egyptian company that had been given a 99-year concession by the Egyptian government in 1854. Article XVI of the 1866 Company Convention conceded, indeed, that “the Company was Egyptian under the jurisdiction of international law”¹⁷⁵. Henceforth, Nasser’s nationalisation of the company did not differ, for example, from the French government’s nationalisation in 1946 of the electrical industry previously owned by Swiss, Belgian, British and French shareholders. Nor was it in opposition with the Labour government’s nationalisation of British coal in 1948. Furthermore, nationalisation did in no way affect free international navigation as the Egyptian leader insisted on his country’s pledge to respect freedom of navigation through the canal. Preserving free navigation and providing adequate compensation did, in effect, legitimatise the nationalisation of the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez, because it was in full conformity with international law as well as with the 1888 Convention of Constantinople, which provided for the respect of free navigation through the Suez Canal .

News of Nasser’s speech caused a thunderstorm within Anglo-French political circles which all shared Prime Minister Eden’s determination that Nasser “must not be allowed to get away with it.”¹⁷⁶ British hostility towards the Egyptian Premier had been building up ever since the Suez talks. Egypt’s attacks on the Baghdad Pact, the failure of the ALPHA plan, the Czech arms deal, the events in Jordan and the eviction of the last British troops from the Suez base on

¹⁷⁴ Suez Canal Nationalisation Law, July 26 1956, Frankland (ed .), 1959, p. 114, Gorst and Johnman ,*The Suez Crisis* , p. 54.

¹⁷⁵ Louis and Owen , *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences* , p. 166 .

¹⁷⁶ William Clark, 1986, p. 186, Gorst & Johnman, p. 56.

June 13, 1956, further embittered the British who blamed Nasser for the erosion of Britain's Middle Eastern empire. The seizure of the Suez Canal, Britain's oil lifeline, was simply too much to bear. In a cabinet meeting on July 27, Eden warned his ministers that if the Western powers did not "take the necessary steps to regain control of the canal [it] would have disastrous consequences for the economic life of the Western powers and for their standing and influence in the Middle East."¹⁷⁷ Cabling Eisenhower the same day, the British Prime Minister stated his country's position declaring that if a firm attitude were not taken "our influence and yours throughout the Middle East will ...be finally destroyed." He also added that the West had to "be ready in the last resort to use force to bring Nasser to his senses". And in closing he called for a "tripartite meeting at the highest level"¹⁷⁸ hoping that an Anglo-American strategy would evolve to meet the new situation created by the nationalisation of the canal of Suez.

Eden's hopes were to be dashed, however, as from the outset of the crisis, Eisenhower instructed the State Department not to associate with British and French actions "which could tie our [the U.S.] hands later."¹⁷⁹ In fact, throughout the crisis, Eisenhower avoided acting through the "big three club" for fear to taint the U.S. with French and British colonialism. Such an attitude together with the administration's rejection of French and British calls for the use of force against Egypt, infuriated Paris and London and fostered an atmosphere of unease and frustration between the three Western allies. This in turn caused the two colonial powers to share in the Israeli aggressive conspiracy against Egypt so as to nullify the nationalisation of the Canal Company and topple Nasser and his régime, more specifically. The Anglo-French and Israeli

¹⁷⁷ Out of the seventy million tons of oil which passed from the Persian Gulf through the Suez Canal, sixty million

tons were destined for Western Europe and represented two-thirds of its oil supplies. Of the 14,666 ships which passed through the Canal in 1955, one-third were British. , PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 54 (56), 27 July, 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 56-60.

¹⁷⁸ Eden to Eisenhower, July 27, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, (Washington D.C.1990) pp. 9-11 .

¹⁷⁹ Notes on a Conversation with the President, July 28, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Diaries, Staff Memos, Box # 16, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 162

plot created a Western crisis within the Suez crisis particularly in view of the hostile stand to be adopted by the United States towards its allies and Israel's military campaign in the Middle East, in late October 1956.

President Nasser's opposition to the U.S. scheme for the organization of the Arab states to become active participants of a Western defense strategy to contain communism remains the one reference position of the Egyptian leader that inspired his decisions and moves with respect to Anglo-American Middle Eastern policies. The Western powers over concern with Cold War priorities and imperial prestige blinded them to the fact that the Northern Tier and the Baghdad Pact policies had from the start served to alienate Nasser as they had immediately created a wide area of conflict especially between Washington and Cairo. Western focus on Iraq together with the West's stalling on arms deliveries to Egypt only furthered Nasser's suspicions of Western policies, acutely revived intra-Arab rivalries and set the stage for the creation of the Cairo-Moscow axis. Still, US policymakers pursued their policy objectives of bringing Nasser to agree to a peace treaty with Israel having more in mind the 1956 US presidential elections than the true geopolitical realities of the area. The result was the failure of the Anderson mission and the end of the Aswan Dam funding offer which, Washington had assumed, entitled the White House to influence Egypt's foreign policy. President Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company did aim at "slapping the white man's face". But it did also reveal how counter-productive American Middle Eastern policies had been. Therefore, could American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis have been an attempt by the Eisenhower administration to remedy to its Middle Eastern policy shortcomings? The answer to this question is dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV: THE UNITED STATES AND THE CRISIS AT SUEZ

President Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July, 1956, came as a direct outcome of the US withdrawal of the Aswan Dam funding offer. The American decision was quite predictable given the Eisenhower administration's shift in policy line towards Egypt, the strong opposition in Congress to the project and US officials general discontent with Nasser's anti-Western policies, pan-Arab campaigns and neutralist inclinations. The Czech arms deal, the mobilization of Arab nationalist opinion against the Baghdad Pact, the recognition of Communist China, the collapse of project ALPHA, Cairo's non-committal participation in the US-sponsored peace effort of the Anderson mission together with its adherence to the non-aligned movement, were all incompatible with Washington's plans for the Middle East. In fact, Nasser's stands hindered the achievement of America's basic Middle East objectives namely, enlisting the Arab world in an anti-communist regional grouping, and managing a peace treaty between Arabs and Israelis with Egypt playing the leading Arab role in such an initiative.

Nasser, however, did not subscribe to such schemes which he viewed as remnants of Western imperialism that infringed Arab sovereignty and unity, and threatened Egypt's leadership position in the region. The Egyptian leader's stands had a significant resonance in the colonized world in general, and in the Middle East in particular. Evicting the British from the Suez base, resisting Anglo-American restrictive manoeuvres to force Egyptian support of the Northern Tier and the Baghdad Pact, and breaking the West's arms monopoly in the area were defiant gestures which clearly thwarted American plans in the Middle East and challenged Britain's century-based might over it. The Czech Arms Deal particularly enhanced Nasser's prestige in Arab eyes as it translated Egypt's independence from Western influence and evidenced its freedom of decision on its foreign policy. It did also confirm Cairo's commitment to the

ideology of neutrality as well as its non-alignment in the Cold War.

Nasser would have probably never been so successful had he not gained the unconditional support of the Arab masses. In identifying Egypt's interests with those of all the Arabs and in resisting the Northern Tier, the Baghdad Pact and the ALPHA plan in the name of the Arabs, he did in effect secure himself and his country the formidable ideological weapon of Arab nationalism. Egypt's alliance with Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen in 1955-1956 best evidenced his ascendancy in the Arab world. Furthermore, according to historian Ali Hellal Dessouki, "On the eve of the Suez confrontation Nasser had effectively made Arabism a protest movement against Western dominance in the region."¹⁸⁰

President Nasser's actions endowed him with a worldwide nationalist reputation too. His charismatic image was tremendously appealing to all world revolutionaries who viewed his opposition to Anglo-American meddling in the Arab world, a daring fight that echoed their own quest for human dignity and encouraged their struggle against the colonial powers for national sovereignty. While in Afro-Asian non-aligned eyes Nasser definitely incarnated a leading Third World leader, of the same ranking as Jawaharlal Nehru and Josip Broz Tito.¹⁸¹

Henceforth, nationalising the Suez Canal Company in July 1956, did but add to the Egyptian Premier's standing and pre-eminence locally, regionally and internationally.¹⁸² A deliberate challenge to Western dominance in the region, it was also a true act of defiance aiming at reversing the Anglo-American withdrawal of the Aswan dam loan, the intended Western blow to his neutralism and Arab leadership position. Moreover, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal

¹⁸⁰ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, '*Nasser and the Struggle for Independence*', Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 37.

¹⁸¹ In historian Amin Hewedy's words, Nasser's deeds 'raised his dignity not only in the region but also throughout the Third World. The national movements in Africa Asia and Latin America were encouraged by the Egyptian example.', *ibid*, p. 172

¹⁸² Mohamed Abdel Wahab Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy : 1952-1956*, LAAM, London, 1989, pp. 123, 126, 128.

Company for the Egyptian president offered further important perspectives. It provided Egypt with the needed funds for the construction of the High Aswan Dam and for the promotion of national development¹⁸³. It allowed completion of Egyptian independence via restitution of a national strategic asset and, most significantly, it demonstrated that the era of small countries accepting public insult and degradation from great powers was well over and done with.¹⁸⁴ In effect, news of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company by the Egyptian president rallied such massive Arab and Afro-Asian support around him, that even his adversary Nuri al-Said was constrained to declare that nationalisation was the “undoubted right of any nation” and that “Iraq stood on Egypt’s side in the dispute over the Suez issue.”¹⁸⁵ Arab public opinion unconditional espousing of Nasser’s cause and the Afro-Asian countries open identification with his disengagement from bloc politics did not go unnoticed by the Eisenhower administration.

The US leadership’s early analysis of the situation at Suez basically acknowledged two important facts: first, that from the legal point of view, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company was “within Egypt’s rights until its operation of the canal was proven incompetent”¹⁸⁶. And second, that any recourse to force against Egypt would bear most dreadful consequences for the West in general and for Western interests and position in the Middle East in particular. Accordingly, from the start Eisenhower clearly stated his administration’s opposition to military intervention with regard to the Suez issue, declaring that it would “array the world from Dakar to the Phillipine Islands against us.”¹⁸⁷

The American position was not shared by its key NATO allies _ Britain and France_ who considered Nasser’s act unacceptable. The determination of

¹⁸³ The Suez Canal transit tolls brought in \$ 100 Million annually, during the period of the crisis.

¹⁸⁴ Heikel , *Milaffat al-Suways* , p. 459 , Louis &Owen ,*The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 38

¹⁸⁵ Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*,p. 128.

¹⁸⁶ Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman File,personal, 2 November,1956, *ibid* , p. 124

¹⁸⁷ NA RG 218 CCS-092 Egypt, note by Sec. To JCS, 31 July, 1956, pp. 306-20 , *ibid* , p.129 SA

the latter powers to go to war against the Egyptian leader and his régime was tangible ever since news of the nationalisation had reached them. Both held grudges against Nasser long before the nationalisation. And both were determined that his challenge could not go unanswered.

Guy Mollet, the French Prime Minister, called Nasser an “apprentice dictator” whose methods were similar to “Hitler’s”, and depicted his action as a “policy of blackmail alternating with flagrant violations of international agreements”. Moreover, stating that his government would not accept the unilateral action of Colonel Nasser, Mollet announced that France was determined to take “an energetic and severe counterstrike.”¹⁸⁸ By reason of the 70,000 French shareholders of the Canal Company, France was directly concerned by the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Yet, far more important than the economic fallouts created by the nationalisation, French officials, especially the military, felt great hostility towards President Nasser because of his régime’s support of the Algerian Revolution. Facing the North African freedom fighters was proving a real drain on French resources that was aggravated because of Egyptian assistance to and sympathy for the revolutionaries. Accordingly, from the start the French who were itching for action against Egypt were ready to consider all means to topple Nasser and his government.¹⁸⁹

With respect to the British government, Prime Minister Anthony Eden was the most committed of all to a showdown with President Nasser. Feeling great enmity towards the Egyptian leader, he also rendered him responsible for the depletion of British power and position in the Middle East. Moreover, being the largest shareholder of the Suez Canal Company with 25 % of its imports passing through the canal, and one third of the total traffic through the canal being British-registered, Britain was the most concerned nation by the

¹⁸⁸ Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, p. 280, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.124

¹⁸⁹ Ambassador Dillon’s Report to Eisenhower, R. Bowie and R. Immerman, *Eisenhower, Waging Peace*, p. 36, *ibid.*

nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Also, with the country's largest percentage of oil requirements depending on the canal to reach the UK, it seemed that nationalisation did, in effect, "put British interests at the mercy of Egypt."¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, Prime Minister Eden declared before Parliament that "No arrangement for the future use of this great international waterway can be acceptable to the British Government which would leave it in the unfettered control of a single power which would exploit it purely for purposes of national policy."¹⁹¹ Eden's diatribe echoed the British Cabinet's earlier warning that "if [Britain] failed to hold the Suez Canal [this] would lead inevitably to the loss ... of all our assets in the Middle East."¹⁹² Concern for Britain's imperial interests and standing in the region and Eden's personal dislike of Nasser nourished British determination to "resort to use force to bring Nasser to his senses."¹⁹³ Like his French counterpart then, Eden spoiled for a fight to destroy the Egyptian leader. To this effect, France and Britain joined efforts to coordinate plans for a united military response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company.

It was plain that the Anglo-French position collided with President Eisenhower's belief conveyed by Deputy Under Secretary Robert Murphy to the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau and his British counterpart Selwyn Lloyd in the evening of 28 July, that the use of force "should be delegated to the background."¹⁹⁴ The US position was also clearly stated by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles when he told Roger Makins, British Ambassador to Washington, on 1 August that "The US government would not be in sympathy with any attempt to make the Egyptian government rescind their nationalisation

¹⁹⁰ Eden *_Full Circle* , pp. 465-6 .

¹⁹¹ NA RG 218, "A post-analysis of the crisis in the Suez Canal Zone", USAEF AIR Intelligence Summary, May 1957, p. 21, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p.123 .

¹⁹² Public Record Office, CAB 128/30, C.M. (56)54, Cabinet meeting at the House of Commons, July 27, 1956 , Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez crisis*, p. 60

¹⁹³ Eden to Eisenhower, July 27,1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI* , pp. 9-11.

¹⁹⁴ Murphy to Dulles, # 517, July 29, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 163 .

decrees, or to regard them as inoperative, under the threat of force...” adding that “... there was no American treaty obligation at stake and no legal basis for intervention.”¹⁹⁵

Obviously the positions of the United States and its European allies regarding the issue at Suez were poles apart. With the unfolding of the crisis, such diverging stands would generate a great deal of distrust, and anger between the three Western powers who were, as it was only fair, called ‘uneasy allies’. The unease between the Westerners would not only affect their handling of the crisis but also their perception of each others policies and moves with regard the retaliatory *démarche* to pursue vis-à-vis the Egyptian president and the reversal of his nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company .

Chapter four covers the US reaction and policies during the Suez Crisis and their impact on the course of events as well as on the different parties to the crisis. The Chapter first deals with the the unease between America and its allies which was fostered by their opposed stands vis-à-vis the Egyptian leader, the nationalisation of the Canal Company and the West’s retaliatory procedures to “Nasser’s theft”. In its second part, the Chapter probes the US diplomatic effort to prevent its allies from using force against Egypt, and the effects of such an initiative on America’s relations with Britain and France. In its third part, the Chapter shows how the US persistent opposition to its allies military plans and Anglo-French adamancy to recourse to force to unseat President Nasser had led to the build up in the Westerners frustration and anger with each other policies and postures regarding the handling of the Suez issue. It equally shows the build up of the Anglo-French and Israeli conspiracy for an offensive against Egypt, without American concurrence and knowledge.

1. UNEASY WESTERN ALLIES.

From the outset of the Suez Crisis, the American leadership pursued a diplomatic course that basically sought to avoid any political moves which could

¹⁹⁵ Public Record Office, FO 371/119080, Makins to Foreign Office , July 30, 1956, Gorst and Johnman p. 65 .

jeopardize the administration's efforts to build up its regional strategy in the Middle East. The outbreak of the Suez Crisis did not nullify the Eisenhower administration's policy objectives in the area.¹⁹⁶ Operation OMEGA which called for strengthening the Saudis to rival Nasser's leadership of the Arab world, and creating a regional defense grouping to contain Soviet penetration in the Middle East, did also aim at pressurising the Egyptian president via political and economic restrictions targeting Egypt, to turn away from the communist bloc and to be more accommodating vis-à-vis the West. The American administration's persistent focus on Nasser was indeniably due to the latter's influential position in the region which the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company further increased. Thus, for the US administration President Nasser did remain the only Arab leader whose regional standing and Arab leadership potential could tolerate a peace treaty with Israel. Secretary of State Dulles, in historian Sayed Ahmed words, still nurtured the hope "to win over Nasser whom he saw as the only Arab leader capable of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict."¹⁹⁷ In other words, a recourse to force against Nasser, as praised by the European allies, would not be in the best interests of the United States which had considerable economic, political and military interests in the Middle East, but none in the Suez Canal Company.

The wave of massive support expressed by the Arab peoples and the Afro-Asian countries towards Nasser, following nationalisation, rendered the US leadership weary of the adverse effect an American military involvement might have on world public opinion and particularly among muslim peoples . One such nation was Saudi Arabia which Nasser was allied to and which boasted pivotal importance in the US OMEGA plan. Not to forget the issue of British-Saudi animosity over the Buraimi Oasis and the Baghdad Pact. American officials

¹⁹⁶ Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59*, Michael Dockrill, King's College London, 1996, p.85

¹⁹⁷ Dulles Oral History Collection, Phleger Herman Oral History, p. 48, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p. 125 .

were fully aware that any pro-British move during the crisis would not be well eyed by the Saudis, given their shared commitment with Egypt to a patriotic pan-Arab philosophy, and their allied stand against the Baghdad Pact. The US leadership was also concerned about access to Saudi oil. Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported before the NSC that US national security top advisers were “very concerned to be assured of continued access to Saudi Arabian oil.”¹⁹⁸ In fact, from the start of the crisis, Washington had worried about the effects of an Arab oil embargo against the West should military operations target Egypt. Aware of his allies dependence on the Suez Canal to receive their oil shipments, Eisenhower feared the collapse of European economies if oil supplies were cut off due to canal closure or pipeline destruction by other Arab states in sympathy with Egypt.¹⁹⁹ Dulles particularly warned that the loss of Arab oil to the West would cause “a severe blow to the US economy” as it would result “in gasoline rationing, the curtailment of automobile production and the loss of markets abroad and jobs at home.”²⁰⁰

Another related factor to this worry, was the US leadership’s fears that London and Paris might ally militarily with Israel to solve their problem. Such a prospect, which increased the administration’s pre-election anxieties, also raised the specter of the possible loss of the Arab world and its huge oil fields to the Soviets, should the administration not move to keep the Suez issue clearly separated from the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁰¹

The American pre-election campaign of 1956, also put pressure on the administration not to acquiesce in its European allies’ calls for the use of force against Egypt. The Eisenhower team realized that supporting an Anglo-French expedition in the area would be seen by Congress as an effort to back European

¹⁹⁸ Eisenhower Diary Series, Box No.16, July 1956, Diary Staff Memos Folders, Memo of Conversation with President , 31 July, 1956, Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p.126 .

¹⁹⁹ Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Papers, Diary Series, Box No.16, Folder July 1956, Diary, State Memo, 27 July, 1956, Memo of Conversation with President , *ibid* , p. 126 .

²⁰⁰ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 31,1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 62-8 .

²⁰¹ Neff , p. 288, Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956* , p. 125

colonialism, and could cost the Republicans dearly as the Democrats would exploit the situation to their advantage in the electoral campaign.²⁰² Second, running for re-election, Eisenhower wanted to present himself to the world and to the American electorate as the 'peace candidate'.²⁰³ Therefore, he did his utmost to avert any outbreak of hostilities before his re-election.

American policy planners also realized that the Soviet Union would greatly benefit from the bad image of the U.S. a recourse to force could bring about. Russia would not only pose as the champion of the Arab states but also of the entire emerging Afro-Asian countries. American strategists repeatedly warned that "it would be harmful to the U.S. and Western interests if the Middle East became more closely affiliated with the communist bloc or more firmly neutralist". No doubt it would adversely affect the U.S. strategy of containing Soviet penetration in the area, and alter the balance of power in the Cold War.²⁰⁴

For all these many reasons, the US administration decided to proceed cautiously in the Suez Crisis with a view to prevent a precipitate move in the region that could cost the West dearly . American caution did not match its allies calls for bolder action against Egypt, which fostered deep misunderstandings and frustration between the Western powers, and created contradictions in their policies regarding the Suez issue.

The unease between the United States and its two European allies regarding a unified Western retaliatory procedure to counter Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company was basically due to their difference over the means with which to achieve retaliation not the ultimate goal from it.²⁰⁵ Like France and Britain, America wanted to reverse nationalisation; unlike them it opposed the use of force to carry this out.

²⁰² Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, Telephone Call Series, Box No.11, Memo of Conversation with President, 30 July, 1956, *ibid* , p. 126.

²⁰³ Sayed Ahmed , p.125, See also Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez* , p.172 .

²⁰⁴ NA RG 218 CCS-092 Egypt JSC 2105/38, 31 July 1956, pp. 306-20, including No.d, Sayed Ahmed *Nasser and*

American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956, p.125.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.127, See also Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 167 .

In response to Prime Minister Eden's 27 July cable²⁰⁶, Eisenhower sent Robert Murphy to London the day after, to convey the US position and also proposal for the organization of an international conference with the "maximum number of maritime nations affected by the Nasser action". The proclaimed aim of the conference was to foster an agreement between the Canal major users for a system of international control of the waterway.²⁰⁷ The US real objective, however, was to pressure the Egyptian government to "assure the efficient operation of the Canal"²⁰⁸ as well as to "dissuade [the allies from using force] perhaps a bit at a time, gradually deflecting their course of action."²⁰⁹

In seeking an international meeting, American officials wanted to divert their allies from moving militarily against Egypt, hoping that a prolonged crisis would diminish the option of war. Likewise, when pressing the Egyptians to assure efficient operation of the Canal, both Eisenhower and Dulles wanted to prevent their allies from using Egyptian mismanagement of maritime traffic through the Canal as a pretext for intervention in Suez. A further objective, according to historian Steven Frieberger, was the US President's desire "to prevent Nasser from successfully nationalising the Suez Canal because he was concerned about possible implications for the Panama Canal."²¹⁰ Eisenhower, thus, wanted to prevent the Suez situation from causing difficulties for the U.S. to maintain its control over the Panama Canal in Central America. Therefore, over the following two months, the U.S. would work to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Suez issue by pursuing a strategy based on a series of delaying tactics which helped the crisis fade away or at least prevented it from resulting in war.

The prospect of an international conference did not fill the French with much joy. Guy Mollet the French Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister

²⁰⁶ Op Cit., pp. 87-88.

²⁰⁷ Eisenhower to Eden , July 28,1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, p. 12 .

²⁰⁸ Eisenhower to Eden , July 31, 1956, *ibid* , pp. 69-71 .

²⁰⁹ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 31, 1956, *ibid* , pp. 62-68 .

²¹⁰ Frieberger , *Dawn Over Suez* , p. 164

Christian Pineau fully concurred with French Ambassador to Cairo, Armand du Chayla's calls for taking action "... to stop Colonel Nasser in his tracks ... [for] ... unless there is (sic) an immediate and very energetic reaction from abroad, the Suez leader will think that ... he can do anything he pleases."²¹¹ Moreover, following the meeting with Pineau and Lloyd on 28 July, Deputy Under Secretary Robert Murphy reported that Pineau, who displayed greater hostility than Lloyd towards the Egyptian leader, saw the nationalisation of the Canal as an opportunity to rid the area of Nasser.²¹²

Like their French counterparts, the British officials were not overjoyed by the US proposal. Yet, on 30 July, 1956, the Egypt Committee _ an inner cabinet made up of six ministers appointed to formulate policy with regard the Suez issue_ accepted the idea of a conference under condition of presenting the Egyptians with a declaration not open to negotiations, and allowing military intervention if rejected by Cairo. More significantly, the Committee defined British objectives from the conference stating that "While our ultimate purpose was to place the Canal under international control, our immediate [purpose] was to bring about the downfall of the present Egyptian Government."²¹³

When meeting with his top advisers on 31 July, to discuss the US policy in light of Murphy's report, Eden's cable and other messages, Eisenhower said that the British decision was "very unwise", and found British thinking "out of date." In effect, the US President who firmly believed the age of colonial wars was past, also explained that the European powers put too much emphasis on Nasser who, according to him, but "embodies the emotional demand of the people of the area for independence and for slapping the white man down."²¹⁴

²¹¹Tel. du Chayla-Pineau, 23 July 1956, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p.136

²¹² PRO, PREM (Prime Minister) 11/1098, Record of Conversation Between the French, UK and US Delegation

July 29, 1956. Pineau did not share the American approach to the problem at Suez and appeared even more outraged than his British counterpart, stating that: 'If Nasser were able to get away with this, it would have incalculable consequences for the whole Western position. Like Hitler, Nasser had made no secret of his intentions...' Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 252.

²¹³ Rhodes James, *Eden*, pp. 459-61, Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences*, p 198.

²¹⁴ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 31, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 62-68.

Thus, Eisenhower adamantly opposed the use of force and definitely based America's position on the Constantinople Convention of 1888. In effect, upon his arrival to London on 1 August, 1956, Dulles presented Eden with a letter from Eisenhower in which the US President did consider that "the possibility of force might be necessary" regarding Suez, but did also heavily insist on the need for an international conference that would endorse the principle of international control of the Canal. In concluding, the president reiterated that America and world opinion would not support the use of force.²¹⁵ On 2 August, Dulles convinced Eden and Pineau to take part in an international conference in London, convened on August 16, to discuss the Suez situation with all the nations concerned by the waterway.

Britain and France's acquiescence in the US plan was due to three major reasons. First, their military preparations for an expedition against Egypt would require a six-week fix. Second, an interesting feature of the US proposal was that putting the Suez Canal under international control would nullify the obligation of returning management of the Canal to Egypt in 1968, due to the expiration of the Company's concession by then. In a Cabinet discussion, British officials declared that "Colonel Nasser had presented us with an opportunity to find a lasting settlement of this problem, and we should not hesitate to take advantage of it."²¹⁶ Third, Eden hoped that if France and Britain "resorted to force to settle their dispute with Egypt, the U.S. would provide a nuclear umbrella to counter the possibility of a Soviet threat", as well as alternative oil supplies in case of an emergency.²¹⁷ Similarly, Christian Pineau reported that his government agreed to try other means first so as to reach a "good solution", that is, "a solution that would make Nasser back down". He also added that if Nasser were to refuse, "we will intervene with the British; if the Americans do not take

²¹⁵ Eisenhower to Eden, July 31, 1956, FRUS (C), 1988, pp. 69-71, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 65-66.

²¹⁶ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM (56), 27 July 1956, *ibid*, p. 59.

²¹⁷ Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, p. 465, Sayed Ahmed, p. 124. See also Gorst & Johnman, pp. 66-67.

part in the intervention we would expect them to take a position, namely, to persuade the Russians not to intervene.”²¹⁸ In short, both British and French officials reasoned that supporting the US proposal would not only allocate time to complete their military preparations, but would also justify the recourse to force if Nasser rejected the conference’s proposals. By another token, should he conform to the conference’s decisions it was, in Eden’s view, “improbable that he will be able to maintain his internal position [and] we should thus have achieved our secondary objective.”²¹⁹

It must be said that Secretary of State Dulles’s attitude and declarations during the crisis did a lot to mislead the French and the British in the belief that the U.S. would tolerate military intervention should diplomacy fail with Nasser. As a matter of fact when he met Eden on 1 August, he declared that:

It was unacceptable to have one nation control the canal, and that it was even more unacceptable because the nation was Egypt. A way had to be found to make Nasser disgorge what he was to swallow.²²⁰

Dulles affected an anti-Nasser attitude, too, best evidenced by his reference to the Egyptian leader as “an extremely dangerous fanatic.”²²¹ What is more in this respect when he met congressional leaders with Eisenhower on 12 August, he showed great concern for the cause of the European allies declaring that: “the U.S. could not be unsympathetic to the British and the French in light of Nasser’s ambitions [whose] fulfillment ... would result in reducing Western Europe to a state of dependency.”²²²

²¹⁸ Memorandum by Pineau of luncheon conversation , 2Aug. 1956, at Anthony Eden’s residence, Louis and Owen,

The Crisis and its Consequences, p. 140

²¹⁹ PRO PREM 11/1098, Eden to Eisenhower, 5 August 1956, Gorst & Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 68-69 .

²²⁰ Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 486-92 , Eden writes, ‘ Nasser must be made, as Mr. Dulles put it to me, “to disgorge” . These were forthright words. They would ring in my ears for months.’

²²¹ Eisenhower Library, White House Office of the Staff Sec., Records 1952-1961, Legislative Meeting Series, Box No. 3, L31a(2), 12 August 1956, p.34, Bipartisan Meeting (Minich Series) Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.126 .

²²² Memorandum of a Conversation , August 12, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 185-87 .

Such declarations coupled with Britain and France's over-concern with matters of pride and prestige for their dying empires, blinded them to the fact that for Dulles "disgorging" would have to be achieved by international means; while for them, this simply meant support for the use of force.

The initial unease between the Western powers regarding the best course to pursue to reverse nationalisation, soon grew into open divergence. This mainly resulted from the allies persistent assumption that the U.S. would ultimately support their military plans against Egypt. An assumption reinforced by the reversals and confusing "prevarications" displayed by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in the course of implementing the U.S. initiative for managing a peaceful resolution of the crisis .

2. THE AMERICAN INITIATIVE

a _ The Menzies Mission :

When the US administration took the initiative for managing a peaceful way out of the Suez issue, it had basically sought to force its allies down the diplomatic route so as to limit the prospect of their acting independently against Egypt. Eisenhower and Dulles adamantly offered diplomatic alternatives to the violence their Atlantic allies were proposing with a view to keep them under American control and divert them from using force. The first of these diplomatic manoeuvres was the First London Conference convened between 16 and 23 August, 1956. Twenty-two nations attended the conference: the top sixteen users of the Suez Canal and the original signatories to the 1888 Convention of Constantinople²²³. During the meeting, Dulles closely worked with the French and the British to manage a draft which basically called for the creation of an international Board that would operate, maintain and secure the Canal as an international waterway, insulate it from the politics of any nation and guarantee

²²³ The Convention of Constantinople gave an international status to the Suez Canal and provided for free navigation through its waters. It was signed in 1888 by the following maritime powers: France, Britain, Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, Spain, Italy and Austria-hungary.

the respect of Egypt's sovereign rights²²⁴ . This initial tripartite proposal formed the basis of the First London Conference and became known as the eighteen-power proposal _ as it had been ratified by 18 out of the 24 attending nations.

Although invited, Egypt did not attend the conference which Nasser had denounced in a speech on 12 August _following the three Western powers freezing of Egyptian assets and funds in their banks_ as a Western conspiracy aiming at starving and terrorizing the Egyptian people. Nasser also declared that:

Egypt deplores these measures and regards them as a threat to the Egyptian people, to make them surrender part of their territory and sovereignty to an international body, which in fact is international colonialism.²²⁵

From the start, Eisenhower objected that an “operating Board” would be hard for Nasser to “swallow” and that “a Board with supervisory rather than operating authority...” should be more acceptable to Cairo.²²⁶ Aware of the Anglo-French objective to use the conference's proposal as an ultimatum precluding negotiations, and knowing that both allies were resuming their military preparations for a forceful move to unseat Nasser ²²⁷, Dulles informed Eisenhower that it would be “very difficult if not impossible” to persuade the British and the French to concede any change.²²⁸ In fact, the US Secretary of State wanted to avoid an open rift with his allies by displaying evident sympathy with their demands.²²⁹ This attitude of the Secretary of State, was motivated

²²⁴ Eayrs (ed.), 1964, pp. 102-10 , The Eighteen Nations Proposals, 23 August, 1956, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez*

Crisis , pp.72-3.

²²⁵ Department of State, Documents Publications, The Suez Canal, pp. 50-1, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.129.

²²⁶ Cables to London TEDUL 13, 19 Aug. 1956, and TEDUL 15, 20 Aug. 1956, AW, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 5,

Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p.202.

²²⁷ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 62 (56), 2_ August 1956, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp.74-76.

²²⁸ Cables to London TEDUL 13, 19 Aug.1956, and TEDUL 15, 20 Aug. 1956, AW, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 5,

Louis and Owen, p.203.

²²⁹ Finer, p. 207 , Sayed Ahmed ,p.132 .

more by the aim of controlling Anglo-French war pulses than by the workability of an international operating Board for the Canal.²³⁰ Dulles reasoned that the conference offered the dual-chance to divert America's allies from launching a military offensive against Egypt, as well as to get negotiations started over the Suez Canal problem.

At the very time he was trying to show American willingness to ally with Anglo-French demands, Dulles also attempted to convey to the world and particularly the emerging Afro-Asian one that the Western powers were not "ganging up" on Egypt. Once the British and the French were persuaded into participating in the London Conference with endorsement of the tripartite proposal, Dulles set about weakening the force of the conference.

On 20 August, 1956, he declared that "this is not a conference through which to deliver any kind of ultimatum to Egypt [and that] none of us would for a moment entertain that purpose."²³¹ In addition to this, he instructed the US ambassador in Cairo to contact Nasser and ask him not to provide Eden with a pretext for intervention against Egypt.²³² Nasser welcomed the US stand for peace as it prolonged the crisis and defused the recourse to forcible means. So, he sent his personal envoy, Ali Sabri, to London with instructions to approach privately the US delegation to the conference and let it be known that:

...Egypt stands ready to work out a reasonable and just solution to the Canal problem ..., [that Egypt] is going to accept internationalization of the Canal ... [but that] ... there is a peaceful way of settling this matter, and if such a method is applied, it will be found that we are ready to give our whole hearted cooperation.²³³

More signals from the US Secretary of State towards Nasser consisted of

²³⁰ Sayed Ahmed , p. 129, see Louis & Owen too, pp. 202-203.

²³¹ Department of State Bulletin, No 897, 29 September 1956, "Conclusion of London Conference" , Statement of 20 August by Dulles, p. 371, Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 130 .

²³² Heikel , *Suez : The Cairo Documents* , p. 100 , *ibid*.

²³³ Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers , White House memo series , Box No.31, White House correspondence general 56 (2), Suez Folder ,forward to Sec. 23181 (95)., Sayed Ahmed, p.100

his turning down Eden's demand for the United States to head the mission that was to present the conference's proposal to Nasser, as well as his rejection of the British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd's request that the United States join in pressurising Nasser economically by withholding canal tolls from Egypt. American shipping provided the Egyptian government with 35 % of its canal revenues, and Washington refused to pressure US shipping companies to pay tolls into the old Company's account.²³⁴

Britain's failure to convince Dulles to head the mission to Egypt led the 18 nations to appoint Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies to lead the delegation to Cairo. As the Menzies mission left for Egypt, the US leadership moved to forestall any British or French attempt to present the conference's proposal as the final offer to Nasser. On 28 August, Dulles declared at a press conference, that "the Suez Canal is not a primary concern to the USA."²³⁵ Three days later, Eisenhower stated that: "for ourselves, we are determined to exhaust every possible, every feasible method of peaceful settlement, and we believe it can be done. We are committed to a peaceful settlement."²³⁶ On that very day, the American President also sent a letter to Eden informing him that he "... really do[es] not see how a successful result could be achieved by forcible means [and that] the use of force, it seems to [him] vastly increased the area of jeopardy."²³⁷ In Egyptian historian Sayed Ahmed words, "It was obvious that American diplomacy had rendered Menzies mission powerless."²³⁸

If anything, the London Conference and the Menzies mission well reflected the inherent tensions between the three Atlantic allies and their diverging purposes regarding counter-measures to reverse Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. From the outset, the British and the French

²³⁴ PRO PREM 11/1099 ,Record of a Meeting between Lloyd ,Dulles and Pineau , August 23 ,1956 , Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 204

²³⁵ Heikel, *Cairo Documents* , p. 168 , Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*.p.130 .

²³⁶ Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Press Conference, 31 August 1956, McCordle Papers, Box No.5 , Suez ,ibid.

²³⁷ PRO PREM 11/1100 , Eisenhower to Eden, 3 September 1956, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 76-7 .

²³⁸ Sayed Ahmed , p. 130 .

sought to use the London proposal as a means to undermine Nasser by forcing reversal of his nationalisation, or by provoking him into some action that would lay the basis for the use of force. In effect, both European powers saw the Menzies mission as an unrealistic scenario to promote a solution while military preparations continued. And both believed they would be justified in resorting to force should Nasser reject the London proposal.²³⁹ Thus on 28 August, Lloyd wrote to Dulles requesting American support for presenting the Suez dispute before the UN Security Council “... to put ourselves [the French and British governments] in the best possible posture internationally in relation to the acts we might be obliged to take.”²⁴⁰ Dulles’s answer conveyed full American support, however not favouring such a move to avert Soviet interference in a problem that the U.S. wanted the world to look upon as one of British and French national interests in the region.

As expected, Nasser rejected the London proposals signaling thereby the failure of the mission which held meetings with him from 3 to 9 September. In commenting the failure of the mission at Suez, Eisenhower told Dulles:

We were in an unfortunate position, because we could not really take a stand ... we did not want to alienate our friends and we did want to keep NATO strong but we can not agree with these people in their extreme attitudes.²⁴¹

Clearly, the US administration wanted to achieve a number of goals some of them contradictory. Such an attitude would be further conveyed by the diplomatic ballet undertaken by Dulles for the implementation of the Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA); the new initiative imagined by the Secretary of State to dissuade an Anglo-French recourse to force to solve the Suez issue.

b _ The Suez Canal Users Association Project

²³⁹ PRO CAB 134/1216, E.C. (56) 18, August 20, 1956, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 170.

²⁴⁰ PRO PREM 11/1100, # 3931, Foreign Office to Washington, *ibid*, p. 171

²⁴¹ Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation between the President and the Secretary of State, 7 September 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, pp. 403-404.

The Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA) was established during the Second London Conference which was held from 19 to 21 September, 1956. The idea of SCUA was first aired on 4 September by Secretary of State Dulles while the Menzies mission was still in Cairo. Dulles introduced the SCUA project to prevent the British and the French from using the failure of the diplomatic mission in Egypt as a pretext for taking their case to the United Nations. SCUA therefore, was but another American delaying tactic to avert an outbreak of hostilities and to get negotiations started over the Suez issue.

On 4 September, 1956, British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd tried again to obtain US support for an Anglo-French resolution at the Security Council. In response, Dulles informed Roger Makins, British Ambassador to Washington, that America did not favour an initiative at the Security Council and would not co-sponsor a resolution with Britain. Instead he submitted SCUA to the British and the French to consider. Based on the Suez Canal users' rights as enclosed in the 1888 Convention, the association's main purpose was to operate the canal by coordinating ship traffic and transit, providing pilots and collecting tolls. As to Egypt's shares of the revenues, they were to be determined in cooperation with Cairo "to make appropriate payment ... for the facilities provided by her."²⁴² Of particular interest to the French and the British was the prospect of shifting the payments made by American and other shippers to the Egyptian Canal Authority _established by Egypt after nationalisation for the management of the Suez Canal and the collection of transit tolls _ to SCUA. Moreover, in Dulles's words, "Nasser [...] was [...] more likely to be deflated by the loss of these revenues than by the threat or the use of force, [and] our position in the United Nations would also be much stronger..."²⁴³

Yet, however sticking to this sort of threatening language, Dulles emphasized to Makins and Hervé Alphand, the French Ambassador to

²⁴² Memcon , Pres., 8 Sept.1956, Dulles Papers, WH Memo Series, Box 4, file 5, Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 203

²⁴³ PRO PREM 11/1100, Sir roger Makins to the Foreign Office , 5 September 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, p.77.

Washington that if the Egyptian government refused transit, SCUA was not empowered to force passage through the Canal, and that in such an event, all shippers would have to be diverted round the Cape of Good Hope. Although knowing of this US condition, and despite strong French opposition, Eden decided to go along the American scheme because as Lloyd had stated:

The great tactical advantage of Mr Dulles's proposal is that if the Americans were to participate in the actual setting up of an international body after Nasser's refusal, they would have committed themselves much further towards a policy compelling the Egyptian Government by some means or other to accept international control.²⁴⁴

Furthermore, Eden believed that should "appropriate payment to Egypt by SCUA [be] small or delayed", Nasser might be provoked into transit blockade, thereby providing a pretext for intervention²⁴⁵. By another token, should he accept SCUA, it would make a mockery of nationalisation.²⁴⁶ The British Prime Minister also reasoned that if his government supported Dulles's scheme and it failed, the US administration would feel obliged to support Britain's move in the United Nations or its recourse to force.²⁴⁷ On 11 September, 1956, Eden set about convincing French Prime Minister Guy Mollet and his Foreign Minister Christian Pineau to adhere to the concept of SCUA, basing his argumentation on the prospect of American participation in paying tolls to the new organization, as well as the need to appease Washington in the hope of securing its support for a military move against Egypt. Pineau was most sceptical about the SCUA project. When Dulles started pressing for alternative approaches to the tripartite proposal in mid August, the French Foreign Minister had already remarked then, that "This does not mean that the United States contemplates a common action

²⁴⁴ PRO PREM 11/1100, 6 September 1956, *ibid*, p. 78.

²⁴⁵ 'Outline of Proposal for a Voluntary Association of Suez Canal Users', given to Makins, 9 Sept. 1956, and to French, 10 Sept. 1956, marked 'Shown to President, Given to Makins (11 sept. 1956)', Dulles Papers Subject Series, Suez Problem, Box 7, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 204.

²⁴⁶ James, *Eden*, p.511, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 174.

²⁴⁷ Public Records Office, CAB 134/1216, E.C. (56)26, September 10, 1956, *ibid*, p. 175

with England and France, but implies (sic) tacit acceptance on their part of the consequences of a probable refusal by Nasser.”²⁴⁸ In effect, in the evening of 11 September, President Eisenhower answered a journalist asking him about possible American support for allied military operations in relation with the Suez affair saying:

...this country will not go to war while I am occupying my present post unless ... Congress declares such a war. We established the United Nations to abolish aggression and I am not going to be party to aggression .²⁴⁹

Despite the American president’s declaration, and however aware of Dulles’s favouring the possibility of rerouting ships round the Cape, Eden did nonetheless present SCUA before Parliament on 12 September 1956, in the original threatening tone Dulles had used when he first introduced it. Yet, when the US Secretary of State held a press conference the day after to announce America’s support of SCUA, he depicted it in a quite different way emphasizing that American policy with regard the proposed association was not meant to coerce the users into an “organized boycott” of Egyptian control of the Canal, or to encourage recourse to force by any SCUA member:

If force is interposed by Egypt, then I do not call it a boycott to avoid using force to shoot your way through. We do not intend to shoot our way through. It may be we have the right to do it but we don’t intend to do it as far as the United States is concerned.... If we are met by force, which we can only overcome by shooting, we don’t intend to go into that shooting. Then we intend to send our boats around the Cape. But that is certainly not a boycott of the Canal.²⁵⁰

In historian Robert R. Bowie’s words, after Dulles’s intervention, “Eden

²⁴⁸ Conversation Pineau-Gladwyn Jebb 4.00 p.m., 14 Aug. 1956, Louis and Owen, p. 140

²⁴⁹ Eden , *Full Circle* , pp. 535-6 .

²⁵⁰ Frankland, 1959, p. 215, Gorst and Johnman, *Suez 1956*, p. 81.

felt he had been betrayed and humiliated [as] SCUA offered neither coercion nor pretext.”²⁵¹ Furthermore, such declarations clearly evidenced how apart the Western powers’ objectives were regarding a unified policy to deal with the Suez issue. This was further confirmed by the US Secretary of State’s manoeuvres during the Second London Conference which did, in effect, increase Anglo-French frustrations with American reversals and contradictory statements.

Between 19 and 21 September, the Second London Conference met to discuss Dulles’s proposal. Once again, Egypt did not attend signaling thereby its opposition to the project. While it played no real part in solving the crisis, SCUA particularly divided the Western allies regarding the payment of Canal dues which the British insisted Egypt should be deprived of. In response, Dulles declared that membership in SCUA “would not involve assumption by any member of any obligation”²⁵² Dulles’s new prevarications not only confirmed his earlier reversals but also greatly exhausted Eden and Lloyd’s patience . At the end of the conference, both shared agreement that SCUA had become “much watered down from its original conception ... [and was] ... widely held ... to be more feeble in its plan for execution than was expected.”²⁵³

This impression was reinforced by a statement by Dulles in a news conference on 2 October when he declared that “there is talk about ‘the teeth’ being pulled out of it [SCUA]. There were never ‘teeth’ in it if that means the use of force.”²⁵⁴ During the London Conference the US Secretary of State also expressed himself against the British proposal for taking the Suez issue before the Security Council as well as against compelling American shippers to pay dues to SCUA. Lloyd later commented Dulles’s stand on the question of dues, saying that “With regard to payment of dues, I have never seen anyone so

²⁵¹ Robert R. Bowie, ‘Eisenhower, Dulles and the Suez Crisis’, Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 205.

²⁵² Sir Anthony Nutting , *No End of a Lesson* , p. 63 , Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 176 .

²⁵³ PRO PREM 11/1102 , 23 September 1956 , Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez crisis*, p. 84

²⁵⁴ Frankland, 1959 , p.248 , *ibid*.

anxious to denigrate his own child as Dulles with SCUA.”²⁵⁵

Utterly frustrated by Dulles’s machinations, and deeply disillusioned by the results of the Second London Conference, London and Paris ultimately asked, on 23 September, for UN action on the Canal issue without consulting Washington. The joint Anglo-French reference to the Security Council essentially endorsed the Eighteen-power proposal and called on Egypt to negotiate on that basis. A counter reference was presented by the Egyptians asking the Security Council to discuss: “actions against Egypt by some powers, particularly France and the United Kingdom, which constitute a danger to international peace and security and are a serious violation of the Charter of the United Nations.”²⁵⁶ The Security Council scheduled to start debate of the issue on 5 October 1956.

Another area of concern that equally split America and its two Atlantic allies was the threat posed by President Nasser. From the start of the crisis, Eisenhower repeatedly advised against any project to unseat Nasser as such a move would jeopardise the entire Western position in the Arab world and the emerging Third World. However knowing of the US president’s position, Eden persisted in calling for US support to bring Nasser down or to condone action against his régime. Between 27 July and 1 October, 1956, the British Prime Minister wrote many letters to Eisenhower where the recurrent subject themes were the Nasser menace, his Russian links and the necessity for the use of force to “undo what Nasser has done”. Two extracts from Eden’s letters of 5 August and 1 October evidence the British Prime Minister’s adamancy on removing Nasser. What is more the extracts also show that despite Eisenhower’s systematic rejection of his analyses of ‘the Nasser menace’, the British Prime Minister persistently harped on the same ideas not minding American warnings regarding action against the Egyptian President . In his 5 August letter Eden wrote:

²⁵⁵ PRO PREM 11/1121, # 847, Dixon to Foreign Office, October 13, 1956, Freiburger, p.180.

²⁵⁶ Lloyd, 1978, pp. 149-150, Gors & Johnman, p. 85.

... Nasser has embarked on a course which is unpleasantly familiar. His seizure of the Canal was undoubtedly designed to impress opinion not only in Egypt but in the Arab world and all Africa, too. By this assertion of his power he seeks to further his ambitions from Morocco to the Persian Gulf The removal of Nasser and the installation in Egypt of a regime less hostile to the West must therefore also rank high among our objectives.²⁵⁷

His 1 October letter conveyed that:

There is no doubt in our minds that Nasser, whether he likes it or not, is now effectively in Russian hands, just as Mussolini was in Hitler's.... No doubt your people have been told of the accumulating evidence of Egyptian pilots in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. At any moment any one of these may be touched off unless we can prove to the Middle East that Nasser is losing.²⁵⁸

Eisenhower did not share Eden's view about Nasser. In his response to Eden's 1 October letter, he reiterated his belief that "... the Canal issue was [not] the one ... to seek to undermine Nasser ... [who] had dangerous tendencies that [only] needed to be curbed." For the US president, "there was promise in developing Arab leadership elsewhere ... [which] ... offered greater hope than a frontal attack with Nasser on the Canal issue."²⁵⁹ Obviously, Eisenhower referred to plan OMEGA which sought to build the Saudis as leaders for the area to rival Nasser's position there. As to the implementation of a coup against him, the American leader replied that the United States "should have nothing to do with any project for a covert operation against Nasser...." because in his view "an action of this kind could not be taken when there is as much active hostility

²⁵⁷ PRO PREM 11/1098, Eden to Eisenhower, 5 August 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, p. 68

²⁵⁸ Eden to Eisenhower, October 1, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 618-619.

²⁵⁹ Memcon of a Conversation between the President and the Secretary of State, White House, Washington, 2 October, 1956, Eisenhower Library, John F. Dulles Papers, Meeting with the President, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 625-625.

as at present.”²⁶⁰ Eisenhower also clearly warned Eden of the adverse effect a forceful move against Nasser or Egypt would have on Western interests in the Middle East and on Anglo-American relations. In his 8 September reply to Eden’s 6 September letter, he told Eden that he “was making of Nasser a much more important figure than he is ...” and warned again that “The use of military force against Egypt under present circumstances might have consequences even more serious than causing the Arabs to support Nasser. It might cause a serious misunderstanding between our two countries.”²⁶¹

The American warnings did not alter the Anglo-French determination to bring Nasser down. The French government view about President Nasser adamantly stuck to the description enclosed in the French circular of 29 July to diplomatic posts and which particularly attacked “Colonel Nasser’s insane régime [which was] ... capable of such follies [and] ... contemptuous of human liberties.”²⁶² Furthermore, two days before the Second London Conference, Sir Gladwyn Jebb British Ambassador to Paris, reported that in Pineau’s opinion:

... a recourse to the Security Council would ... be largely immaterial, except for window dressing purposes. What was material was that Nasser would clearly in the circumstances be thought to have got away with his seizure. We should thus be left with the distressing alternative of using force or facing the fact that our two countries were ‘completely finished.’²⁶³

Similarly, Eden reported before the Cabinet on 3 October, 1956, that despite the public statements made by members of the US administration, “our objectives would not be fully attained if we accepted a settlement of the Suez Canal dispute which left Colonel Nasser’s influence undiminished throughout

²⁶⁰ *Ide* .

²⁶¹ Eisenhower to Eden , September 8, 1956, *ibid*, pp. 434-435 .

²⁶² Circular tel. N°.58 by Secretary General, 29 July 1956, Loius and Owen,*The Crisis and its Consequences*,p. 136

²⁶³ PRO PREM 11/1102, 17 September 1956, Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, p. 85

the Middle East.”²⁶⁴ Eden’s report was echoed by the president of the French colony in Egypt M. Guyomard’s declaration on 20 October, to Pierre Maillard, the head of the Africa-Levant Directorate, that Nasser was a “dictator [and] a true fanatic, intransigent and spiteful”, adding that he considered it urgent to “deprive him very soon of the ability to do damage” by a police operation.²⁶⁵

Henceforth, on the eve of starting debate of the Canal issue at the Security Council, both the French and the British were still in search for a pretext to move against Egypt, despite public US opposition to such a project. In fact, in allowing diplomacy to probe a way out of the Suez crisis, both European Powers did in reality allow themselves time to complete their joint military preparations. Both displayed interest in the US plans with the aim of gaining time to put a military operation on foot as well as to secure their countries a legal international cover before resorting to force. Prime Minister Eden also mistakenly believed that Anglo-French receptiveness to US schemes would, in the end, be rewarded with American support for an allied move against Egypt. The British Prime Minister adamantly stuck to the belief that a common identity allied American and Anglo-French interests with regard to Suez, while there existed real differences between them. These were unambiguously spelled out by Dulles when he declared at a press conference on 2 October:

Now there has been some difference in our approach to this problem of the Suez Canal. This is not an area where we are bound together by treaty. Certain areas we are by treaty bound to protect such as the North Atlantic Treaty area, and there we stand absolutely together. There is (sic) also other problems where our approach is not always identical. For example there is (sic) Asia and Africa the so-called problem of colonialism. Now there, the Unites States plays a

²⁶⁴ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 68 (56) , 3 October 1956, *ibid*, p. 86

²⁶⁵ Visit of the President of the French Colony in Egypt to Africa-Levant Director, 20 Oct.1956, Louis and Owen,

Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences, p. 136.

somewhat independent role.²⁶⁶

These remarks not only revealed the depth of the growing rift between the American and Anglo-French handling of the Suez crisis but also warned that US interests could not always be expected to coincide with the interests of the Western allies. In effect, Anglo-French and American differences dramatically materialized on 29 October, 1956, with the attack led by the Israelis on Egypt, and concocted in concert with the French and the British, without American knowledge. Anglo-French and Israeli conspiracy brought things to a head at Suez, but also plunged the Western alliance in a total discord.

3. CONSPIRACY AT SUEZ

Two months after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, the exchanges emanating from the Western powers regarding the Suez Crisis, only confirmed the increasing gulf between European and American interpretations of the situation at Suez. On one side there stood the British and the French with their entrenched belief that the seizure of the Canal Company constituted a breach of international commitments and a direct threat to the security of the free world.²⁶⁷ On the other side stood their big American ally which seemed to them to look upon the whole matter as a conflict between colonial and anti-colonial interests.²⁶⁸ The gap between the two sides seemed well unbridgeable in light of continued contradictory declarations from either side, on the very eve of their public debating of the Suez affair at the Security Council.

Thus, when debates of the Suez issue began on 5 October, 1956, the Westerners were most distrustful of each other's policies regarding the problem in question. Dulles was fully aware of the state of deterioration of America's relations with the European allies. On 2 October, he told Eisenhower that Britain and France were resentful because they thought that "we are not backing them

²⁶⁶ Eden, Full Circle, pp. 556-57, See also PRO PREM 11/1174, # 2046, Makins to Foreign Office, 2 October, 1956, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 177

²⁶⁷ Op Cit., pp. 85-86

²⁶⁸ NA RG 218 Record of US Joint Chiefs of Staff, top secret, Joint Chief of Staff, Vol. VI, Ch X, The Suez Canal Crisis, p. 331, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.133

sufficiently and ... are blaming their failure to get results on the fact that we are holding them back.”²⁶⁹

But the American leadership was also resentful of the Anglo-French recourse to the UN without prior-consultations with Washington. At the NSC meeting of 4 October, Dulles first reported that:

The French [were] eager to resort to the use of force in the Suez area on the ground that this course of action was vital to them in their own war in North Africa ... [and that] the tendency ... in France had been to blame the United States for not going along with French policy and with the French assumption that [being NATO] allies ... France and the United States must therefore be allies everywhere else in the world.

The US Secretary of State went on complaining that he:

... was not even privy to the British-French decision to take their case to the United Nations ... until after that decision had been made ... [and that] ... never before had we faced a situation where we had no clear idea of the intentions of our British and French allies... [whose]... governments tend to use the U.S.as a scapegoat for the popular disapproval of British and French policy.²⁷⁰

The US leadership's frustration with the Anglo-French move at the Security Council did also largely stem from its awareness of the allies determination to bring the matter to an end quickly with a Soviet veto which would not only evidence the exhaustion of diplomatic initiatives, but would also render the use of force inevitable. US intelligence reports, indeed, pointed that France and Britain had completed their military preparations and were ready for a forceful move against Egypt. Furthermore, American resentment also

²⁶⁹ Memo of a Conversation with the President, October 2, 1956, Eisenhower Library, J.F Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum series, Box # 4, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 177

²⁷⁰ Memorandum of a Discussion at the 299th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, October 4, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, pp. 632-634.

originated in the fact that US diplomacy had gone to great lengths and moved in different directions to exert pressure on Nasser to bring a shift in his position.²⁷¹ And at the very time American efforts seemed to bear fruits, particularly in view of Nasser's declaration that SCUA could be seen "as a nucleus for a negotiation group"²⁷², the French and the British maintained their determination to escalate the crisis to the military level.

The proceedings at the UN took place between 5 and 14 October. As a consequence of the private talks held between Lloyd, Pineau and Fawzi from 9 to 12 October, the prospects for an upshot seemed within reach. Dr Fawzi, indeed, reported his government's acceptance of insulating the Canal from the politics of any one country and suggested the setting up of a small negotiating group under the auspices of the UN. During his intervention in the general debate at the Security Council on 9 October, Dulles stated the U.S. endorsement of the 18-power proposal, but he insisted again on the need to explore all peaceful manners to reach a solution: "There exists a great variety of means whereby the four basic principles stated by the 18 nations could be carried out [...] the Council ought not to close its mind to any alternative suggestions."²⁷³ Clearly, Dulles's words were intended at London and Paris not to consider the UN as the last diplomatic exercise before resorting to force, and that the U.S. was determined to resolve the issue via all possible diplomatic channels.

On 12 October, Fawzi accepted Lloyd's all six principles for Canal operation, and the next day the Security Council adopted them. These were:

- ... free and open transit through the Canal without discrimination;
- the sovereignty of Egypt should be respected ;

²⁷¹ Behind the scenes, American diplomacy had moved in various directions to foster a change in the Egyptian position. Eisenhower asked King Saud for example to use his great influence _ by reason of Saudi Arabia's alliance with Egypt against the Hashemite bloc_ to bring about Egyptian concessions. America did also keep secret contacts with oil-producing Arab states to get them to exert pressure on Nasser to modify his position. Eisenhower also approached Prime Minister Nehru for the same reasons.

²⁷² Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Papers, International Series, Suez summaries, N° 15, 24 September, 1956, Sayed Ahmed ,*Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 134

²⁷³ *U.S. Policy in the Middle East, (State Dept., 1957), p. 113, Louis and Owen, Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* p.206.

- the operation of the Canal should be insulated from the politics of any country ;
- ... fixing tolls and charges should be decided by agreement between Egypt and the users ;
- a fair portion of the dues should be allotted to development ;
- ... disputes between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian Government should be settled by arbitration.²⁷⁴

Yet, a peaceful way out of the crisis clearly conflicted with both Britain and France's determination to move militarily against Egypt. On the day of the passage of the six principles by the Security Council, Eden's speech, during a Tory Party Conference, reaffirmed his government's refusal to rule out the use of force to settle at Suez. The speech was greeted with such enthusiasm that it rendered any compromise solution such as Lloyd was working out in New York, unlikely to be popular with the Prime Minister's own political party.

As to the French, during the tripartite meeting in London (30-1 July and 1 August) following the nationalisation of the Canal Company, Christian Pineau explained to John Foster Dulles that the French government was moved by one overall preoccupation: "if Egypt's action remained without a response, it would be useless to pursue the struggle in Algeria"²⁷⁵ In a further conversation with the US Secretary of State, the French Foreign Minister depicted an even more apocalyptic picture of the Suez situation when he said that "according to the most reliable intelligence sources, we have only a few weeks ... in which to save North Africa" and added that "the loss of North Africa would then be followed by that of Black Africa and the entire territory would rapidly escape European control and influence."²⁷⁶ On the other hand, French eagerness to take military action against Nasser dated back long before the Suez Crisis. In breach

²⁷⁴ Lloyd , 1978, Appendix IV, p. 26, Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 88-89.

²⁷⁵ Memorandum of Tripartite Meeting in London, 30 July, 1956, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 137.

²⁷⁶ Dulles-Pineau Conversation, 1 Aug. 1956, *ibid*, p. 137.

of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration²⁷⁷, France had been secretly supplying the Israelis with arms since the spring of 1956, including advanced Dassault Mystere fighter aircrafts. This rapprochement between France and Israel based on a common enemy – Nasser – led to talks in early September.²⁷⁸ These talks were followed by more detailed plans for a military showdown with Egypt, during a conference in Paris attended by Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir and Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, the French Air Staff General Maurice Challe and Christian Pineau, on 30 September and 1 October, 1956. According to historians Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, “the stumbling block was that a sine qua non for the Israeli government was active British participation.”²⁷⁹ This was remedied shortly afterwards when the Israelis forced British adherence to their war plans by escalating attacks on Jordan, whose King requested immediate British support as provided for under the 1948 Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. The British Chiefs of Staff, on alert in the Middle East then, remarked that either operation CORDAGE against Israel could be pursued or operation MUSKETEER, concocted with the French to unseat Nasser, could be implemented but not both. It was then that the French approached Eden with a proposal involving cooperation between Britain France and Israel against Egypt.

On 14 October, 1956 Albert Gazier, acting French Foreign Minister, and General Challe presented Eden with an outline of the French-Israeli plan to gain control of the Suez Canal. The French officials explained that Israel would launch an attack against Egypt across the Sinai. Britain and France, having allowed the Israelis sufficient time to conquer most of the desert, would then order both sides to withdraw their forces from the Suez Canal area to prevent damage to the Canal. Then an Anglo-French force would intervene to separate

²⁷⁷ Op Cit., pp. 20-23.

²⁷⁸ On 18 September, 1956, Shimon Peres from the Israeli Defense Ministry, travelled to Paris to discuss arms purchases. After meeting French Defense Minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, It was agreed that Israel would

join the French in a military operation against Nasser.

²⁷⁹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 89-90

the belligerents and secure the waterway by occupying it.²⁸⁰

The French proposal provided the British leadership with both a resolution of the Jordanian situation and a pretext for a military intervention in Egypt. Not surprisingly, Eden then moved to instruct Lloyd and Pineau in New York, to submit a rider to their resolution in the Security Council stressing that there were not sufficient Egyptian proposals to meet the six principles approved by the Security Council and that Egypt cooperate with SCUA for the payment of transit tolls. As expected, Russia vetoed that part of the resolution. When reporting the matter to his president Dulles pointed that France and Britain had raised the Soviet veto only to pursue their own political aims.²⁸¹ Nevertheless he urged Fawzi to continue talks at all costs and to submit further proposals quickly.²⁸² While at the Security Council, it was agreed that talks would resume in Geneva on 29 October, 1956.

In the meanwhile, Eden recalled Lloyd from New York and in the afternoon of 16 October, they met Mollet and Pineau in Paris for further study of the French-Israeli plan. All agreed that Dulles had “double-crossed” them with SCUA, and that “... prior consultations with the United States ... would serve no useful purpose.”²⁸³ Then followed a meeting on 22 October between Lloyd, Ben-Gurion and his advisers at Sevres (outside Paris), where Moshe Dayan presented the British minister with the plan agreed to with the French. Two days of discussions resulted in the signature of the secret agreement known as the “Protocole of Sevres”. The next day, Eden provided his ministers with full details of the plan emphasizing that:

... if Israel launched a full-scale military operation against Egypt, the governments of the

²⁸⁰ Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, p. 93, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.181 See also Gorst and Johnman , p. 90.

²⁸¹ Memo of a Telephone Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, Washington, October 14, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, p. 721.

²⁸² Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower International Series, Suez Summaries, Summary N°. 36, 23 October 1956 , Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 137

²⁸³ PRO FO 800/75, Meeting in Paris Between Eden, Mollet, Pineau and Lloyd, October 16, 1956, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.181

United Kingdom and France should at once call on all parties to stop hostilities and to withdraw their forces to a distance ten miles from the Canal ; ... if one or both governments failed to undertake within twelve hours to comply with these requirements, British and French forces would intervene ...to enforce compliance. Israel might well undertake to comply.... If Egypt also complied, Colonel Nasser's prestige would be fatally undermined.If she failed to comply, there would be ample justification for Anglo-French military action against Egypt in order to safeguard the Canal.We may face the risk that we should be accused of collusion with Israel.²⁸⁴

With the signature of the “protocole of Sevres” the British and the French did in effect enshrine their governments agreements to be party to conspiracy with Israel for a military aggression against a sovereign country. They did so despite all US diplomatic efforts for a peaceful solution to the issue, and despite positive progress in the New York talks which strongly hinted to a satisfactory upshot to the crisis.The conspiracy also came in defiance of the principles of the UN Charter, as well as of US repeated opposition to the use of force to solve the issue at Suez.

The United States concern about the consequences of a Western military move against Egypt on its Middle East policy objectives had prevented the Suez Crisis from versing in war. Furthermore, American political manoeuvres towards the British and the French had also greatly served to reduce the initial tensions that had resulted from the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company and allowed the opening of channels of communication between the protagonists of the crisis with a view to kill the option of war. The Eisenhower administration had it at stake to safeguard its interests in the region in the long run and could therefore not back its allies plans to strike Egypt. It must be said that the US stand amidst the Crisis of Suez was not an easy one. Holding the European allies

²⁸⁴ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 74 (56), 25 October, 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 101-102.

from a recourse to force against President Nasser created a gulf of distrust between America and France and Britain. By another token, on the outbreak of the crisis, the US administration was very resentful towards President Nasser and his policies, and could have done without a situation where it found itself almost compelled to run to the rescue of the Egyptian leader. Indeed, however opposed to the use of force against Egypt, the Eisenhower administration fully subscribed to the new policy options set forth under plan OMEGA and calling for controlling Nasser and undermining his influence in the region. This created further contradictions in American policies and was to puzzle the world and America's allies alike during the Suez War which France, Britain and Israel had conspired for at Sevres. America's reaction to the conspiracy at Suez is dealt with in the following chapter which equally examines American Attitudes and policies during the ensuing Suez War.

CHAPTER IV: THE UNITED STATES AND THE CRISIS AT SUEZ

President Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July, 1956, came as a direct outcome of the US withdrawal of the Aswan Dam funding offer. The American decision was quite predictable given the Eisenhower administration's shift in policy line towards Egypt, the strong opposition in Congress to the project and US officials general discontent with Nasser's anti-Western policies, pan-Arab campaigns and neutralist inclinations. The Czech arms deal, the mobilization of Arab nationalist opinion against the Baghdad Pact, the recognition of Communist China, the collapse of project ALPHA, Cairo's non-committal participation in the US-sponsored peace effort of the Anderson mission together with its adherence to the non-aligned movement, were all incompatible with Washington's plans for the Middle East. In fact, Nasser's stands hindered the achievement of America's basic Middle East objectives namely, enlisting the Arab world in an anti-communist regional grouping, and managing a peace treaty between Arabs and Israelis with Egypt playing the leading Arab role in such an initiative.

Nasser, however, did not subscribe to such schemes which he viewed as remnants of Western imperialism that infringed Arab sovereignty and unity, and threatened Egypt's leadership position in the region. The Egyptian leader's stands had a significant resonance in the colonized world in general, and in the Middle East in particular. Evicting the British from the Suez base, resisting Anglo-American restrictive manoeuvres to force Egyptian support of the Northern Tier and the Baghdad Pact, and breaking the West's arms monopoly in the area were defiant gestures which clearly thwarted American plans in the Middle East and challenged Britain's century-based might over it. The Czech Arms Deal particularly enhanced Nasser's prestige in Arab eyes as it translated Egypt's independence from Western influence and evidenced its freedom of decision on its foreign policy. It did also confirm Cairo's commitment to the

ideology of neutrality as well as its non-alignment in the Cold War.

Nasser would have probably never been so successful had he not gained the unconditional support of the Arab masses. In identifying Egypt's interests with those of all the Arabs and in resisting the Northern Tier, the Baghdad Pact and the ALPHA plan in the name of the Arabs, he did in effect secure himself and his country the formidable ideological weapon of Arab nationalism. Egypt's alliance with Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen in 1955-1956 best evidenced his ascendancy in the Arab world. Furthermore, according to historian Ali Hellal Dessouki, "On the eve of the Suez confrontation Nasser had effectively made Arabism a protest movement against Western dominance in the region."²⁸⁵

President Nasser's actions endowed him with a worldwide nationalist reputation too. His charismatic image was tremendously appealing to all world revolutionaries who viewed his opposition to Anglo-American meddling in the Arab world, a daring fight that echoed their own quest for human dignity and encouraged their struggle against the colonial powers for national sovereignty. While in Afro-Asian non-aligned eyes Nasser definitely incarnated a leading Third World leader, of the same ranking as Jawaharlal Nehru and Josip Broz Tito.²⁸⁶

Henceforth, nationalising the Suez Canal Company in July 1956, did but add to the Egyptian Premier's standing and pre-eminence locally, regionally and internationally.²⁸⁷ A deliberate challenge to Western dominance in the region, it was also a true act of defiance aiming at reversing the Anglo-American withdrawal of the Aswan dam loan, the intended Western blow to his neutralism and Arab leadership position. Moreover, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal

²⁸⁵ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, '*Nasser and the Struggle for Independence*', Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 37.

²⁸⁶ In historian Amin Hewedy's words, Nasser's deeds 'raised his dignity not only in the region but also throughout the Third World. The national movements in Africa Asia and Latin America were encouraged by the Egyptian example.', *ibid*, p. 172

²⁸⁷ Mohamed Abdel Wahab Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy : 1952-1956*, LAAM, London, 1989, pp. 123, 126, 128.

Company for the Egyptian president offered further important perspectives. It provided Egypt with the needed funds for the construction of the High Aswan Dam and for the promotion of national development²⁸⁸. It allowed completion of Egyptian independence via restitution of a national strategic asset and, most significantly, it demonstrated that the era of small countries accepting public insult and degradation from great powers was well over and done with.²⁸⁹ In effect, news of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company by the Egyptian president rallied such massive Arab and Afro-Asian support around him, that even his adversary Nuri al-Said was constrained to declare that nationalisation was the “undoubted right of any nation” and that “Iraq stood on Egypt’s side in the dispute over the Suez issue.”²⁹⁰ Arab public opinion unconditional espousing of Nasser’s cause and the Afro-Asian countries open identification with his disengagement from bloc politics did not go unnoticed by the Eisenhower administration.

The US leadership’s early analysis of the situation at Suez basically acknowledged two important facts: first, that from the legal point of view, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company was “within Egypt’s rights until its operation of the canal was proven incompetent”²⁹¹. And second, that any recourse to force against Egypt would bear most dreadful consequences for the West in general and for Western interests and position in the Middle East in particular. Accordingly, from the start Eisenhower clearly stated his administration’s opposition to military intervention with regard to the Suez issue, declaring that it would “array the world from Dakar to the Phillipine Islands against us.”²⁹²

The American position was not shared by its key NATO allies _ Britain and France_ who considered Nasser’s act unacceptable. The determination of

²⁸⁸ The Suez Canal transit tolls brought in \$ 100 Million annually, during the period of the crisis.

²⁸⁹ Heikel , *Milaffat al-Suways* , p. 459 , Louis &Owen ,*The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 38

²⁹⁰ Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*,p. 128.

²⁹¹ Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman File,personal, 2 November,1956, *ibid* , p. 124

²⁹² NA RG 218 CCS-092 Egypt, note by Sec. To JCS, 31 July, 1956, pp. 306-20 , *ibid* , p.129 SA

the latter powers to go to war against the Egyptian leader and his régime was tangible ever since news of the nationalisation had reached them. Both held grudges against Nasser long before the nationalisation. And both were determined that his challenge could not go unanswered.

Guy Mollet, the French Prime Minister, called Nasser an “apprentice dictator” whose methods were similar to “Hitler’s”, and depicted his action as a “policy of blackmail alternating with flagrant violations of international agreements”. Moreover, stating that his government would not accept the unilateral action of Colonel Nasser, Mollet announced that France was determined to take “an energetic and severe counterstrike.”²⁹³ By reason of the 70,000 French shareholders of the Canal Company, France was directly concerned by the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Yet, far more important than the economic fallouts created by the nationalisation, French officials, especially the military, felt great hostility towards President Nasser because of his régime’s support of the Algerian Revolution. Facing the North African freedom fighters was proving a real drain on French resources that was aggravated because of Egyptian assistance to and sympathy for the revolutionaries. Accordingly, from the start the French who were itching for action against Egypt were ready to consider all means to topple Nasser and his government.²⁹⁴

With respect to the British government, Prime Minister Anthony Eden was the most committed of all to a showdown with President Nasser. Feeling great enmity towards the Egyptian leader, he also rendered him responsible for the depletion of British power and position in the Middle East. Moreover, being the largest shareholder of the Suez Canal Company with 25 % of its imports passing through the canal, and one third of the total traffic through the canal being British-registered, Britain was the most concerned nation by the

²⁹³ Neff, *Warriors at Suez*, p. 280, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.124

²⁹⁴ Ambassador Dillon’s Report to Eisenhower, R. Bowie and R. Immerman, *Eisenhower, Waging Peace*, p. 36, *ibid.*

nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Also, with the country's largest percentage of oil requirements depending on the canal to reach the UK, it seemed that nationalisation did, in effect, "put British interests at the mercy of Egypt."²⁹⁵ Accordingly, Prime Minister Eden declared before Parliament that "No arrangement for the future use of this great international waterway can be acceptable to the British Government which would leave it in the unfettered control of a single power which would exploit it purely for purposes of national policy."²⁹⁶ Eden's diatribe echoed the British Cabinet's earlier warning that "if [Britain] failed to hold the Suez Canal [this] would lead inevitably to the loss ... of all our assets in the Middle East."²⁹⁷ Concern for Britain's imperial interests and standing in the region and Eden's personal dislike of Nasser nourished British determination to "resort to use force to bring Nasser to his senses."²⁹⁸ Like his French counterpart then, Eden spoiled for a fight to destroy the Egyptian leader. To this effect, France and Britain joined efforts to coordinate plans for a united military response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company.

It was plain that the Anglo-French position collided with President Eisenhower's belief conveyed by Deputy Under Secretary Robert Murphy to the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau and his British counterpart Selwyn Lloyd in the evening of 28 July, that the use of force "should be delegated to the background."²⁹⁹ The US position was also clearly stated by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles when he told Roger Makins, British Ambassador to Washington, on 1 August that "The US government would not be in sympathy with any attempt to make the Egyptian government rescind their nationalisation

²⁹⁵ Eden *_Full Circle* , pp. 465-6 .

²⁹⁶ NA RG 218, "A post-analysis of the crisis in the Suez Canal Zone", USAEF AIR Intelligence Summary, May 1957, p. 21, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p.123 .

²⁹⁷ Public Record Office, CAB 128/30, C.M. (56)54, Cabinet meeting at the House of Commons, July 27, 1956 , Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez crisis*, p. 60

²⁹⁸ Eden to Eisenhower, July 27,1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI* , pp. 9-11.

²⁹⁹ Murphy to Dulles, # 517, July 29, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 163 .

decrees, or to regard them as inoperative, under the threat of force...” adding that “... there was no American treaty obligation at stake and no legal basis for intervention.”³⁰⁰

Obviously the positions of the United States and its European allies regarding the issue at Suez were poles apart. With the unfolding of the crisis, such diverging stands would generate a great deal of distrust, and anger between the three Western powers who were, as it was only fair, called ‘uneasy allies’. The unease between the Westerners would not only affect their handling of the crisis but also their perception of each others policies and moves with regard the retaliatory démarche to pursue vis-à-vis the Egyptian president and the reversal of his nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company .

Chapter four covers the US reaction and policies during the Suez Crisis and their impact on the course of events as well as on the different parties to the crisis. The Chapter first deals with the the unease between America and its allies which was fostered by their opposed stands vis-à-vis the Egyptian leader, the nationalisation of the Canal Company and the West’s retaliatory procedures to “Nasser’s theft”. In its second part, the Chapter probes the US diplomatic effort to prevent its allies from using force against Egypt, and the effects of such an initiative on America’s relations with Britain and France. In its third part, the Chapter shows how the US persistent opposition to its allies military plans and Anglo-French adamancy to recourse to force to unseat President Nasser had led to the build up in the Westerners frustration and anger with each other policies and postures regarding the handling of the Suez issue. It equally shows the build up of the Anglo-French and Israeli conspiracy for an offensive against Egypt, without American concurrence and knowledge.

1. UNEASY WESTERN ALLIES.

From the outset of the Suez Crisis, the American leadership pursued a diplomatic course that basically sought to avoid any political moves which could

³⁰⁰ Public Record Office, FO 371/119080, Makins to Foreign Office , July 30, 1956, Gorst and Johnman p. 65 .

jeopardize the administration's efforts to build up its regional strategy in the Middle East. The outbreak of the Suez Crisis did not nullify the Eisenhower administration's policy objectives in the area.³⁰¹ Operation OMEGA which called for strengthening the Saudis to rival Nasser's leadership of the Arab world, and creating a regional defense grouping to contain Soviet penetration in the Middle East, did also aim at pressurising the Egyptian president via political and economic restrictions targeting Egypt, to turn away from the communist bloc and to be more accommodating vis-à-vis the West. The American administration's persistent focus on Nasser was indeniably due to the latter's influential position in the region which the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company further increased. Thus, for the US administration President Nasser did remain the only Arab leader whose regional standing and Arab leadership potential could tolerate a peace treaty with Israel. Secretary of State Dulles, in historian Sayed Ahmed words, still nurtured the hope "to win over Nasser whom he saw as the only Arab leader capable of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict."³⁰² In other words, a recourse to force against Nasser, as praised by the European allies, would not be in the best interests of the United States which had considerable economic, political and military interests in the Middle East, but none in the Suez Canal Company.

The wave of massive support expressed by the Arab peoples and the Afro-Asian countries towards Nasser, following nationalisation, rendered the US leadership weary of the adverse effect an American military involvement might have on world public opinion and particularly among muslim peoples . One such nation was Saudi Arabia which Nasser was allied to and which boasted pivotal importance in the US OMEGA plan. Not to forget the issue of British-Saudi animosity over the Buraimi Oasis and the Baghdad Pact. American officials

³⁰¹ Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59*, Michael Dockrill, King's College London, 1996, p.85

³⁰² Dulles Oral History Collection, Phleger Herman Oral History, p. 48, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p. 125 .

were fully aware that any pro-British move during the crisis would not be well eyed by the Saudis, given their shared commitment with Egypt to a patriotic pan-Arab philosophy, and their allied stand against the Baghdad Pact. The US leadership was also concerned about access to Saudi oil. Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff reported before the NSC that US national security top advisers were “very concerned to be assured of continued access to Saudi Arabian oil.”³⁰³ In fact, from the start of the crisis, Washington had worried about the effects of an Arab oil embargo against the West should military operations target Egypt. Aware of his allies dependence on the Suez Canal to receive their oil shipments, Eisenhower feared the collapse of European economies if oil supplies were cut off due to canal closure or pipeline destruction by other Arab states in sympathy with Egypt.³⁰⁴ Dulles particularly warned that the loss of Arab oil to the West would cause “a severe blow to the US economy” as it would result “in gasoline rationing, the curtailment of automobile production and the loss of markets abroad and jobs at home.”³⁰⁵

Another related factor to this worry, was the US leadership’s fears that London and Paris might ally militarily with Israel to solve their problem. Such a prospect, which increased the administration’s pre-election anxieties, also raised the specter of the possible loss of the Arab world and its huge oil fields to the Soviets, should the administration not move to keep the Suez issue clearly separated from the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁰⁶

The American pre-election campaign of 1956, also put pressure on the administration not to acquiesce in its European allies’ calls for the use of force against Egypt. The Eisenhower team realized that supporting an Anglo-French expedition in the area would be seen by Congress as an effort to back European

³⁰³ Eisenhower Diary Series, Box No.16, July 1956, Diary Staff Memos Folders, Memo of Conversation with President , 31 July, 1956, Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p.126 .

³⁰⁴ Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Papers, Diary Series, Box No.16, Folder July 1956,Diary, State Memo, 27 July, 1956, Memo of Conversation with President , *ibid* , p. 126 .

³⁰⁵ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 31,1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 62-8 .

³⁰⁶ Neff , p. 288, Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956* , p. 125

colonialism, and could cost the Republicans dearly as the Democrats would exploit the situation to their advantage in the electoral campaign.³⁰⁷ Second, running for re-election, Eisenhower wanted to present himself to the world and to the American electorate as the 'peace candidate'.³⁰⁸ Therefore, he did his utmost to avert any outbreak of hostilities before his re-election.

American policy planners also realized that the Soviet Union would greatly benefit from the bad image of the U.S. a recourse to force could bring about. Russia would not only pose as the champion of the Arab states but also of the entire emerging Afro-Asian countries. American strategists repeatedly warned that "it would be harmful to the U.S. and Western interests if the Middle East became more closely affiliated with the communist bloc or more firmly neutralist". No doubt it would adversely affect the U.S. strategy of containing Soviet penetration in the area, and alter the balance of power in the Cold War.³⁰⁹

For all these many reasons, the US administration decided to proceed cautiously in the Suez Crisis with a view to prevent a precipitate move in the region that could cost the West dearly . American caution did not match its allies calls for bolder action against Egypt, which fostered deep misunderstandings and frustration between the Western powers, and created contradictions in their policies regarding the Suez issue.

The unease between the United States and its two European allies regarding a unified Western retaliatory procedure to counter Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company was basically due to their difference over the means with which to achieve retaliation not the ultimate goal from it.³¹⁰ Like France and Britain, America wanted to reverse nationalisation; unlike them it opposed the use of force to carry this out.

³⁰⁷ Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, Telephone Call Series, Box No.11, Memo of Conversation with President, 30 July, 1956, *ibid* , p. 126.

³⁰⁸ Sayed Ahmed , p.125, See also Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez* , p.172 .

³⁰⁹ NA RG 218 CCS-092 Egypt JSC 2105/38, 31 July 1956, pp. 306-20, including No.d, Sayed Ahmed *Nasser and*

American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956, p.125.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.127, See also Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 167 .

In response to Prime Minister Eden's 27 July cable³¹¹, Eisenhower sent Robert Murphy to London the day after, to convey the US position and also proposal for the organization of an international conference with the "maximum number of maritime nations affected by the Nasser action". The proclaimed aim of the conference was to foster an agreement between the Canal major users for a system of international control of the waterway.³¹² The US real objective, however, was to pressure the Egyptian government to "assure the efficient operation of the Canal"³¹³ as well as to "dissuade [the allies from using force] perhaps a bit at a time, gradually deflecting their course of action."³¹⁴

In seeking an international meeting, American officials wanted to divert their allies from moving militarily against Egypt, hoping that a prolonged crisis would diminish the option of war. Likewise, when pressing the Egyptians to assure efficient operation of the Canal, both Eisenhower and Dulles wanted to prevent their allies from using Egyptian mismanagement of maritime traffic through the Canal as a pretext for intervention in Suez. A further objective, according to historian Steven Frieberger, was the US President's desire "to prevent Nasser from successfully nationalising the Suez Canal because he was concerned about possible implications for the Panama Canal."³¹⁵ Eisenhower, thus, wanted to prevent the Suez situation from causing difficulties for the U.S. to maintain its control over the Panama Canal in Central America. Therefore, over the following two months, the U.S. would work to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Suez issue by pursuing a strategy based on a series of delaying tactics which helped the crisis fade away or at least prevented it from resulting in war.

The prospect of an international conference did not fill the French with much joy. Guy Mollet the French Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister

³¹¹ Op Cit., pp. 87-88.

³¹² Eisenhower to Eden , July 28,1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, p. 12 .

³¹³ Eisenhower to Eden , July 31, 1956, *ibid* , pp. 69-71 .

³¹⁴ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 31, 1956, *ibid* , pp. 62-68 .

³¹⁵ Frieberger , *Dawn Over Suez* , p. 164

Christian Pineau fully concurred with French Ambassador to Cairo, Armand du Chayla's calls for taking action "... to stop Colonel Nasser in his tracks ... [for] ... unless there is (sic) an immediate and very energetic reaction from abroad, the Suez leader will think that ... he can do anything he pleases."³¹⁶ Moreover, following the meeting with Pineau and Lloyd on 28 July, Deputy Under Secretary Robert Murphy reported that Pineau, who displayed greater hostility than Lloyd towards the Egyptian leader, saw the nationalisation of the Canal as an opportunity to rid the area of Nasser.³¹⁷

Like their French counterparts, the British officials were not overjoyed by the US proposal. Yet, on 30 July, 1956, the Egypt Committee _ an inner cabinet made up of six ministers appointed to formulate policy with regard the Suez issue_ accepted the idea of a conference under condition of presenting the Egyptians with a declaration not open to negotiations, and allowing military intervention if rejected by Cairo. More significantly, the Committee defined British objectives from the conference stating that "While our ultimate purpose was to place the Canal under international control, our immediate [purpose] was to bring about the downfall of the present Egyptian Government."³¹⁸

When meeting with his top advisers on 31 July, to discuss the US policy in light of Murphy's report, Eden's cable and other messages, Eisenhower said that the British decision was "very unwise", and found British thinking "out of date." In effect, the US President who firmly believed the age of colonial wars was past, also explained that the European powers put too much emphasis on Nasser who, according to him, but "embodies the emotional demand of the people of the area for independence and for slapping the white man down."³¹⁹

³¹⁶Tel. du Chayla-Pineau, 23 July 1956, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p.136

³¹⁷ PRO, PREM (Prime Minister) 11/1098, Record of Conversation Between the French, UK and US Delegation

July 29, 1956. Pineau did not share the American approach to the problem at Suez and appeared even more outraged than his British counterpart, stating that: 'If Nasser were able to get away with this, it would have incalculable consequences for the whole Western position. Like Hitler, Nasser had made no secret of his intentions...' Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 252.

³¹⁸ Rhodes James, *Eden*, pp. 459-61, Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences*, p 198.

³¹⁹ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 31, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 62-68.

Thus, Eisenhower adamantly opposed the use of force and definitely based America's position on the Constantinople Convention of 1888. In effect, upon his arrival to London on 1 August, 1956, Dulles presented Eden with a letter from Eisenhower in which the US President did consider that "the possibility of force might be necessary" regarding Suez, but did also heavily insist on the need for an international conference that would endorse the principle of international control of the Canal. In concluding, the president reiterated that America and world opinion would not support the use of force.³²⁰ On 2 August, Dulles convinced Eden and Pineau to take part in an international conference in London, convened on August 16, to discuss the Suez situation with all the nations concerned by the waterway.

Britain and France's acquiescence in the US plan was due to three major reasons. First, their military preparations for an expedition against Egypt would require a six-week fix. Second, an interesting feature of the US proposal was that putting the Suez Canal under international control would nullify the obligation of returning management of the Canal to Egypt in 1968, due to the expiration of the Company's concession by then. In a Cabinet discussion, British officials declared that "Colonel Nasser had presented us with an opportunity to find a lasting settlement of this problem, and we should not hesitate to take advantage of it."³²¹ Third, Eden hoped that if France and Britain "resorted to force to settle their dispute with Egypt, the U.S. would provide a nuclear umbrella to counter the possibility of a Soviet threat", as well as alternative oil supplies in case of an emergency.³²² Similarly, Christian Pineau reported that his government agreed to try other means first so as to reach a "good solution", that is, "a solution that would make Nasser back down". He also added that if Nasser were to refuse, "we will intervene with the British; if the Americans do not take

³²⁰ Eisenhower to Eden, July 31, 1956, FRUS (C), 1988, pp. 69-71, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 65-66.

³²¹ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM (56), 27 July 1956, *ibid*, p. 59.

³²² Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, p. 465, Sayed Ahmed, p. 124. See also Gorst & Johnman, pp. 66-67.

part in the intervention we would expect them to take a position, namely, to persuade the Russians not to intervene.”³²³ In short, both British and French officials reasoned that supporting the US proposal would not only allocate time to complete their military preparations, but would also justify the recourse to force if Nasser rejected the conference’s proposals. By another token, should he conform to the conference’s decisions it was, in Eden’s view, “improbable that he will be able to maintain his internal position [and] we should thus have achieved our secondary objective.”³²⁴

It must be said that Secretary of State Dulles’s attitude and declarations during the crisis did a lot to mislead the French and the British in the belief that the U.S. would tolerate military intervention should diplomacy fail with Nasser. As a matter of fact when he met Eden on 1 August, he declared that:

It was unacceptable to have one nation control the canal, and that it was even more unacceptable because the nation was Egypt. A way had to be found to make Nasser disgorge what he was to swallow.³²⁵

Dulles affected an anti-Nasser attitude, too, best evidenced by his reference to the Egyptian leader as “an extremely dangerous fanatic.”³²⁶ What is more in this respect when he met congressional leaders with Eisenhower on 12 August, he showed great concern for the cause of the European allies declaring that: “the U.S. could not be unsympathetic to the British and the French in light of Nasser’s ambitions [whose] fulfillment ... would result in reducing Western Europe to a state of dependency.”³²⁷

³²³ Memorandum by Pineau of luncheon conversation , 2Aug. 1956, at Anthony Eden’s residence, Louis and Owen,

The Crisis and its Consequences, p. 140

³²⁴ PRO PREM 11/1098, Eden to Eisenhower, 5 August 1956, Gorst & Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 68-69 .

³²⁵ Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 486-92 , Eden writes, ‘ Nasser must be made, as Mr. Dulles put it to me, “to disgorge” . These were forthright words. They would ring in my ears for months.’

³²⁶ Eisenhower Library, White House Office of the Staff Sec., Records 1952-1961, Legislative Meeting Series, Box No. 3, L31a(2), 12 August 1956, p.34, Bipartisan Meeting (Minich Series) Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.126 .

³²⁷ Memorandum of a Conversation , August 12, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 185-87 .

Such declarations coupled with Britain and France's over-concern with matters of pride and prestige for their dying empires, blinded them to the fact that for Dulles "disgorging" would have to be achieved by international means; while for them, this simply meant support for the use of force.

The initial unease between the Western powers regarding the best course to pursue to reverse nationalisation, soon grew into open divergence. This mainly resulted from the allies persistent assumption that the U.S. would ultimately support their military plans against Egypt. An assumption reinforced by the reversals and confusing "prevarications" displayed by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in the course of implementing the U.S. initiative for managing a peaceful resolution of the crisis .

2. THE AMERICAN INITIATIVE

a _ The Menzies Mission :

When the US administration took the initiative for managing a peaceful way out of the Suez issue, it had basically sought to force its allies down the diplomatic route so as to limit the prospect of their acting independently against Egypt. Eisenhower and Dulles adamantly offered diplomatic alternatives to the violence their Atlantic allies were proposing with a view to keep them under American control and divert them from using force. The first of these diplomatic manoeuvres was the First London Conference convened between 16 and 23 August, 1956. Twenty-two nations attended the conference: the top sixteen users of the Suez Canal and the original signatories to the 1888 Convention of Constantinople³²⁸. During the meeting, Dulles closely worked with the French and the British to manage a draft which basically called for the creation of an international Board that would operate, maintain and secure the Canal as an international waterway, insulate it from the politics of any nation and guarantee

³²⁸ The Convention of Constantinople gave an international status to the Suez Canal and provided for free navigation through its waters. It was signed in 1888 by the following maritime powers: France, Britain, Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, Spain, Italy and Austria-hungary.

the respect of Egypt's sovereign rights³²⁹ . This initial tripartite proposal formed the basis of the First London Conference and became known as the eighteen-power proposal _ as it had been ratified by 18 out of the 24 attending nations.

Although invited, Egypt did not attend the conference which Nasser had denounced in a speech on 12 August _following the three Western powers freezing of Egyptian assets and funds in their banks_ as a Western conspiracy aiming at starving and terrorizing the Egyptian people. Nasser also declared that:

Egypt deplores these measures and regards them as a threat to the Egyptian people, to make them surrender part of their territory and sovereignty to an international body, which in fact is international colonialism.³³⁰

From the start, Eisenhower objected that an “operating Board” would be hard for Nasser to “swallow” and that “a Board with supervisory rather than operating authority...” should be more acceptable to Cairo.³³¹ Aware of the Anglo-French objective to use the conference's proposal as an ultimatum precluding negotiations, and knowing that both allies were resuming their military preparations for a forceful move to unseat Nasser³³², Dulles informed Eisenhower that it would be “very difficult if not impossible” to persuade the British and the French to concede any change.³³³ In fact, the US Secretary of State wanted to avoid an open rift with his allies by displaying evident sympathy with their demands.³³⁴ This attitude of the Secretary of State, was motivated

³²⁹ Eayrs (ed.), 1964, pp. 102-10 , The Eighteen Nations Proposals, 23 August, 1956, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* , pp.72-3.

³³⁰ Department of State, Documents Publications, The Suez Canal, pp. 50-1, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.129.

³³¹ Cables to London TEDUL 13, 19 Aug. 1956, and TEDUL 15, 20 Aug. 1956, AW, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 5, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p.202.

³³² PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 62 (56), 2_ August 1956, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp.74-76.

³³³ Cables to London TEDUL 13, 19 Aug.1956, and TEDUL 15, 20 Aug. 1956, AW, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 5,

Louis and Owen, p.203.

³³⁴ Finer, p. 207 , Sayed Ahmed ,p.132 .

more by the aim of controlling Anglo-French war pulses than by the workability of an international operating Board for the Canal.³³⁵ Dulles reasoned that the conference offered the dual-chance to divert America's allies from launching a military offensive against Egypt, as well as to get negotiations started over the Suez Canal problem.

At the very time he was trying to show American willingness to ally with Anglo-French demands, Dulles also attempted to convey to the world and particularly the emerging Afro-Asian one that the Western powers were not "ganging up" on Egypt. Once the British and the French were persuaded into participating in the London Conference with endorsement of the tripartite proposal, Dulles set about weakening the force of the conference.

On 20 August, 1956, he declared that "this is not a conference through which to deliver any kind of ultimatum to Egypt [and that] none of us would for a moment entertain that purpose."³³⁶ In addition to this, he instructed the US ambassador in Cairo to contact Nasser and ask him not to provide Eden with a pretext for intervention against Egypt.³³⁷ Nasser welcomed the US stand for peace as it prolonged the crisis and defused the recourse to forcible means. So, he sent his personal envoy, Ali Sabri, to London with instructions to approach privately the US delegation to the conference and let it be known that:

...Egypt stands ready to work out a reasonable and just solution to the Canal problem ..., [that Egypt] is going to accept internationalization of the Canal ... [but that] ... there is a peaceful way of settling this matter, and if such a method is applied, it will be found that we are ready to give our whole hearted cooperation.³³⁸

More signals from the US Secretary of State towards Nasser consisted of

³³⁵ Sayed Ahmed , p. 129, see Louis & Owen too, pp. 202-203.

³³⁶ Department of State Bulletin, No 897, 29 September 1956, "Conclusion of London Conference", Statement of 20 August by Dulles, p. 371, Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 130 .

³³⁷ Heikel , *Suez : The Cairo Documents* , p. 100 , *ibid*.

³³⁸ Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers , White House memo series , Box No.31, White House correspondence general 56 (2), Suez Folder ,forward to Sec. 23181 (95)., Sayed Ahmed, p.100

his turning down Eden's demand for the United States to head the mission that was to present the conference's proposal to Nasser, as well as his rejection of the British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd's request that the United States join in pressurising Nasser economically by withholding canal tolls from Egypt. American shipping provided the Egyptian government with 35 % of its canal revenues, and Washington refused to pressure US shipping companies to pay tolls into the old Company's account.³³⁹

Britain's failure to convince Dulles to head the mission to Egypt led the 18 nations to appoint Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies to lead the delegation to Cairo. As the Menzies mission left for Egypt, the US leadership moved to forestall any British or French attempt to present the conference's proposal as the final offer to Nasser. On 28 August, Dulles declared at a press conference, that "the Suez Canal is not a primary concern to the USA."³⁴⁰ Three days later, Eisenhower stated that: "for ourselves, we are determined to exhaust every possible, every feasible method of peaceful settlement, and we believe it can be done. We are committed to a peaceful settlement."³⁴¹ On that very day, the American President also sent a letter to Eden informing him that he "... really do[es] not see how a successful result could be achieved by forcible means [and that] the use of force, it seems to [him] vastly increased the area of jeopardy."³⁴² In Egyptian historian Sayed Ahmed words, "It was obvious that American diplomacy had rendered Menzies mission powerless."³⁴³

If anything, the London Conference and the Menzies mission well reflected the inherent tensions between the three Atlantic allies and their diverging purposes regarding counter-measures to reverse Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. From the outset, the British and the French

³³⁹ PRO PREM 11/1099 ,Record of a Meeting between Lloyd ,Dulles and Pineau , August 23 ,1956 , Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 204

³⁴⁰ Heikel, *Cairo Documents* , p. 168 , Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*.p.130 .

³⁴¹ Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Press Conference, 31 August 1956, McCordle Papers, Box No.5 , Suez ,ibid.

³⁴² PRO PREM 11/1100 , Eisenhower to Eden, 3 September 1956, Gorst & Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 76-7 .

³⁴³ Sayed Ahmed , p. 130 .

sought to use the London proposal as a means to undermine Nasser by forcing reversal of his nationalisation, or by provoking him into some action that would lay the basis for the use of force. In effect, both European powers saw the Menzies mission as an unrealistic scenario to promote a solution while military preparations continued. And both believed they would be justified in resorting to force should Nasser reject the London proposal.³⁴⁴ Thus on 28 August, Lloyd wrote to Dulles requesting American support for presenting the Suez dispute before the UN Security Council "... to put ourselves [the French and British governments] in the best possible posture internationally in relation to the acts we might be obliged to take."³⁴⁵ Dulles's answer conveyed full American support, however not favouring such a move to avert Soviet interference in a problem that the U.S. wanted the world to look upon as one of British and French national interests in the region.

As expected, Nasser rejected the London proposals signaling thereby the failure of the mission which held meetings with him from 3 to 9 September. In commenting the failure of the mission at Suez, Eisenhower told Dulles:

We were in an unfortunate position, because we could not really take a stand ... we did not want to alienate our friends and we did want to keep NATO strong but we can not agree with these people in their extreme attitudes.³⁴⁶

Clearly, the US administration wanted to achieve a number of goals some of them contradictory. Such an attitude would be further conveyed by the diplomatic ballet undertaken by Dulles for the implementation of the Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA); the new initiative imagined by the Secretary of State to dissuade an Anglo-French recourse to force to solve the Suez issue.

b _ The Suez Canal Users Association Project

³⁴⁴ PRO CAB 134/1216, E.C. (56) 18, August 20, 1956, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 170.

³⁴⁵ PRO PREM 11/1100, # 3931, Foreign Office to Washington, *ibid*, p. 171

³⁴⁶ Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation between the President and the Secretary of State, 7 September 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, pp. 403-404.

The Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA) was established during the Second London Conference which was held from 19 to 21 September, 1956. The idea of SCUA was first aired on 4 September by Secretary of State Dulles while the Menzies mission was still in Cairo. Dulles introduced the SCUA project to prevent the British and the French from using the failure of the diplomatic mission in Egypt as a pretext for taking their case to the United Nations. SCUA therefore, was but another American delaying tactic to avert an outbreak of hostilities and to get negotiations started over the Suez issue.

On 4 September, 1956, British Foreign Minister Selwyn Lloyd tried again to obtain US support for an Anglo-French resolution at the Security Council. In response, Dulles informed Roger Makins, British Ambassador to Washington, that America did not favour an initiative at the Security Council and would not co-sponsor a resolution with Britain. Instead he submitted SCUA to the British and the French to consider. Based on the Suez Canal users' rights as enclosed in the 1888 Convention, the association's main purpose was to operate the canal by coordinating ship traffic and transit, providing pilots and collecting tolls. As to Egypt's shares of the revenues, they were to be determined in cooperation with Cairo "to make appropriate payment ... for the facilities provided by her."³⁴⁷ Of particular interest to the French and the British was the prospect of shifting the payments made by American and other shippers to the Egyptian Canal Authority _established by Egypt after nationalisation for the management of the Suez Canal and the collection of transit tolls _ to SCUA. Moreover, in Dulles's words, "Nasser [...] was [...] more likely to be deflated by the loss of these revenues than by the threat or the use of force, [and] our position in the United Nations would also be much stronger..."³⁴⁸

Yet, however sticking to this sort of threatening language, Dulles emphasized to Makins and Hervé Alphand, the French Ambassador to

³⁴⁷ Memcon , Pres., 8 Sept.1956, Dulles Papers, WH Memo Series, Box 4, file 5, Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 203

³⁴⁸ PRO PREM 11/1100, Sir roger Makins to the Foreign Office , 5 September 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, p.77.

Washington that if the Egyptian government refused transit, SCUA was not empowered to force passage through the Canal, and that in such an event, all shippers would have to be diverted round the Cape of Good Hope. Although knowing of this US condition, and despite strong French opposition, Eden decided to go along the American scheme because as Lloyd had stated:

The great tactical advantage of Mr Dulles's proposal is that if the Americans were to participate in the actual setting up of an international body after Nasser's refusal, they would have committed themselves much further towards a policy compelling the Egyptian Government by some means or other to accept international control.³⁴⁹

Furthermore, Eden believed that should "appropriate payment to Egypt by SCUA [be] small or delayed", Nasser might be provoked into transit blockade, thereby providing a pretext for intervention³⁵⁰. By another token, should he accept SCUA, it would make a mockery of nationalisation.³⁵¹ The British Prime Minister also reasoned that if his government supported Dulles's scheme and it failed, the US administration would feel obliged to support Britain's move in the United Nations or its recourse to force.³⁵² On 11 September, 1956, Eden set about convincing French Prime Minister Guy Mollet and his Foreign Minister Christian Pineau to adhere to the concept of SCUA, basing his argumentation on the prospect of American participation in paying tolls to the new organization, as well as the need to appease Washington in the hope of securing its support for a military move against Egypt. Pineau was most sceptical about the SCUA project. When Dulles started pressing for alternative approaches to the tripartite proposal in mid August, the French Foreign Minister had already remarked then, that "This does not mean that the United States contemplates a common action

³⁴⁹ PRO PREM 11/1100, 6 September 1956, *ibid*, p. 78.

³⁵⁰ 'Outline of Proposal for a Voluntary Association of Suez Canal Users', given to Makins, 9 Sept. 1956, and to French, 10 Sept. 1956, marked 'Shown to President, Given to Makins (11 sept. 1956)', Dulles Papers Subject Series, Suez Problem, Box 7, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 204.

³⁵¹ James, *Eden*, p.511, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 174.

³⁵² Public Records Office, CAB 134/1216, E.C. (56)26, September 10, 1956, *ibid*, p. 175

with England and France, but implies (sic) tacit acceptance on their part of the consequences of a probable refusal by Nasser.”³⁵³ In effect, in the evening of 11 September, President Eisenhower answered a journalist asking him about possible American support for allied military operations in relation with the Suez affair saying:

...this country will not go to war while I am occupying my present post unless ... Congress declares such a war. We established the United Nations to abolish aggression and I am not going to be party to aggression .³⁵⁴

Despite the American president’s declaration, and however aware of Dulles’s favouring the possibility of rerouting ships round the Cape, Eden did nonetheless present SCUA before Parliament on 12 September 1956, in the original threatening tone Dulles had used when he first introduced it. Yet, when the US Secretary of State held a press conference the day after to announce America’s support of SCUA, he depicted it in a quite different way emphasizing that American policy with regard the proposed association was not meant to coerce the users into an “organized boycott” of Egyptian control of the Canal, or to encourage recourse to force by any SCUA member:

If force is interposed by Egypt, then I do not call it a boycott to avoid using force to shoot your way through. We do not intend to shoot our way through. It may be we have the right to do it but we don’t intend to do it as far as the United States is concerned.... If we are met by force, which we can only overcome by shooting, we don’t intend to go into that shooting. Then we intend to send our boats around the Cape. But that is certainly not a boycott of the Canal.³⁵⁵

In historian Robert R. Bowie’s words, after Dulles’s intervention, “Eden

³⁵³ Conversation Pineau-Gladwyn Jebb 4.00 p.m., 14 Aug. 1956, Louis and Owen, p. 140

³⁵⁴ Eden , *Full Circle* , pp. 535-6 .

³⁵⁵ Frankland, 1959, p. 215, Gorst and Johnman, *Suez 1956*, p. 81.

felt he had been betrayed and humiliated [as] SCUA offered neither coercion nor pretext.”³⁵⁶ Furthermore, such declarations clearly evidenced how apart the Western powers’ objectives were regarding a unified policy to deal with the Suez issue. This was further confirmed by the US Secretary of State’s manoeuvres during the Second London Conference which did, in effect, increase Anglo-French frustrations with American reversals and contradictory statements.

Between 19 and 21 September, the Second London Conference met to discuss Dulles’s proposal. Once again, Egypt did not attend signaling thereby its opposition to the project. While it played no real part in solving the crisis, SCUA particularly divided the Western allies regarding the payment of Canal dues which the British insisted Egypt should be deprived of. In response, Dulles declared that membership in SCUA “would not involve assumption by any member of any obligation”³⁵⁷ Dulles’s new prevarications not only confirmed his earlier reversals but also greatly exhausted Eden and Lloyd’s patience . At the end of the conference, both shared agreement that SCUA had become “much watered down from its original conception ... [and was] ... widely held ... to be more feeble in its plan for execution than was expected.”³⁵⁸

This impression was reinforced by a statement by Dulles in a news conference on 2 October when he declared that “there is talk about ‘the teeth’ being pulled out of it [SCUA]. There were never ‘teeth’ in it if that means the use of force.”³⁵⁹ During the London Conference the US Secretary of State also expressed himself against the British proposal for taking the Suez issue before the Security Council as well as against compelling American shippers to pay dues to SCUA. Lloyd later commented Dulles’s stand on the question of dues, saying that “With regard to payment of dues, I have never seen anyone so

³⁵⁶ Robert R. Bowie, ‘Eisenhower, Dulles and the Suez Crisis’, Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: the Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 205.

³⁵⁷ Sir Anthony Nutting , *No End of a Lesson* , p. 63 , Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 176 .

³⁵⁸ PRO PREM 11/1102 , 23 September 1956 , Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez crisis*, p. 84

³⁵⁹ Frankland, 1959 , p.248 , *ibid*.

anxious to denigrate his own child as Dulles with SCUA.”³⁶⁰

Utterly frustrated by Dulles’s machinations, and deeply disillusioned by the results of the Second London Conference, London and Paris ultimately asked, on 23 September, for UN action on the Canal issue without consulting Washington. The joint Anglo-French reference to the Security Council essentially endorsed the Eighteen-power proposal and called on Egypt to negotiate on that basis. A counter reference was presented by the Egyptians asking the Security Council to discuss: “actions against Egypt by some powers, particularly France and the United Kingdom, which constitute a danger to international peace and security and are a serious violation of the Charter of the United Nations.”³⁶¹ The Security Council scheduled to start debate of the issue on 5 October 1956.

Another area of concern that equally split America and its two Atlantic allies was the threat posed by President Nasser. From the start of the crisis, Eisenhower repeatedly advised against any project to unseat Nasser as such a move would jeopardise the entire Western position in the Arab world and the emerging Third World. However knowing of the US president’s position, Eden persisted in calling for US support to bring Nasser down or to condone action against his régime. Between 27 July and 1 October, 1956, the British Prime Minister wrote many letters to Eisenhower where the recurrent subject themes were the Nasser menace, his Russian links and the necessity for the use of force to “undo what Nasser has done”. Two extracts from Eden’s letters of 5 August and 1 October evidence the British Prime Minister’s adamancy on removing Nasser. What is more the extracts also show that despite Eisenhower’s systematic rejection of his analyses of ‘the Nasser menace’, the British Prime Minister persistently harped on the same ideas not minding American warnings regarding action against the Egyptian President . In his 5 August letter Eden wrote:

³⁶⁰ PRO PREM 11/1121, # 847, Dixon to Foreign Office, October 13, 1956, Freiburger, p.180 .

³⁶¹ Lloyd, 1978, pp. 149-150, Gors & Johnman, p. 85 .

... Nasser has embarked on a course which is unpleasantly familiar. His seizure of the Canal was undoubtedly designed to impress opinion not only in Egypt but in the Arab world and all Africa, too. By this assertion of his power he seeks to further his ambitions from Morocco to the Persian Gulf The removal of Nasser and the installation in Egypt of a regime less hostile to the West must therefore also rank high among our objectives.³⁶²

His 1 October letter conveyed that:

There is no doubt in our minds that Nasser, whether he likes it or not, is now effectively in Russian hands, just as Mussolini was in Hitler's.... No doubt your people have been told of the accumulating evidence of Egyptian pilots in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. At any moment any one of these may be touched off unless we can prove to the Middle East that Nasser is losing.³⁶³

Eisenhower did not share Eden's view about Nasser. In his response to Eden's 1 October letter, he reiterated his belief that "... the Canal issue was [not] the one ... to seek to undermine Nasser ... [who] had dangerous tendencies that [only] needed to be curbed." For the US president, "there was promise in developing Arab leadership elsewhere ... [which] ... offered greater hope than a frontal attack with Nasser on the Canal issue."³⁶⁴ Obviously, Eisenhower referred to plan OMEGA which sought to build the Saudis as leaders for the area to rival Nasser's position there. As to the implementation of a coup against him, the American leader replied that the United States "should have nothing to do with any project for a covert operation against Nasser...." because in his view "an action of this kind could not be taken when there is as much active hostility

³⁶² PRO PREM 11/1098, Eden to Eisenhower, 5 August 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, p. 68

³⁶³ Eden to Eisenhower, October 1, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 618-619.

³⁶⁴ Memcon of a Conversation between the President and the Secretary of State, White House, Washington, 2 October, 1956, Eisenhower Library, John F. Dulles Papers, Meeting with the President, *FRUS, 1955-57, XVI*, pp. 625-625.

as at present.”³⁶⁵ Eisenhower also clearly warned Eden of the adverse effect a forceful move against Nasser or Egypt would have on Western interests in the Middle East and on Anglo-American relations. In his 8 September reply to Eden’s 6 September letter, he told Eden that he “was making of Nasser a much more important figure than he is ...” and warned again that “The use of military force against Egypt under present circumstances might have consequences even more serious than causing the Arabs to support Nasser. It might cause a serious misunderstanding between our two countries.”³⁶⁶

The American warnings did not alter the Anglo-French determination to bring Nasser down. The French government view about President Nasser adamantly stuck to the description enclosed in the French circular of 29 July to diplomatic posts and which particularly attacked “Colonel Nasser’s insane régime [which was] ... capable of such follies [and] ... contemptuous of human liberties.”³⁶⁷ Furthermore, two days before the Second London Conference, Sir Gladwyn Jebb British Ambassador to Paris, reported that in Pineau’s opinion:

... a recourse to the Security Council would ... be largely immaterial, except for window dressing purposes. What was material was that Nasser would clearly in the circumstances be thought to have got away with his seizure. We should thus be left with the distressing alternative of using force or facing the fact that our two countries were ‘completely finished.’³⁶⁸

Similarly, Eden reported before the Cabinet on 3 October, 1956, that despite the public statements made by members of the US administration, “our objectives would not be fully attained if we accepted a settlement of the Suez Canal dispute which left Colonel Nasser’s influence undiminished throughout

³⁶⁵ *Ide* .

³⁶⁶ Eisenhower to Eden , September 8, 1956, *ibid*, pp. 434-435 .

³⁶⁷ Circular tel. N°.58 by Secretary General, 29 July 1956, Loius and Owen,*The Crisis and its Consequences*,p. 136

³⁶⁸ PRO PREM 11/1102, 17 September 1956, Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, p. 85

the Middle East.”³⁶⁹ Eden’s report was echoed by the president of the French colony in Egypt M. Guyomard’s declaration on 20 October, to Pierre Maillard, the head of the Africa-Levant Directorate, that Nasser was a “dictator [and] a true fanatic, intransigent and spiteful”, adding that he considered it urgent to “deprive him very soon of the ability to do damage” by a police operation.³⁷⁰

Henceforth, on the eve of starting debate of the Canal issue at the Security Council, both the French and the British were still in search for a pretext to move against Egypt, despite public US opposition to such a project. In fact, in allowing diplomacy to probe a way out of the Suez crisis, both European Powers did in reality allow themselves time to complete their joint military preparations. Both displayed interest in the US plans with the aim of gaining time to put a military operation on foot as well as to secure their countries a legal international cover before resorting to force. Prime Minister Eden also mistakenly believed that Anglo-French receptiveness to US schemes would, in the end, be rewarded with American support for an allied move against Egypt. The British Prime Minister adamantly stuck to the belief that a common identity allied American and Anglo-French interests with regard to Suez, while there existed real differences between them. These were unambiguously spelled out by Dulles when he declared at a press conference on 2 October:

Now there has been some difference in our approach to this problem of the Suez Canal. This is not an area where we are bound together by treaty. Certain areas we are by treaty bound to protect such as the North Atlantic Treaty area, and there we stand absolutely together. There is (sic) also other problems where our approach is not always identical. For example there is (sic) Asia and Africa the so-called problem of colonialism. Now there, the Unites States plays a

³⁶⁹ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 68 (56) , 3 October 1956, *ibid*, p. 86

³⁷⁰ Visit of the President of the French Colony in Egypt to Africa-Levant Director, 20 Oct.1956, Louis and Owen,

Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences, p. 136.

somewhat independent role.³⁷¹

These remarks not only revealed the depth of the growing rift between the American and Anglo-French handling of the Suez crisis but also warned that US interests could not always be expected to coincide with the interests of the Western allies. In effect, Anglo-French and American differences dramatically materialized on 29 October, 1956, with the attack led by the Israelis on Egypt, and concocted in concert with the French and the British, without American knowledge. Anglo-French and Israeli conspiracy brought things to a head at Suez, but also plunged the Western alliance in a total discord.

3. CONSPIRACY AT SUEZ

Two months after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, the exchanges emanating from the Western powers regarding the Suez Crisis, only confirmed the increasing gulf between European and American interpretations of the situation at Suez. On one side there stood the British and the French with their entrenched belief that the seizure of the Canal Company constituted a breach of international commitments and a direct threat to the security of the free world.³⁷² On the other side stood their big American ally which seemed to them to look upon the whole matter as a conflict between colonial and anti-colonial interests.³⁷³ The gap between the two sides seemed well unbridgeable in light of continued contradictory declarations from either side, on the very eve of their public debating of the Suez affair at the Security Council.

Thus, when debates of the Suez issue began on 5 October, 1956, the Westerners were most distrustful of each other's policies regarding the problem in question. Dulles was fully aware of the state of deterioration of America's relations with the European allies. On 2 October, he told Eisenhower that Britain and France were resentful because they thought that "we are not backing them

³⁷¹ Eden, Full Circle, pp. 556-57, See also PRO PREM 11/1174, # 2046, Makins to Foreign Office, 2 October, 1956, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 177

³⁷² Op Cit., pp. 85-86

³⁷³ NA RG 218 Record of US Joint Chiefs of Staff, top secret, Joint Chief of Staff, Vol. VI, Ch X, The Suez Canal

Crisis, p. 331, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p.133

sufficiently and ... are blaming their failure to get results on the fact that we are holding them back.”³⁷⁴

But the American leadership was also resentful of the Anglo-French recourse to the UN without prior-consultations with Washington. At the NSC meeting of 4 October, Dulles first reported that:

The French [were] eager to resort to the use of force in the Suez area on the ground that this course of action was vital to them in their own war in North Africa ... [and that] the tendency ... in France had been to blame the United States for not going along with French policy and with the French assumption that [being NATO] allies ... France and the United States must therefore be allies everywhere else in the world.

The US Secretary of State went on complaining that he:

... was not even privy to the British-French decision to take their case to the United Nations ... until after that decision had been made ... [and that] ... never before had we faced a situation where we had no clear idea of the intentions of our British and French allies... [whose]... governments tend to use the U.S. as a scapegoat for the popular disapproval of British and French policy.³⁷⁵

The US leadership's frustration with the Anglo-French move at the Security Council did also largely stem from its awareness of the allies determination to bring the matter to an end quickly with a Soviet veto which would not only evidence the exhaustion of diplomatic initiatives, but would also render the use of force inevitable. US intelligence reports, indeed, pointed that France and Britain had completed their military preparations and were ready for a forceful move against Egypt. Furthermore, American resentment also

³⁷⁴ Memo of a Conversation with the President, October 2, 1956, Eisenhower Library, J.F Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum series, Box # 4, Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 177

³⁷⁵ Memorandum of a Discussion at the 299th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, October 4, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, pp. 632-634.

originated in the fact that US diplomacy had gone to great lengths and moved in different directions to exert pressure on Nasser to bring a shift in his position.³⁷⁶ And at the very time American efforts seemed to bear fruits, particularly in view of Nasser's declaration that SCUA could be seen "as a nucleus for a negotiation group"³⁷⁷, the French and the British maintained their determination to escalate the crisis to the military level.

The proceedings at the UN took place between 5 and 14 October. As a consequence of the private talks held between Lloyd, Pineau and Fawzi from 9 to 12 October, the prospects for an upshot seemed within reach. Dr Fawzi, indeed, reported his government's acceptance of insulating the Canal from the politics of any one country and suggested the setting up of a small negotiating group under the auspices of the UN. During his intervention in the general debate at the Security Council on 9 October, Dulles stated the U.S. endorsement of the 18-power proposal, but he insisted again on the need to explore all peaceful manners to reach a solution: "There exists a great variety of means whereby the four basic principles stated by the 18 nations could be carried out [...] the Council ought not to close its mind to any alternative suggestions."³⁷⁸ Clearly, Dulles's words were intended at London and Paris not to consider the UN as the last diplomatic exercise before resorting to force, and that the U.S. was determined to resolve the issue via all possible diplomatic channels.

On 12 October, Fawzi accepted Lloyd's all six principles for Canal operation, and the next day the Security Council adopted them. These were:

- ... free and open transit through the Canal without discrimination;
- the sovereignty of Egypt should be respected ;

³⁷⁶ Behind the scenes, American diplomacy had moved in various directions to foster a change in the Egyptian position. Eisenhower asked King Saud for example to use his great influence _ by reason of Saudi Arabia's alliance with Egypt against the Hashemite bloc_ to bring about Egyptian concessions. America did also keep secret contacts with oil-producing Arab states to get them to exert pressure on Nasser to modify his position. Eisenhower also approached Prime Minister Nehru for the same reasons.

³⁷⁷ Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Papers, International Series, Suez summaries, N° 15, 24 September, 1956, Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 134

³⁷⁸ *U.S. Policy in the Middle East, (State Dept., 1957), p. 113, Louis and Owen, Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* p.206.

- the operation of the Canal should be insulated from the politics of any country ;
- ... fixing tolls and charges should be decided by agreement between Egypt and the users ;
- a fair portion of the dues should be allotted to development ;
- ... disputes between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian Government should be settled by arbitration.³⁷⁹

Yet, a peaceful way out of the crisis clearly conflicted with both Britain and France's determination to move militarily against Egypt. On the day of the passage of the six principles by the Security Council, Eden's speech, during a Tory Party Conference, reaffirmed his government's refusal to rule out the use of force to settle at Suez. The speech was greeted with such enthusiasm that it rendered any compromise solution such as Lloyd was working out in New York, unlikely to be popular with the Prime Minister's own political party.

As to the French, during the tripartite meeting in London (30-1 July and 1 August) following the nationalisation of the Canal Company, Christian Pineau explained to John Foster Dulles that the French government was moved by one overall preoccupation: "if Egypt's action remained without a response, it would be useless to pursue the struggle in Algeria"³⁸⁰ In a further conversation with the US Secretary of State, the French Foreign Minister depicted an even more apocalyptic picture of the Suez situation when he said that "according to the most reliable intelligence sources, we have only a few weeks ... in which to save North Africa" and added that "the loss of North Africa would then be followed by that of Black Africa and the entire territory would rapidly escape European control and influence."³⁸¹ On the other hand, French eagerness to take military action against Nasser dated back long before the Suez Crisis. In breach

³⁷⁹ Lloyd , 1978, Appendix IV, p. 26, Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 88-89.

³⁸⁰ Memorandum of Tripartite Meeting in London, 30 July, 1956, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 137.

³⁸¹ Dulles-Pineau Conversation, 1 Aug. 1956, *ibid*, p. 137.

of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration³⁸², France had been secretly supplying the Israelis with arms since the spring of 1956, including advanced Dassault Mystere fighter aircrafts. This rapprochement between France and Israel based on a common enemy – Nasser – led to talks in early September.³⁸³ These talks were followed by more detailed plans for a military showdown with Egypt, during a conference in Paris attended by Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir and Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, the French Air Staff General Maurice Challe and Christian Pineau, on 30 September and 1 October, 1956. According to historians Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, “the stumbling block was that a sine qua non for the Israeli government was active British participation.”³⁸⁴ This was remedied shortly afterwards when the Israelis forced British adherence to their war plans by escalating attacks on Jordan, whose King requested immediate British support as provided for under the 1948 Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. The British Chiefs of Staff, on alert in the Middle East then, remarked that either operation CORDAGE against Israel could be pursued or operation MUSKETEER, concocted with the French to unseat Nasser, could be implemented but not both. It was then that the French approached Eden with a proposal involving cooperation between Britain France and Israel against Egypt.

On 14 October, 1956 Albert Gazier, acting French Foreign Minister, and General Challe presented Eden with an outline of the French-Israeli plan to gain control of the Suez Canal. The French officials explained that Israel would launch an attack against Egypt across the Sinai. Britain and France, having allowed the Israelis sufficient time to conquer most of the desert, would then order both sides to withdraw their forces from the Suez Canal area to prevent damage to the Canal. Then an Anglo-French force would intervene to separate

³⁸² Op Cit., pp. 20-23.

³⁸³ On 18 September, 1956, Shimon Peres from the Israeli Defense Ministry, travelled to Paris to discuss arms purchases. After meeting French Defense Minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, It was agreed that Israel would

join the French in a military operation against Nasser.

³⁸⁴ Gorst and Johnman , *The Suez Crisis* ,pp. 89-90

the belligerents and secure the waterway by occupying it.³⁸⁵

The French proposal provided the British leadership with both a resolution of the Jordanian situation and a pretext for a military intervention in Egypt. Not surprisingly, Eden then moved to instruct Lloyd and Pineau in New York, to submit a rider to their resolution in the Security Council stressing that there were not sufficient Egyptian proposals to meet the six principles approved by the Security Council and that Egypt cooperate with SCUA for the payment of transit tolls. As expected, Russia vetoed that part of the resolution. When reporting the matter to his president Dulles pointed that France and Britain had raised the Soviet veto only to pursue their own political aims.³⁸⁶ Nevertheless he urged Fawzi to continue talks at all costs and to submit further proposals quickly.³⁸⁷ While at the Security Council, it was agreed that talks would resume in Geneva on 29 October, 1956.

In the meanwhile, Eden recalled Lloyd from New York and in the afternoon of 16 October, they met Mollet and Pineau in Paris for further study of the French-Israeli plan. All agreed that Dulles had “double-crossed” them with SCUA, and that “... prior consultations with the United States ... would serve no useful purpose.”³⁸⁸ Then followed a meeting on 22 October between Lloyd, Ben-Gurion and his advisers at Sevres (outside Paris), where Moshe Dayan presented the British minister with the plan agreed to with the French. Two days of discussions resulted in the signature of the secret agreement known as the “Protocole of Sevres”. The next day, Eden provided his ministers with full details of the plan emphasizing that:

... if Israel launched a full-scale military operation against Egypt, the governments of the

³⁸⁵ Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, p. 93, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.181 See also Gorst and Johnman , p. 90.

³⁸⁶ Memo of a Telephone Conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, Washington, October 14, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57, Vol XVI*, p. 721.

³⁸⁷ Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower International Series, Suez Summaries, Summary N°. 36, 23 October 1956 , Sayed Ahmed , *Nasser and American Foreign Policy*, p. 137

³⁸⁸ PRO FO 800/75, Meeting in Paris Between Eden, Mollet, Pineau and Lloyd, October 16, 1956, Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p.181

United Kingdom and France should at once call on all parties to stop hostilities and to withdraw their forces to a distance ten miles from the Canal ; ... if one or both governments failed to undertake within twelve hours to comply with these requirements, British and French forces would intervene ...to enforce compliance. Israel might well undertake to comply.... If Egypt also complied, Colonel Nasser's prestige would be fatally undermined.If she failed to comply, there would be ample justification for Anglo-French military action against Egypt in order to safeguard the Canal.We may face the risk that we should be accused of collusion with Israel.³⁸⁹

With the signature of the “protocole of Sevres” the British and the French did in effect enshrine their governments agreements to be party to conspiracy with Israel for a military aggression against a sovereign country. They did so despite all US diplomatic efforts for a peaceful solution to the issue, and despite positive progress in the New York talks which strongly hinted to a satisfactory upshot to the crisis.The conspiracy also came in defiance of the principles of the UN Charter, as well as of US repeated opposition to the use of force to solve the issue at Suez.

The United States concern about the consequences of a Western military move against Egypt on its Middle East policy objectives had prevented the Suez Crisis from versing in war. Furthermore, American political manoeuvres towards the British and the French had also greatly served to reduce the initial tensions that had resulted from the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company and allowed the opening of channels of communication between the protagonists of the crisis with a view to kill the option of war. The Eisenhower administration had it at stake to safeguard its interests in the region in the long run and could therefore not back its allies plans to strike Egypt. It must be said that the US stand amidst the Crisis of Suez was not an easy one. Holding the European allies

³⁸⁹ PRO CAB 128/30 Pt II, CM 74 (56), 25 October, 1956, Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, pp. 101-102.

from a recourse to force against President Nasser created a gulf of distrust between America and France and Britain. By another token, on the outbreak of the crisis, the US administration was very resentful towards President Nasser and his policies, and could have done without a situation where it found itself almost compelled to run to the rescue of the Egyptian leader. Indeed, however opposed to the use of force against Egypt, the Eisenhower administration fully subscribed to the new policy options set forth under plan OMEGA and calling for controlling Nasser and undermining his influence in the region. This created further contradictions in American policies and was to puzzle the world and America's allies alike during the Suez War which France, Britain and Israel had conspired for at Sevres. America's reaction to the conspiracy at Suez is dealt with in the following chapter which equally examines American Attitudes and policies during the ensuing Suez War.

CONCLUSION

The Suez Crisis was a turning point in the history of the Middle East. It boasted vast and far reaching consequences which, in regional and global terms, had the greatest impact on changing the history of the world.

Clearly, President Nasser and the Americans were the most outstanding victors of the Suez Crisis. While the British and the French ranked among its biggest losers. The Soviets greatly enhanced their position in the region and skillfully used the distraction of Suez as a means of controlling events in Eastern Europe and restoring communist rule over Hungary. As to the Israelis, securing free passage through the Gulf of Aqaba seemed as precious a spoils for them as managing the divorce between Britain and the Arab world.

Yet, the intricate game of power politics displayed during the Suez Crisis involved such major international figures in pursuit of such crucial regional and global stakes, that any simplistic approach to dealing with the consequences of the crisis is not permissible. This is particularly so given the fact that the Suez Crisis wholly mirrored the contradictions and confrontations of the changing international scene in the mid-fifties, which all downdeep rooted themselves in trends generated by the aftermaths of the Second World War.

In regional terms, the Suez Crisis signaled the end of Britain's era in regional politics, as British collusion with Israel against an Arab state definitely discredited the UK and disintegrated most of what had remained of British power-status and prestige in the Middle East. The UK lost its treaty rights in Egypt and Jordan which abrogated the 1948 Anglo-Jordan treaty, while diplomatic relations with Syria and Saudi Arabia were severed. More significantly, however, Britain's relationship with the Baghdad Pact countries highly deteriorated because, collusion with Israel, had irremediably undermined the pro-western régimes in the area, which Arab nationalists had immediately tarred as Israeli collaborators, by reason of their alliance with the British in the Bagdad Pact. True, through pressure of Arab public opinion Nuri al-Said did

condemn the Anglo-French attack against Egypt, and his government's representatives refused to sit with Britain in a Baghdad Pact meeting. This did little, however, to tone down Arab nationalists' attacks against Nuri's government, and was not enough to prevent the downfall of the Iraqi monarchy which succumbed to the nationalist coup of 1958.

The Anglo-French debacle at Suez also indicated the end of the domineering style of 19th century diplomacy tolling, thereby, the bells of decline for the British and French empires. As such, Suez reflected the conflict between two systems: one of the pre-World War II order, in which colonial might and international inequality were predominant, and the other of the newly emerging ex-colonies which aspired to full equality and sovereignty.³⁹⁰ Thus, Britain's attempt to re-establish itself in the Middle East ended in disaster, and so did France's manoeuvre to end Egypt's aid to the Algerian Revolution which had plunged the French government into a bloody colonial war. The decline of Britain and France in the wake of the Suez war furthered decolonization and accelerated the process of British and French retreat from world power status. More significantly, however, Suez destroyed any slim possibility that France and Britain could remain major powers in the Arab world as it equally rendered it difficult for both to sustain a claim to world leadership.

In the Middle East, the Anglo-French defeat marked the end of the century-old system of military, political and economic control of such countries as Egypt and Jordan by the European powers. Credit for that was overwhelmingly attributed to President Nasser who was, accordingly, consecrated hero of the Arab masses. Indeed, rather than liquidating his régime, the Suez War raised the Egyptian leader's stature and prestige not only in the Middle East, but also throughout the Third World. Nasser inspired national movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America to follow the Egyptian example

³⁹⁰ Ali.E. Hillal Dessouki, '*Nasser and the Struggle for Independence*', Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p. 30

and challenge the colonial powers. What is more his pan-Arab philosophy dominated the nationalist aspirations of the area, therefore, elevating “Nasserism” to the status of an ideology.³⁹¹ In effect, Suez ultimately confirmed Arab nationalism, led and symbolized by Nasser, as the primary vehicle of expression of the Arab people for the restoration of their dignity and the elimination of the last vestiges of foreign domination in the Arab world.

I think that one of the most unfortunate things about the Suez affair was the U.S. failure to grasp the real significance of the profound anti-Western sensitivities of the peoples of the region, and its blindness to the fact that what was clear evidence of the overriding dynamics moving the power politics of the area was obviously at odds with America’s new policy for the Middle East. In effect, instead of maintaining a dialogue with President Nasser and engaging Arab nationalism, American policymakers reactivated operation OMEGA and produced the Eisenhower Doctrine which eventually confused Arab nationalism with communism, and confronted Nasserism not Soviet expansionism in the area. This but translated the failure of American policy in the Middle East.

When the United States set about enrolling the Arab world into a Western defense strategy to counter the Soviet threat in the region, it had imposed its own frame of political reference on the area, particularly upon Egypt. True, on visiting the region in May 1953, Dulles advised against pressuring the Arab states into a regional alliance, so as not to increase their distrust of the West which Britain’s imperial presence and the conflict with Israel had fostered in the area. Yet, in pressing the British to withdraw from the Suez base and in devising plans for peace talks to take place between Egypt and Israel, Washington basically sought to organize the Arab states to become active participants of a Western defense strategy to contain the communist menace.

Such a policy immediately created a wide area of conflict between the

³⁹¹ Rashid Khalidi, ‘*Consequences of Suez in the Arab World*’, Louis and Owen, *The Crisis and its Consequences*, p.14

United States and president Nasser. In formulating his country's Middle East policy, Dulles, de facto, rejected Nasser's pan-Arab vision of the region and his ambitions for Egypt's leadership of the Arab world. Instead, he shifted his priorities to the Northern Tier strategy to contain the Soviet threat in the eastern Mediterranean. The American-Iraqi arms deal, in April 1954, confirmed the new shift in the American Middle Eastern strategy. However, it did equally increase President Nasser's suspicions about Anglo-American designs in the area, which the formation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, further confirmed.

For Nasser, but also for the other non-member states, the Pact was not a means of containing the Soviet Union; rather it was a Western tool to reaffirm Western hegemony over the Middle East. Indeed, it was not only Western-inspired, but largely UK-dominated too. Worse though, because Iraq had always been Egypt's traditional rival for Arab leadership, the Pact immediately revived intra-Arab rivalries. More seriously, however, the Pact helped bind Egypt to the Soviet Union in a relationship based on their mutual hostility towards Western attempts to develop a MEDO, which each regarded as dangerous to its interests. Again, in imposing its own view of the geopolitical realities of the area, the United States not only further complicated its relations with Egypt but also contributed to the failure of its own policies.

Likewise, the US administration's stalling on arms sales to Egypt together with the February 1955 Israeli raid on Gaza provoked the Egyptian President into closing the Czech Arms Deal which, in effect, brought the Moscow-Cairo axis into being. Dismissing Nasser's nationalist needs to strengthen his country militarily and to provide for Egypt's national security, the State Department stuck to the 'communist conspiracy' thesis in its analysis of the events in the Middle East. American policymakers refused to recognize that the Northern Tier strategy was not a workable solution to their interests in the area. Rather, they viewed Nasser as an extension of Russian penetration in the Middle East and an obstacle to a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

America's investment in the peace efforts of ALPHA and the Anderson mission was a daring attempt for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Yet, its instigators were concerned more with reinforcing the U.S. strategic role in the Arab world to limit Soviet influence, than with the full dimensions of the political and historical realities of the area. For most Arab countries, there was no immediate threat from the Soviet Union; Israel and Western imperialism were their main enemies. On the other hand, Washington's insistence for a peace treaty before the November 1956 presidential election clearly clashed with Nasser's emphasis on the need to prepare Arab public opinion to accept peace with Israel. Once again, in viewing the Middle Eastern political arena through its own prism of particular interests, the United States helped undermine its own strategies.

The failure of the Anderson mission in March 1956 to settle Egyptian-Israeli enmity, as a prerequisite to financing the Aswan project, brought about plan OMEGA. American policymakers 'wrongly' assumed that vast economic aid to Egypt, especially funding the Aswan Dam, would entitle the State Department to influence Egypt's foreign policy. So, choosing Nasser as a scapegoat for its Middle East policy failures, the Eisenhower administration responded with operation OMEGA, to punish the Egyptian leader for his alleged Soviet leanings and his non-alignment in the Cold War.³⁹² This particular American policy proved counter-productive for on its heels followed the withdrawal of the Aswan Dam loan, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company and the eventual attack of Egypt by Israel, France and Britain. More significantly, however, American policies allowed the Soviets to take advantage of poor judgement from Washington and its allies to further penetrate the Area. They did also equally enhance President Nasser's leadership position in Egypt, in the Middle East and in the Third World.

American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis and the Suez War

³⁹² Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, p. 213

were striking and determinant. They were striking because the American stance towards its allies amidst an international context undermined by the Cold War, utterly surprised the world, not the least the French and British. Such an attitude not only embittered Paris and London, but did also greatly weaken the Western alliance. In effect, Charles de Gaulle, French president from 1959 to 1969, radically reassessed the alliance with the United States, ultimately developing the atomic bomb to provide for France's autonomy in defense, and withdrawing his country from NATO.³⁹³ As to the British, they learnt that the United States was an unreliable partner when Washington deemed its interests as paramount. During the Suez War, Britain was brought sharply to heel by economic pressure from its American allies. Worse though for the British, the humiliating cease-fire and withdrawal in November 1956, widely revealed their country's reduced power status, and led to the bitter reassessment of their interests and position in the world. In effect, after Suez, Britain paid the price of permanent subservience to American policy, especially in the Middle East.³⁹⁴

American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis were also determinant because they had not only set the entire conflict in motion but constituted the one decisive element that ended it too. Technically speaking the US withdrawal of the Aswan Dam funding offer had triggered the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company which in turn sparked off the tripartite invasion against Egypt. Yet, the Aswan Dam affair was but a link in the sequence of America's Middle East policy; it was the resulting consequence of the Eisenhower administration's policy options and moves in the area, between 1953 and 1956. As such the crisis of Suez did not start in July 1956, but several years before, when U.S. foreign policy planners set about recruiting the Arab world in general, and Egypt in particular, to conduct the West's crusade in the Middle East, against Soviet communist attempts to penetrate it.

³⁹³ Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, p.11

³⁹⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis*, p. 4

Clearly American attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis did in no way stem from sympathy for President Nasser. His nationalist aims for Egypt and the Arab world distorted his image as a moderate ally in the eyes of Dulles and Eisenhower, and hindered achievement of their policy goals.³⁹⁵ Nor was the object of the U.S. stance during the Suez War directed to undermine its European allies. Rather, the United States severe stand against France and Britain aroused from concern for the protection of Western interests in the long-run, and the will to deny the Soviets exploitation of the situation to expand their influence over the emerging Afro-Asian countries and the Arab world. In this respect, American officials acknowledged that, however reflecting pure propaganda,³⁹⁶ the Russian threats to Britain and France revealed the extent to which the Soviets might reap the dividends of the discomfiture of the old colonial powers.³⁹⁷ Similarly, the Eisenhower administration denied Israel the right to veto American policy so as not to alienate the Arabs, and especially the Saudis who bore pivotal importance in the US post-Suez Middle East policy plans.

With the decline of British influence in the wake of the Suez War, the U.S. ushered itself in as the new Western power in the Middle East. True, the UK was the artisan of its own downfall in the region and the victim of its outdated Victorian policies. Yet, American policymakers also decided that because continued British presence in the region antagonized the Arabs and also Israel, a removal of this power and its replacement by American influence would be in the best interests of not only the U.S. but also of all the West.³⁹⁸ The United States sought primarily to prevent a power vacuum from developing in the

³⁹⁵ Sayed Ahmed, *Nasser and American Foreign Policy: 1952-1956*, p. 151

³⁹⁶ During the Suez War, an intelligence report confirmed that '... neither Egypt nor the USSR is ready to accept the risks of military alliance at this time. Our continued estimate is that the USSR would make every effort to avoid direct involvement in the event of Western military action against Nasser'. , NA RG 218 h JCS 091Memo for Chairman JCS, Subject: Nasser's Alleged Attempt to Obtain Soviet Mutual Defense Agreement, No Date. , Ibid , p. 143

³⁹⁷ Nigel John Ashton, *Macmillan, Eisenhower and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59*, p. 103

³⁹⁸ John Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, Congressional Quarterly Inc., Washington D.C. , 1991, p. 103

region. Accordingly, Washington initiated the Eisenhower Doctrine and set about promoting King Saud to the leadership of the Arab world under the banner of pan-Islamism to counter Nasser's pan-Arabism. In Eisenhower's view, Saud at least "professed anti-communism and enjoyed on religious grounds a high standing among all Arab nations."³⁹⁹ Thus, the central issue for Eisenhower after Suez was the containment of both communism and Nasserism. As a result, rather than engaging Arab nationalism, the United States contested it and produced the Eisenhower Doctrine to confront it.⁴⁰⁰

The Eisenhower Doctrine reaffirmed the fundamental continuity in American foreign policy for the opposition of communist expansionism, and was a clear assertion of the US desire to assume unilateral responsibility for the region and its problems. Far more significant than this, however, was the US administration's pledge to send token US forces to the Middle East for the 'rescue' of those Middle Eastern nations requesting US help against subversive communist attempts. Thus, unlike the Truman Doctrine which only rendered it a US responsibility to help those nations threatened by communist subversion, the Eisenhower Doctrine proclaimed the U.S. pledge to involve itself militarily to help Middle Eastern nations fight back the communist threat. Yet, in assuming that Arab nationalist movements could be channelled into directions more favourable to the West simply by replacing one leader (Nasser) by another (King Saud), the doctrine showed how shallow the American understanding of the Arab nationalist movement was. It equally revealed American blindness to the fact that Nasser's success to inspire the area truly reflected a genuine Arab desire to get rid of external domination, which given the recent history of the region, was particularly associated with the Western powers. Instead, the US

³⁹⁹ Dwight David Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, op. cit., pp. 114-6, Sayed Ahmed , p. 145

⁴⁰⁰ Historian Egya N. Sangmuah put it plainly that 'The emerging literature on [Eisenhower's] handling of Relations with the newly independent nations in the 1950s, [...] suggests that his administration bent on the containment of communism, misunderstood and underestimated the force of nationalism in those parts of the world freed from colonial rule.' , Robert J. McMahon, ' *Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism : A Critique of the Revisionists* ', Political Science Quarterly, Vol 101, n° 3 (Centennial Year 1886-1986), Egya N. Sangmuah, Middle East Journal, Vol 44, n° 1, Winter 1990, p. 76

administration considered the Egyptian leader as a Soviet tool and an anti-western demagogue bent on frustrating American goals in the area.

Clearly, the United States failed to distinguish between the local forces of nationalism and worldwide communism. Furthermore, in forcing its fixed pattern of political reference upon the region, Washington missed a good opportunity to build on the goodwill that had been generated by its attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis and the Suez War. More significantly, however, in adopting the Eisenhower Doctrine, which was but another piece of Cold War rhetoric that did little to further peace and stability in the region, the Americans missed an excellent occasion to reduce intra-Arab rivalries and Arab-Israeli tensions. As a result, America and Arab nationalism have been left confronting each other, and seem today, as far apart as they were in the 1950s.

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