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**Post Second World War British Foreign Policy in the  
Middle East,  
Case Study: ‘ The Suez Crisis, 1956 ‘**

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This modest work is dedicated *to all the  
people who fought and still fighting  
the intellectual genocide that is  
taking place in our beloved country.*

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## **Abstract:**

Right after the end of the Second World War, the world knew important and dramatic turmoils. The Suez Crisis 1956, was undeniably one of the most serious events of that era which irrevocably changed the history of the entire Middle East as well as the history of the world, because it ushered in new powers regionally and changed the world order globally.

This dissertation aims at analysing different elements of British foreign policy in the context of the Suez crisis, 1956, starting with a brief analysis of the origins and evolution of Anglo-Egyptian relations. Then the emergence of the new Egyptian regime under the Free Officers in 1952 and a deep insight in the policies and circumstances which were to pave the way to the crisis. These were also the three major contexts within which the crisis had evolved namely, the cold war, the rise of Arab nationalism and the campaign of decolonization in the Third World. Focus in this work is on the effects of the Suez crisis on the Middle East, particularly Egypt, Britain, and the new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

## Résumé :

Juste après la fin de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, le monde savait des crises dramatiques. La crise de Suez, 1956, a été incontestablement l'une des plus graves événements de cette époque qui a changé irrévocablement l'histoire de l'ensemble du Moyen Orient ainsi que l'histoire du monde, car elle a créé de nouveaux pouvoirs régionaux et un nouveau ordre dans le monde.

Cette thèse vise à analyser les différents éléments de la politique étrangère Britannique en la mettant dans le contexte de la crise de Suez, 1956, en commençant par une brève analyse des origines et des évolutions des relations Anglo-Egyptiennes. Ensuite, l'émergence du nouveau régime Égyptien sous la direction des Officiers libres en 1952 ainsi qu'une idée approfondie à propos des politiques et circonstances qui ont ouvert la voie à la crise. Ce sont aussi les trois contextes principaux dans lesquels la crise a évolué à savoir, la guerre froide, la montée du nationalisme Arabe et la campagne de la décolonisation dans le Tiers Monde. Dans Ce travail, L'accent est mis sur les effets de la crise de Suez sur le Moyen-Orient, notamment l'Égypte, Grande-Bretagne, et les nouvelles superpuissances, les États-Unis et l'Union soviétique.

## **Introduction:**

The Suez Crisis of 1956 was among the most serious events of the Cold War era; which caused a deep conflict within the Western alliance. The crisis had many dimensions of which the change in status of the ancient imperial powers in the area was perhaps the most important. The crisis was a turning point in the modern history of the Middle East as well as in the campaign of decolonization which swept the Third World after that.

The nationalization of the Anglo-French owned Suez Company was not the only cause of the tripartite invasion in Egypt in October 1956. Other factors indeed played a significant role like, the Cold War, Arab Nationalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the attempt of the old imperial powers to preserve their status in and hegemony on the area.

Additionally, the crisis was followed by tremendous changes in the Middle East where Anglo-Egyptian relations went badly due to the several crises following Suez, in Lebanon and Jordan( 1957),in Syria and Iraq(1958), and in Yemen and Saudi Arabia in the early 1960's.The conflict was widened in the area, as both Britain and

Egypt tried to protect their interests by playing the game of alliances in the region.

Understanding British attitudes and policies during the Suez Crisis, one has to go through Britain's political agenda in the Middle East from the end of the Second World War till the outbreak of the crisis of Suez. What was the degree of success or failure of Britain's policies for the maintenance of its imperial might over Egypt then ? Did the Suez crisis end Britain's imperial role in the area or were there was other factors that uncovered the weakness of Britain and its inability to solve its many problems within its former colonies ?

The present dissertation is a modest attempt to answer these two inter related questions with a view to analyse Britain's foreign policy toward Egypt from the invasion up to the crisis, and its impacts on the whole Middle East ; and to try to determine the extent of those impacts on Britain , Egypt and on the two major powers, the USA and the USSR , in the area.

A brief insight in the historical context of the Anglo-Egyptian relations since the Invasion of Egypt in 1882 to the nationalization of the canal will be discussed with focus on the major events that influenced directly those relations. This includes the non colonial status of Egypt under British rule to its official annexation to Britain

as a Protectorate (1914) to the relative independence granted to Egypt after World War One. The most apparent issue in those relations was undeniably the Suez crisis. This will be dealt with in the first Chapter.

Chapter Two investigates the different contexts of the crisis, most important of all that of the Cold War with focus on American-Soviet attitudes toward the crisis leading to the Suez War. The Suez War will be referred to briefly but the analysis will mainly stress the tripartite strategy for the invasion of Egypt . Finally, international reactions to the War will be probed , mainly the American-Soviet roles, in forcing a cease fire. There by halting the invasion signalling thereby the end of the Suez War.

Chapter Three looks in the impact of the Suez crisis on the Middle East as a whole; that is to say ,the status of power of Britain in the region, the American-Soviet struggle over leadership there and the emerging role of Egypt as a major player in the political life of the Arab World.

The Three Chapters serve to understand fully the causes, the circumstances and the impact of the Suez Crisis on Britain's Middle Eastern policies, with special focus on the dimensions of the crisis on the different actors of the crisis and their respective

geo-strategic and political interests . The first chapter will try to explain the essential events that shaped Anglo-Egyptian Relations. The Second stresses the failure of the invasion and its immediate consequences. The third is about the impact of the crisis on Britain's imperial status , which was to decrease gradually and dwindle definitively around min 1960's

# Chapter One

## The Historical Context of Anglo-Egyptian Relations

Britain's Foreign Policy toward Egypt went into different stages throughout the Nineteenth Century up to the Nationalization of the Suez Canal that was the last provocation made by Colonel Nasser challenging Britain's status in the middle East. Britain was among the most influencing players in the Middle East during that period, only France and the Ottoman Empire challenged its role in the area. France signed the Entente Cordiale and recognized Britain's role in Egypt, whereas the Ottoman Empire fell after the First World War leaving Britain as the major power there. Post Second World War relations, however, changed the situation mainly due to the emergence of two new superpowers, the USA and The USSR, and the economic and political instability that Britain was facing when trying to preserve its old possessions. The Suez Crisis came to indicate that Britain was no longer able to do so without the help and the assistance of the USA.

The first stage was the harsh competition with France over Egypt throughout the nineteenth century when Britain succeeded in invading Egypt in 1882, ending with the signature of the Entente Cordiale up to the Great War when Egypt officially was declared as a protectorate. The second stage was the period between the two wars when Britain did its best to preserve Egypt through its economic troubles at home by signing the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. This period ended when the Free Officers movement undertook the Coup d'état of 1952. The third stage was from the coup up to the nationalization of the Suez Canal when the signature of the base agreement of 1954 proved to be a failure for Britain to undermine President Nasser's policies.

## **I ) Britain and The Suez Canal , ... the Beginning:**

The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway in Egypt, connecting Europe and Asia without navigating around Africa. In 1854 and 1856 Ferdinand De Lesseps obtained a concession from Said Pasha ,the Viceroy of Egypt, to create a company to construct a canal open to ships of all nations. The company was to operate the canal for 99 years from its opening . The (*Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez*) came into being on 15 December 1858 and work started on 25 April 1859.

After the opening of the canal, the Suez Canal Company was in financial difficulties. The remaining works were completed only in 1871. The ensuing commercial and diplomatic activities resulted in the International Commission of Constantinople establishing a specific kind of net tonnage and settling the question of tariffs in their protocol of 18 December 1873. The canal had an immediate and dramatic effect on world trade. It allowed the entire world to be circled in record time. It played an important role in increasing European colonization of Africa. External debts forced Said Pasha's successor, Ismail Pasha, to sell his country's share in the canal for £4,000,000 to Britain in 1875, but French shareholders still held the majority.

During the nineteenth century, Britain was at its highest stage of power in international affairs with its imperial status. Its ‘‘ Jewel Crown ’’, India was the most important sphere of interest. For that reason, Britain’s main concern was to secure the route to India via the control of sensitive areas leading to its Far Eastern possessions.

The Suez Canal was the most significant area for Britain to secure its route to the Far East. So, Egypt was the ‘‘ Swing Door ‘‘<sup>1</sup> of the British Empire as it was the shortest route of Britain to the Indian subcontinent, which became the centre of UK’s interest after the loss of the American colonies in 1783. Moreover, Egypt was subjected to imperial competition throughout that century mainly with France. In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt, but he had been defeated in the Nile Battle. The French attitudes toward Egypt created a panic in Britain fearing French influence over the area. Egypt remained a source of concern for its strategic position to Britain and to the European powers.

Before 1882, Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire for over five centuries. In the nineteenth century, however, it was getting relative independence under powerful Khedives who sought to transform their country into an industrialized society aiming to have full independence from Constantinople, with the help of the European powers. The Suez Canal was the most important sign of industrialization, Built between 1859 and 1869 by a French Company, the Canal increased the strategic significance of Egypt to European powers mainly Britain and France. Furthermore, British investment was directed to minimize the emerging role of France that was financing enormous projects there. Fearing France would gain control over the Canal route, Benjamin Disraeli, the British Prime Minister, in 1875, took the opportunity offered by Khedive Ismail (1863-79) to buy the Egyptian Shares of 44 per cent in the Suez Canal Company, to prevent France from gaining exclusive control. The Times commented on that saying: ‘‘ *We have now an abiding stake in the security and welfare of Egypt* ‘‘ ( Hyam, p.251.) Britain’s purchase failed to

solve Egyptian financial problems. Consequently, Britain and France imposed financial settlement on Khedive Tawfik (1879-92), (Khedif Ismail successor), to pay the enormous foreign debts.

Because of foreign interventions in Egypt's affairs, Arabi Pasha, the Egyptian army leader, carried out a coup d'état in 1881, to deal with the problem. William Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, fearing to lose capital in Egypt and the incapacity of the Khedive to protect foreign subjects, ordered the naval force to land at Alexandria, and in January 1882, Britain and France agreed to support the Khedive against Arabi Pasha, So in May 1882, a naval force was sent to Egypt and bombarded Alexandria. Not surprisingly, Britain decided to order an invasion to crush Arabi's rebellion.

The following month, a British force under General Wolseley defeated Arabi and his Army at Tel- el Kebir and brought the country under *de facto* British control, over the next 40 years. In reality Egypt was controlled by a Britishrun civil service led by the Consul and helped by English advisors in the government departments. The khedives lost power and worked in coordination with Britain to maintain their status . Thus, the country had no official status under British rule . It was neither a colony nor a protectorate but rather Rather it was as described by Milner ‘’ the veiled protectorate ‘’<sup>2</sup> up to the Great War.

The Maritime powers signed the convention of 1888 to secure the conditions for free transit through the canal in war and peace. But, still they did not recognize Britain as the

legal ruler of Egypt. Only in 1904, did Britain and France resolve their difficulties over Egypt by signing the *Entente cordial* which started a new age of peaceful co- existence.

The *Entente* was composed of three documents. The most important was *the declaration with respect to Egypt and Morocco*. France promised not to obstruct British actions in Egypt, in return, Britain promised to allow France to set control over Morocco Free passage through the canal was regaranted,too.

### **A) British imperialism Between Diplomacy and Duplicity :**

In 1914, Britain found itself in a war against the Ottoman Empire. The khedive tried to ally with the Ottomans but, he was overthrown from power by Britain. The war broke Ottoman rule in the Middle East and Egypt became a British Protectorate up to 1922.

By doing so Britain sought to have a more significant role in the area especially after the oil discoveries in the Middle East in 1907. Furthermore, the secret agreement of *Sykes-Picot*, war signed between Britain and France (1916) to divide the Fertile Crescent,(which includes Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria) which was put into effect after the League of Nation's recognition and the *San Remo Conference*, 1919 through the mandatory system.

During the war the British High Commissioner, Henry Mc Mahon, entered in correspondence with the Arab leader, the Sherif of Macca promising to create an Arab State that would include most of the Ottoman Empire, with the help of Britain .Yet, the war broke and Britain did not keep its promises which create sense of betrayal in the mind

of the Arabs.

After the war, Britain designed its foreign policy in the Middle East upon three major Concerns : The security of India ,providing fuel needs for its expanding navy by having access to the newly discovered oil resources in the Persian Gulf , and what to do with the territories recently partitioned from the Ottoman Empire. For those considerations, Egypt became more important than it had ever been for Britain, mainly due to the strategic location of the Suez Canal.

Egypt shared the sense of betrayal by the British and anti colonial sentiments .The Egyptian *wafd* Party led by a prominent nationalist, Saad Zaghloul, went into a rebellion against Britain and its refusal to grant independence to Egypt. Britain quickly crushed the rebellion with great brutality causing thousands of deaths. Then, Lord Milner was sent to Egypt to deflate the Wafdists cause. He argued that Egypt should be offered independence and, a treaty of alliance had to be drafted to guarantee Britain's imperial interests. In February 1922, Britain accepted the proposal and later that month, the *Allenby Declaration* was issued giving Egypt its independence and making the khedive a king , but reserved for Britain : the defence of Egypt against foreigners, the protection of foreign interests in Egypt and Soudan, and most importantly the security of communications to the British Empire via Egypt .Under such conditions, Egypt remained not sovereign.

Egypt up to 1936 did its best to have more roles in its foreign and defence affairs, which later on came into effect by signing the Anglo-Egyptian treaty. Officially, the treaty is known as The Treaty of Alliance between Britain and the Kingdom of Egypt. The treaty required Britain to withdraw all troops from Egypt except those necessary to protect the Suez Canal and its surroundings, 10,000 troops plus auxiliary personnel. Britain would also supply and train Egypt's army and assist in its defence in case of war. The treaty was signed on August 26 and ratified on December 22 and was to last for 20 years.

Neither the Wafd party nor the royal court were willing to sign a treaty that would be acceptable by the British. Martin Daly maintained that the unification of Egypt and Sudan was the key reason of failure in signing a new treaty. Moreover, the pressure put by various small groups like the Muslim brotherhood and young Egypt by using the street to prevent any moderate compromise with Britain. However, Britain saw in a treaty with Egypt an urgent obligation after Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia with the fear of probable war with Germany in Europe. In 1936, Britain entered into alliance with Egypt aiming to prevent Egyptian nationalists from siding with the Axis and seeking the preservation of its communication link with the Empire via the Suez canal. Britain allowed some concessions, most important of all were : Egypt joining the League of Nations under British mediation in 1937, and a limited British presence in the canal zone. The Treaty was to run for twenty years. Also the treaty reaffirmed the 1922's exceptions to Egypt full Sovereignty.

The 1936 alliance gave wide military rights to Britain Egypt including occupation of

the canal zone. The importance of the treaty lies in satisfying the British security needs without really raising the Egyptian from their previous status as second class partner.

Miles Tompson, The British Ambassador, continued to interfere in Egyptian internal politics to maintain a *Cromer – Style*<sup>3</sup> influence despite Egyptian independence.

Additionally, the treaty was to form the basis of the Anglo-Egyptian relations until 1954 as the 1888 convention contained contradictions that were to undermine the British position in Egypt after the nationalization of the Suez canal in 1956 despite the fact that The treaty reinforced Britain's role in Egypt.

## **B) Britain, Egypt and World War II:**

In 1941, Sir Winston Churchill, in a directive states that:

*...loss of Egypt and the Middle East would be a disaster of the first magnitude To Great Britain, through only a successful invasion of Britain and final conquest that would secure our interests in the area... (Ashton and Stockwell, p.347.).*

Accordingly, Britain during the Second World War reoccupied Egypt to protect its interests from falling into the hands of the Axis powers. In 1940, the Egyptian government of the Nationalist Ali Maher Pasha, considered a pro fascists by Britain, was obliged to resign under the pressure of Britain which was considered by Egyptians as another sign

of foreign intervention. Another sign was marked when Britain forced King Farouk in February 1942 to choose between abdication or appointing a government of a Foreign office's choice. Moreover, Britain was able to carry out the military campaigns that secured the allied control of the Middle East, and provide the base area and British troops that defeated the Axis at the Al Alamain Battle and in North Africa. Anti British sentiments grew again in Egypt as the first conference for Arab Unity in Alexandria, 1944 failed to consider Britain as a friend of Arabs. Egypt finally declared War on the Axis hoping to have a place with the emerging United State Nations Organization. Egypt in December 1945 called for the revision of its alliance. In fact, Egypt wanted a withdrawal of British forces from its territories.

When Second World War ended, the World went through series of tremendous. Britain as France were declining as imperial powers giving the USA and the USSR the leading role in World's affairs. The most noticeable change within the Third World in general and in Egypt in particular, was the rise of anti colonial feelings emerging from national consciousness of self determination. Such a sentiment added to the imperial powers heavy burden with rebuilding their nations and the economic crises they suffered.

Though Britain was victorious in the War, it was one of the most badly affected nations. Lord Keneyes in 'our overseas Financial Prospects' stresses that the Weakness of Britain economically if it would go further concerning overseas expenditures. Moreover, he insists in the impacts of such crisis on Britain's status of power by saying:

*abroad it would require a sudden and humiliating withdrawal from our overseas responsibilities with great loss of prestige and acceptance for the time being of the position of second class power, rather like the present position of France ... ( Keynes,p.69.).*

Yet, the chief of imperial general staff in Britain argued that:

*for Britain to remain a great power it has to remain in control of the Mediterranean and the Middle East .The Egyptian base was to remain a vital concerns tone of British strategy .( Mc Namara, p.14.)*

However, the problem was that Britain strategic requirement needed an adequate reaction to growing Arab Nationalism. Ernest Bevin, The British Foreign Secretary was convinced of the value of the Middle East unlike his Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, who questioned in 1946-47 the assumptions about the region .He felt that Britain could not afford the burden of maintaining a massive military presence in the area nor was necessary.<sup>20</sup> .The consequence of Atlee's thinking would have meant a severe truncation of Britain's global role by abandoning the base of Suez and evacuating from Egypt.

During the War Britain had bought goods and services from Egypt. As a result, 400 million Sterling Pound was owned to Egypt .Chancellor of the Exchequer, Dalton feared

that to maintain the base in Egypt would mean that Britain could find itself “ *in the impossible position of borrowing money from the Egyptians in order to maintain our forces in Egypt*” ( Barnett,p.215 ). Despite this powerful argument, Bevin maintained his policy in the Middle East considering the area the most sensitive one for Britain though its heavy financial burdens and political disputes among the members of the British Cabinet. In 1945, Following an advice of Antony Eden, Secretary of the State, contributed to found the Arab League Organization in Cairo .This action was as an acknowledgement of Egyptian role in the Arab world .Yet, Britain did not want to strengthen the Egyptian role, but rather to use its Relations with it to protect its interests in the area.

Moreover, Britain’s Egyptian relations went badly because of creation of Israel in, May 1948, out of the Palestine’s mandate.The harsh defeat of the British supplied Arab armies convinced the Arab leaders in general and the Egyptian ones in particular that Britain was deeply involved in betraying the Arab states though it refused to recognize the State of Israel at the beginning seeking maintaining its influence in the Middle East. But, The Arabs were convinced Britain would not side with them against Israel According to The historian Vatisiotis:

*their firm belief that their defeat in the field had been due mainly to the British control of Egyptian military training and arms supplies and to the involvement of the palace and politicians in several arm*

*as scandals* (N Owen,p.69 ).

The defeat in the first Arab-Israeli War caused too many troubles for Egyptian politicians. Mainly for the King and his Prime Minister Pasha appointed in 1951. Both agreed on calling for immediate evacuation of British troops and unification of Egypt and Sudan after Herbert Morrison's declaration seeking a new Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in April 1951. Morrison refused a withdrawal unless Egypt would guarantee its alliance with the West. The tension kept going on and no agreement was signed. Still the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was not ratified and the relations came into a new phase after the 1952's *coup d'état* By The Free Officers.

## **II) The Revolution in Egypt, 'the Nouvelle Donne' for Britain:**

The Free Officers Movement was composed of young army officers committed to putting down the monarchy in Egypt and its British advisors was founded by Colonel Nasser in the aftermath of Egypt's defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Egyptian Politicians were forced to respond to the demands of those groups. While the first military coups began its mission in Syria in the late 1940's, it was the Free Officers coup in Egypt and the revolution of 1952 that would have the greatest impact and encourage later movements of independence. The members were not of the wealthy elite, but rather the middle class, young workers, government officials and junior officers. Coming from a modest background, Nasser signified the groups majority; the hard working middle class. He saw the problem of domestic passive reaction to

imperialism as much a problem as imperialism itself. They strengthened a new middle class.

When Sir Winston Churchill came into office in 1951, he believed that Britain had to take tough measures to face Egyptian rising ambitions. An undeclared war was going on between British forces in Suez and Egyptian guerrilla, which caused enormous human losses from both sides. Churchill Consequently ordered his forces to take more aggressive actions. Egyptians reacted by going into riots in Cairo against the European population on ‘ ‘ *Black Saturday* ‘ ‘<sup>4</sup>. Britain increasingly got angry accusing the King and his government of being unable to stop the mess. Churchill wrote: ‘ ‘ *The Egyptians cannot be classed as a civilized power until they Purged themselves* ‘ ‘ (W.Roger Louis,p.116.).

Furthermore, the chief of the imperial staff warned that any further operations in Egypt would harm British strategic reserves. The conflict made the country Ungovernable. Neither the King and the Wafd’s government, nor Britain were able to deal with the total anarchy in which the country was living. That complete mess brought *the Free Officers*, led by Colonel Jamal Abdalnasser who in 23 July 1952, carried out a coup d’état. About 3000 troops with tanks seized the army; key points like Airports, radio stations, communications centres and crossroads .The movement obliged the King to abdicate in favour of his son Fouad and to leave the country for ever.

At the beginning, there was no immediate British intervention as it proffered to wait and wait for The new regime's policies. Yet, some British diplomats suggested a show of force but, The Minister at Cairo Embassy believed that the threat and the use of force against the new regime should be kept in reserve .He wrote :

*... we can still stop them by a clear show of determination*

*... show of force ...if they begin to apply their hitherto*

*successful technique of threat to any Aspects of Anglo*

*-Egyptian problem.( A.Assadat ,p.115.).*

The British also took advice from the State Department that to give the new regime a chance and warning foreign intervention would be disastrous. Other Politicians predicted an ongoing mess as Harold Mc Millan,Chancellor of the Exchequer his dairy :

*... In Egypt, a military coup d'état has intimidated the King,*

*The corrupt old politicians and the old generals. It remains*

*to be how soon the young movement will itself be corrupted...*

*( Mc Namara,p. 2.).*

### **III) The Free Officers Rule:**

The New Regime was led by General Mohamed Naguib based upon decisions of

The (RCC), the Revolutionary Command Council, dominated by younger officers. Politically, the officers believed in Social Arab Nationalism. Their policies were based on major goals; the elimination of foreign, particularly British, influence, some form of land reforms including the breaking up of big estates, the ending of the monarchy, and the cleansing of public life of corruption. The RCC quickly dissolved all political parties fearing they may collaborate with foreign agendas. A dispute over this issue and the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, rose between Naguib and Colonel Nasser .As a result, the RCC obliged Naguib to resign as President in November 1954 accusing him of sympathizing with the Muslim Brotherhood Leaders.

President Nasser had a completely new vision concerning the future of Egypt. Regarding Foreign politiccy, he had a number of priorities; a complete removal of the British from Egypt, the elimination of British power in the Arab world, and a personal ambition of making Egypt the leader of Arabs. He wrote:

*...Existence cannot come out of nothing .we cannot come out*

*Look stupidly at a map of the world not realizing our place*

*And the role determined to us by that place neither can we*

*Ignore that there is an Arab circle surrounding us and that*

*circle is as much as a part of us as we are part of it*

(R. Louis & R. Owen, p. 23).

Moreover, he considered Egypt and its potential role as one of the necessary conditions for assuming Arab leadership. He added:

*... I do not know why always imagine that in this region in which we live there is a role wandering aimlessly about seeking an actor to play it... to perform it since there is nobody else who can do it (G.Abdelnacer,p.21.).*

Such views bothered Britain as it required a divided Middle East to ensure the supply of oil, to provide communications and to protect the base rights in addition to probable alliance with the USSR .At this stage a clash was almost inevitable between the two countries because Nasser showed serious signs of anti British attitudes.He transmitted old colonial influence in the Third World countries. Some Western politicians considered him the new ‘ *Hitler, Mussolini of Arabs* ’<sup>5</sup>.In fact,for the first time an Egyptian local leader came to challenge British interests directly in the Middle East. The tension went on between Britain and Egypt until the nationalization of The Suez Canal. Britain angrily allied with France and Israel to put down Nasser’s government after failing to bring the USA with them.

On 19 October 1954 a treaty was signed by Nasser and by Anthony Nutting, British minister of state for foreign affairs. The agreement was to last for seven years. British troops were to be withdrawn from Egypt by June 1956, and the British bases were to

be run jointly by British and Egyptian civilian technicians. Egypt agreed to respect the freedom of navigation through the canal, and it was agreed that British would be permitted to return if the Suez Canal was threatened by an outside power.

The Significance of the Agreement for Britain was to maintain its interest in the Suez zone though some concessions offered to the Egyptians. Moreover, the economic burden of maintaining such huge number of troops played a role in agreeing to withdraw them as Britain was reconstructing its economy . Whereas, Egypt profited from that to gain as much concessions as possible. Britain promised it to interfere in case of War against any foreign threat to the canal except Israel as its relation with the West was too complex concerning the Arabo-Israeli conflict. Yet, though this agreement was signed but still a mutual mistrust among both carried out as Britain doubted Nasser's ambition, while Nasser feared a probable help to Israel in case of War with it. At this stage , was the clash inevitable or just postponed ?

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### **Notes :**

1. As Antony Eden described Egypt in 1929. Kyle , Suez, P 29. Mc Namara , Britain , Nasser and the balance of power in the Middle East , p. 6.
- 2 . A.L Sayyid-Marsot British Occupation of Egypt, p .653.
- 3 . As described by Hala Gamal Abdelnasser Britain and Egyptian Nationalist Movement , 1936-52 (Reading, Ithaca press ,1966) p.99.
4. as described by Bannet Lost Victory, p. 63. Mc Namara Robert , Britain , Nasser and the balance of power in the Middle East ,national university of Ireland ,maynooth ,2003 , FRANK CASS , p. 15.
5. As Harold Mc Millan described Gamal Abdelnasser, in Riding the Storm, p 69.

## Chapter Two

The Road to Suez crisis, 1956

To understand fully the Suez Crisis, it should be put in its most influencing context, the Cold War, as it was a result of accumulating events of competition among the two blocs that sought to gain loyal actors in the Middle East. The USA as The USSR wanted to protect their interest in the area by more interference in regional affairs. The USA political and financial pressures to halt Nasser's emerging role in the area and his attitudes towards the USSR whereas , Britain and France wanted a military intervention to put President Nasser down. This created a disagreement among the Western countries on how to deal with Nasser, which alerted American policy makers of a probable Soviet profit from the situation in the Middle East.

Additionally, and less importantly, the rise of nationalism all over the world and the research for self determination and full independence from old imperial powers played a significant role in shaping the crisis's direction. In the Middle East and elsewhere, Britain as France tried to preserve as much colonies as possible directly through colonization, or indirectly via seeking loyal regimes .Yet , Nasser challenged imperial interests by subdividing revolutionary movements as in Algeria against France; and in Syria , Iraq ,and Jordan by supporting Nationalist activities against the supportive attitudes of their regimes to the West in general and Imperial powers in particular .

The Crisis turned into War when the tripartite alliance of Britain, France and Israel took the risk of invading Egypt without neither an international cover nor an American one. Despite the military success, the war was followed by harsh political and economic

troubles for the aggressors who were subjected to serious financial and political pressures to halt their military intervention and to look for a political means to solve the problem via the United Nations Organization.

#### **D) The Cold War Context of the Suez Crisis:**

During the 1950's, the Soviets were launching their first large scale program of military and economic assistance designed to win friends in the Third World in general and in the Middle East in particular, mainly exploiting revolutionary movements of anti imperial attitudes. The aim was to make the Western relations with their colonies and former ones more complicated and to contribute to dissension within the western bloc itself. Thus, Western hegemony was challenged by the USSR in the Region.

The Soviet Power was not the only factor affecting the situation in the region .The West played a much larger role .the British had major economic interests, chiefly in oil and in the Suez Canal, while the Americans sought to have more economic opportunities and preventing the emerging role of The USSR in the area via a western Arab regional defensive alliance. Arab Nationalist leaders, however, rejected the American vision as they blamed The West for being Israel's friends.

Furthermore, Great power's competition for the loyalty of Arabs was inevitable. The West was committed to provide arms for them but, supportive attitudes for Israel broke the Arab confidence on the westerns. In 1951, USA, Britain, France and Turkey

suggested a Middle Eastern Defence Command .Egypt was the first on the list as it was the site of the Suez Canal, but the Egyptian government did not dare to accept as it was facing troubles at home due to its nationalist activists who refused to see their country as ‘‘ stalking horse ‘’<sup>1</sup> for the US in the cold War .

But The USA carried on with its policy despite all the complexities of the region and it persuaded Iraq to enter the alliance with the West through ‘‘ The Baghdad Pact ‘’.Iraq thus, gain American economic and military assistance after joining the pact in 1955. While, Britain and Iran joined the US did not as it still hoped to attract Nasser, and to leave impression that the pact was US dominated Eisenhower, The US president , indeed, refused qualifying the pact as : ‘‘... *an instrument of British foreign policy and Arab intrigue...*’’ (D.Eisenhower, p.76.) and thus preventing his country from joining it.

Moreover, The Americans placed pressures on Britain to accommodate Egyptian demands for full sovereignty over the Suez Canal .Thus, the American support for the Egyptian cause was to persuade Nasser to join the Pact. Yet, Nasser disappointed the Americans and refused to join and condemned Nuri Said, the Iraqi Prime Minister, at the Arab Summit accusing him of attempting to isolate Egypt from what it should play in the region .Antony Eden, The British Prime Minister, noted after his meeting with Nasser in Cairo in February 1955 : ‘‘... *no doubt jealousy plays a part in this, and frustrated desire To lead the Arab World* ‘’ ( R.James,p.77.).

After a week, President Nasser attended the Bandung Conference in which was to found "Non -Allied movement "led by Nehru, choo Enlai, and Tito. The third world leaders insisted on a naturalistic policy toward the East-West conflict. Nasser's neutral visions with his strong beliefs in Arab Nationalism were the basis of his refusal. Additionally, traditional rivalries in the Middle East broke on an Agreement among the Arabs toward the Pact. Nasser immediately allied with old Iraqi rivals Syria and Saudi Arabia by forming a military alliance as a reaction of Iraqi membership in the Pact which the US rewarded by financial and military aid.

President Nasser's interest in undermining the Baghdad Pact played right into Soviet hands. Nasser provided the USSR with lowered prices cotton, in return, he Profited from arms Provision," the Czech arm deal" The USSR thus, projected itself as a friend of Arabs against the West as well as against Israel. The West reacted to halt the emerging role of the Soviets by providing funds for the construction of the Aswan Dam the Century's Project of Egypt "; Even the French sought to improve their Relations with Egypt despite Nasser's support to revolutionary movement in Algeria. The west noticeably wanted to bring Nasser out of Soviet influence.

Israel, the direct enemy of Nasser in the region, played on the East -West conflict to seek military and political help from the West as Egypt did the same with the USSR. The USA, Britain and France began cooperate with Israel, which wanted to signal to Nasser that the west was prepared to come to its defence. President Nasser responded by withdrawing diplomatic recognition from "Chiang Kai Shek " regime in Taiwan

and shifting it to the People's Republic of China. Under pressure from Britain, France and in the Middle East, Turkey, Iraq and Israel as well as the US Congress closely related to Jewish lobbies' John Foster Dulles withdrew financial support for the Aswan Dam as he became convinced to reduce expenditure on foreign aid. It was also about Nasser's purchase of arms. The British foreign secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, followed Dulles and withdrew the British offer of aid. The World Bank then refused to advance Egypt a promised \$200 million. According to Roger Louis: *"...The timing of the removal of finance was a bad move as the last few troops of the base had just been evacuated..."* ( R.Louis &R.Owen , p.218.).

## **II) Suez: the crisis july 1956:**

Thus, a strong means of pressure on President Nasser from within Egypt had been lost. Nasser consequently nationalized the Suez Canal on July 1956 to finance the construction of the Aswan Dam with the revenues of the Suez canal company. The Crisis reached its peak after Nasser's action.

In fact, President Nasser's action was not the first against the Western interest in Middle East since the Free Officers coup of 1952, he was seen badly in the West and the clash was almost inevitable or postponed. In Britain, Antony Eden, the prime minister, saw Nasser as a direct threat his country mainly after the " Glubb Pasha " affaire in Marsh 1956. The affaire added to Eden's convictions he has to remove Nasser from power despite his Minister of the State at the foreign office, Antony Nutting , call for

neutralizing and isolating Nasser. Eden went strongly against his Minister saying:

*'...what all this nonsense about isolating Nasser or neutralizing him as you call it ? I want him destroyed ... I want him removed ... you better come to the cabinet and explain ...'' ( A.Eden,p.483.).*

Eden after knowing the fact in a meeting with the Iraqi King and Prime Minister, Nuri Said, immediately sought a military action that might result in Nasser's downfall and restore Britain's influence in Egypt and in the rest of the region. The United States, however, made it clear that unjustified military action against Egypt would not be tolerated by Washington According to Mohamed Hassanein Haikel:

*...Nasser expected a British military response when he took the Action and was already thinking about how to mobilize himself World opinion to prevent such an attack ... (M.Haikel,p123.)*

Therefore, Nasser was preparing himself to war before the nationalization. However, Eden took his military advisers' views and preferred to wait despite tough opposition among his cabinet members mainly, Harold Mc Millan, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who wanted to recover the Canal and remove Nasser's from power. Those views shared with other conservative leaders who wanted the preservation of the British Empire. Similarly, the French had almost the same aim North Africa as President Nasser was the main arms supplier for the Algerian revolution .Moreover, French Middle Eastern

economic interests were also threatened by Nasser's Policy in the region, which was to remove western imperial powers from the region.

Britain went into a series of propaganda to win as much as possible the world Opinion mainly the American .Lloyd informed The USA, that

*...western position in the Middle East will be jeopardised*

*If Nasser gets away his action...we will be at the mercy of*

*man who has shown himself irresponsible and faithless...( Lloyd,p190.).*

Eden wanted The US either to be an ally or at least stay neutral. Yet, Eisenhower deceived him when sending him a letter: *'...I have given you my conviction,...as to the unwisdom of contemplating the use of force at the moment...'* (W.R.Louis,p.153.). The US feared more soviet interference in the region in case of war, but Britain went in its policy and allied with France for operation "Musketeer". The plan was for Full-Scale land, sea and air assaults on Egypt beginning by Alexandria. During that time, France was developing close military links with Israel which wanted to weaken Nasser as much as possible. Britain and France saw in Israel a means of speeding up the attack as well as minimizing their expenditures in the War.

The US tried to find out a solution out of the use of force. In a conference held in London, they proposed an international control over the Canal, but Egypt rejected it

Consequently, Britain went to the UN seeking cover to invade Egypt, but Canada and The USA rejected the British proposal. Dulles proposed a new plan ‘ ‘ The Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA) ‘ ‘ .Nasser again reject it and Eisenhower reacted by creating a CIA plot to topple him. While The US was working for a political solution, Britain and France went with their military plan by editing ‘ ‘ the Muketters’ ’ to ‘ ‘ The Musketeer revised ‘ ‘.The New plan was to rely on bombarding via an air campaign against Egyptian military and economic targets with a landing in Port Said , which would facilitate the seizure of the Canal.

From 5 to 8 October, 1956 The Security Council discussed the issue without success after the failure of Negotiations over ‘ ‘ the Six Principles’ ’ between Lloyd, Pineau and Faouzi, The three ministers of foreign affaires of Britain, France and Egypt. The Anglo- French resolution calling for adopting ‘ ‘ The Six Principles’ ’ was vetoed in the Security Council by the USSR. Therefore, The Anglo-French attempt to gain the support of the international opinion failed. France proposed quickly to Eden ‘ ‘ The Plan ‘ ‘ on which the Israelis were to be invited to attack Egypt across the Sinai peninsula, then Britain and France would order the combatants of Egypt and Israel to withdraw their troops from the Canal Zone by deploying theirs to separate the combatants. According to Nutting: ‘ ‘... *Eden was convinced that the Plan gave Britain the pretext of War..*’ ’(A.Nutting, p.90.) Britain tried to convince France and Israel in a meeting fearing Israeli attitudes in Jordan and possible Israeli occupation of the Canal. By October, 23, Lloyd, met French and Israeli delegations at Sèvres. Avi Shaim

wrote: ‘ *...as not just the most famous but also the best documented War plot in Modern History...* ’ ( A.Shaim ,p.171.) The Protocol of Sèvres was signed without informing the United States . The protocol was about giving Britain and France the right to intervene to seize the Canal after the Israeli Invasion designed to be on October, 29. Britain and France also would eliminate the Egyptian air forces within 36 Hours . Edward Heath in his memoire pointed out :

*‘...Israel had agreed to invade Egypt. We shall then send our forces Backed up the French ...to regain the Canal... The Americans would not be told about the plan... ’* ( E .Heath,p.169.)

A conspiracy seemed to be driven over Egypt by neglecting the USA, The USSR as well as the UN. Eden gave the decision for the attack without telling the full cabinet about the Protocol. According to Heath: ‘ *...They were only told that force would be used as a last resort.. ’* ( E .Heathp.170.). The Americans increasingly worried about the issue doubting the Anglo-French attitudes mainly after the US discovering that France had supplied Israel with arms. The American fear was driven from a possible Israeli attack on Jordan or Egypt would be relatively an adequate pretext to invade Egypt . Moreover, Eisenhower in a few days from his re-election, feared the situation in the area would bring the USSR in the area and thus to run away from its crisis in Hungary and Poland. Dulles blamed the Anglo-French attitudes saying: ‘ *...They are deliberately keeping us in the dark ... ’* ( W.R.Louis,p.157.).

### **III ) War at Suez, October 1956:**

On October 29, 1956, Israel, as it had already planned with its allies Britain and France, invaded Egypt on October 29, 1956. The Anglo-French ultimatum was delivered requiring both sides to pull back their forces ten miles from either side of the Canal of Suez, and to accept an Anglo-French landing to protect the Canal. Fearing that all newly independent countries would turn to the Soviet Union unless he opposed his Allies, Eisenhower expressed his deep concern about what had happened.

Israeli military planning for the operation in the Sinai hinged on four main military objectives; Sharm el-Sheikh, al-Arish, Abu Uwayulah, and the Gaza Strip. By capturing Sharm el-Sheikh, Israel would have access to the Red Sea. The Gaza Strip was also chosen because Israel wished to remove the training grounds for Fedayeen groups, and as it recognized that Egypt could use the territory as a staging ground for attacks against the advancing Israeli troops. Al-Arish and Abu Uwayulah were important hubs for soldiers, equipment, and centres of command and control of the Egyptian Army in Sinai. Capturing them would forbid any Egyptian's operation in the Peninsula. The capture of these four objectives were hoped to be the means by which the entire Egyptian Army would be routed and fall back into Egypt, which British and French forces would then be able to crush efficiently. The operation had not gone as planned, Although the Israelis succeeded in forcing the Egyptians to retreat, at Jebel Heitan.

In the initial phase of the conflict, the Egyptian air force flew attack missions against advancing Israeli ground troops. In the air combat the Israelis shot down seven Egyptian jets, with the loss of one Israeli aircraft, but Egyptian strikes against the Forces continued. With the attack by the British and French air forces and navies, Nasser ordered his pilots to fly their planes to bases in Southern Egypt. The Israeli Air Force was then free to strike Egyptian troops as they advanced into Sinai.

To support the invasion, large air forces had been deployed by Britain and France. On October, 30 Britain and France sent an ultimatum to Egypt. They initiated Operation Musketeer on 31 October, with a bombing campaign. On November, 3 France attacked the Cairo aerodrome. Nasser responded by sinking all 40 ships present in the Canal, closing it to further shipping. Britain followed by securing base for incoming support aircraft and reinforcements. It also stormed the beaches, using landing craft of World War II causing considerable damage to the Egyptian batteries and gun emplacements. The town of Port Said sustained great damage. Acting in concert with British forces, the French forces jumped over the al-Raswa bridges, and secured them followed by close-air-support missions which destroyed tank destroyers. The French also hit two large oil storage tanks in Port Said. Egyptian resistance varied, some troops fought until destroyed, others were abandoned with little resistance.

Furthermore, French Para operations continued by dropping near Port Fouad. These were also constantly supported by the Corsairs of the French air forces, which carried out very intensive operations. No less than 40 combat sorties were completed. British

commandos assaulted by helicopter, met tough resistance in Street fighting and house clearing as well as by Egyptian snipers Total British dead were 16, with 96 wounded. Total French dead was ten and the Israelis lost 189. The number of Egyptians killed was never reliably established It is estimated at 650 were killed by the Anglo-French operation and 1,000 killed by Israel.

From a military point of view, the operation successfully achieved its targets but it was a political disaster for Britain and France. The USA was dealing with the crisis simultaneously with the Hungarian uprising the Suez crisis , and decided to avoid simultaneous opposing attitudes towards its two principle European allies. The USA also feared a wider war after the Soviet Union threatened to intervene on the Egyptian side and launch rocket on Britain ,France and Israel despite the fact that Nasser requested help from the US on November 1, without requesting Russian assistance. Thus, American considerations were likely toward avoiding any Russian intervention in the Middle East whereas, the Russians were hoping to gain friends as much as possible by intimidating the Western bloc .

The cold war fear in the United State of America pushed its policy makers to disagree with the policy Britain , France and Israel. The United States rather preferred political and financial pressures on Egypt .A military intervention in Egypt was seen to be disastrous if the Soviet union interfere in the Egyptian side. That is why the United States opposed the invasion from the beginning.

Britain under tough financial and political pressures from the USA, military threats

from the USSR and international disapproval warning oil sanctions as well as other political and economic ones coming from members of NATO and other countries ; The British cabinet in its meeting, on November 6, 1956, announced a cease fire warning neither France nor Israel would break it. Troops were still in Port Said on operational manoeuvres at that time .In fact The British were obliged in doing so as they were no more able to carry on their policies in the region without the consent of The USA.

The decision came after a number of financial problems caused by American pressures and economic troubles they faced since the Second World War. The most important of all was the developing run on sterling .Harold Mc Millan ,Chancellor of the Exchequer, learned that he would not receive a credit from the IMF to support the currency as the USA was going to bloc the procedures until there was a Cease Fire. In addition to that, other nations warned oil sanctions and political ones. Consequently, the international campaign led by the USA against Britain , convinced McMillan to change his previous tough thinking when he supported halting military activities in Egypt advising his Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, that the United States was fully prepared to carry out this threat. .He said: “*...The American Financial pressures were to hard to bear...I informed Antony Eden about the fact ... this was a decisive moment in the agreement of the cabinet to cease fire...*” ( H.Mc Millan,p464.).

Furthermore, Eisenhower ordered his Secretary of the Treasury, George Humphrey, to prepare to sell part of the US Government's Sterling Bond holdings. The Government held these bonds in part to aid post war Britain's economy in the Cold

War , and as partial payment of Britain's enormous World War debt to the US Government, American corporations, and individuals. It was also part of the overall effort of Marshall Plan aid, in the rebuilding of the Western European economies.

Mc Milan also warned his Prime Minister that Britain's foreign exchange reserves simply could not sustain the devaluation of the pound that would come after the United States' actions; and that within weeks of such a move, the country would be unable to import the food and energy supplies needed simply to sustain the population on the islands. In concert with the U.S. actions, Saudi Arabia started an oil embargo against Britain and France. The U.S. refused to fill the gap until Britain and France agreed to a rapid withdrawal. The other NATO members refused to sell oil they received from Arab nations to Britain or France.

Consequently, the Anglo-French Task Force had to finish withdrawing by 22 December 1956, to be replaced by Danish and Colombian units of the United Nations Emergency Force. The Israelis refused to host any UN force on Israeli controlled territory and left the Sinai in March, 1957. The UNEF was formed by forces from countries that were not part of the major alliances ,NATO and the Warsaw Pact though Canadian troops participated in later years, since Canada had spearheaded the idea of a neutral force. By April 24, 1957 the canal was fully reopened to shipping.

The Anglo-French military success turned to a failure in terms of objectives. Neither the Suez Canal was reoccupied; nor was Nasser put down despite great loss, nor they prevent him from supporting revolutionary movements mainly the Algerian

one. Rather, Britain as France increased the anti colonial sentiments all over the World which would turn into an international speeding fight for decolonization all over the World. Only the Israeli seemed to fulfil some of their targets of weakening relatively Nasser militarily and economically despite their failure to downfall him.

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### **Notes :**

1.As stated by Mc Namara Robert , Britain , Nacer and the balance of power in the Middle East ,national\_ university of Irland ,maynooth ,2003 , FRANK CASS , p. 79.

## Chapter Three

### The Impact of the Crisis on the Middle East

The Suez crisis of 1956 was a turning point in global history as it marked emergence of a new international order. Britain and France, their empires were in an advanced stage of decline. They lost leadership in the Middle East and in other regions to the USA and the USSR. Thus, the competition for influence in the Third World began between the two superpowers.

#### **I) On Britain's Regional and global status:**

The imperial status of Britain and France consequently was falling after the crisis. After losing its Jewel Crown, India, Britain lost the most strategic sea route and thus relatively the protection of its trade to the Far East and its oil interests in the region. This resulted later on, in a serious financial and economic crisis added to that of post World War Two. France also lost a lot of imperial fight after successive defeats, beginning in Vietnam 1954; high troubles in North Africa after the loss of Tunisia and Morocco in March 1956, it faced a strong Algerian Revolution as well; it lost another area of influence with Britain in Egypt after the crisis. The era of decolonization and self determination reached its peak motivated by Nasser's political success.

The Suez crisis was a decisive moment for British policy towards Egypt and the Middle East. According to Scott Lucas: ‘...with Suez Britain left the Middle East not With roar, but with a whimper ...’ (W.S.Lucas, p119.). Nigel Ashton, however, offered the fall of the Iraqi regime two years later as the decisive moment in ending Britain's hegemonic role in the Middle East. In fact, both events contributed in the fall of Britain's role which was gradually diminishing after a series of losses since

1945. For example, India in 1947, Iran in 1951, the coup d'état in Egypt in 1952, but the Suez and later on the Iraqi coup d'état proved British failure once and for all in the area. Moreover, Iraqi coup of 1958 was to some extent a result of Nasser's political victory in the Suez crisis as the Iraqi army took total inspiration a lot from Egyptian leader's nationalist convictions, which in the end pulled Britain up from the region. Though the Suez crisis did not destroy Britain's alliance with the Iraqi regime, it did destroy Britain's hopes of relying on the Hashemite regimes in Iraq and Jordan. After the crisis, still Britain considered Nasser as a dangerous man for its security, perhaps more than he was before the crisis. Yet, its policy changed though its attitudes towards him remained.

Additionally, the use of force at the Suez was a major sign in post World War II British policy. Britain had defended its interests when challenged since Suez, notably in Argentina and Indonesia using armed forces; but those operations were not as ambitious as the Suez. Previously, Britain's power status proved to be declining to the USA in Iran 1951 as in Egypt 1952 under operation "rodeo", rejection of the US Made Britain incapable to carry on its policy. After Suez, military actions were considered and rejected in number of occasions on similar grounds by the US. For example in Jordan (1957), when Britain tried to respond to Nasser's visions in the area by putting down his pro government; or in Syria 1958, when it tried to put down the Unity by subdividing a probable unity among Hashemite regimes in Jordan and Iraq. The crisis thus, proved that Britain's ability of launching military actions without American support was a risky attitude. Scott Lucas maintained that: " *Britain paid price of permanent subservience to American policy ...* " ( W.S.Lucas,p121.).

Post Suez period marked a great change in Britain's role in the region, of course Britain was falling, but still it remained a power of a minor significance comparing to the USA or the USSR. In that basis, Britain's inability to keep peace during the Yemeni crisis, 1961, the Saudi crisis 1964, and the Six Days War, 1967 as well as its incapacity to maintain loyal regimes in Iran 1953 and in Iraq 1958 ; were decisive moments in ending British influence. Trying to situate an exact moment of its decline in the region is too hard to determine. Still, the Suez Crisis and the Iraqi revolution 1958 were the most noticed signs of British decreasing role in the region; As Egypt and Iraq represented the two wings of the British Empire in the Middle East for mainly oil supply in the Persian Gulf and trade route to the Far East. Most importantly, Suez as it raised oil prices via new ways of transportation to Europe or paying high tariffs through the Suez Canal. Moreover, the economic crises of post World II, Post Suez, and imperial expenditures were part of Britain's disengagement in other worldwide military activities.

The aftermath of the Suez crisis Mc Millan, the New British Prime Minister, constraint of American policy for most part as he understood the impact of any policy out of the American one. In both, 1957 and 1958, despite his radical anti Nasser strategy, he waited for American supportive agendas. According to Nigel Ashton:

*...Anglo-American relations during Mc Millan Premiership are characterized as an era of renewed closeness between London and Washington .In one sense this is no surprise.*

*Sandwiched in between the disastrous Anglo-American breach over the Suez crisis .... British financial crisis and London's abandonment of its defence role East of the Suez ,Mc Millan era was almost bound to appear rosy in comparison...(N.J.Ashton,p13.).*

Therefore, Mc Millan understood that the Suez was the primary reason that he would not challenge American interests in the Middle East or work out of the West-East struggle of leading the World under American tutelage. Britain remained willing to challenge Nasser on a more covert level. In 1964, the Americans prevented serious British retaliation against Egyptian Army in the Yemen-South Arabia crisis, but could not prevent level covert operations. The American policy was driven from its Cold War fears, while Britain still hoped the American help to solve its colonial struggle. Mc Millan, after the Syrian crisis, 1957 pointed that:

*...it would be important, however, that these discussions should not reflected any reluctance on our part to take advantage of this opportunity to establish between the US and ourselves unity of policy in the Middle East... (H.McMillan,p242.).*

Furthermore, British attitudes toward Nasser remained exactly the same after the Crisis. Britain still wanted to remove him. Yet, attitudes are different from policies, which was directed to American support. Thus, Britain and the USA cooperated to halt Nasser's emerging role in the area as Britain with France failed to do so. According To Robert Mc Namara, a researcher in Middle Eastern history:

*...The Suez remains the ultimate moment when British  
Power and treasure were exposed as not even sufficient  
To defeat what many considered little than Jumped-up  
Arab Mussolini without American supervision...(R.Mc Namara,p78.).*

The Suez Proved to Mc Millan that any military action out of American benediction would be another disaster for Britain after that of Suez.

Additionally, the Ultimate failure of British policy toward Nasser from the Baghdad Pact to the Suez crisis made Nasser a hero in the eyes of Arabs in particular , and Third World Nationalists in general as he challenged Western interests.

Dekmeyjan claims: “ *...in pattern of leadership Nacer propelled to apposition of universal visibility unprecedented in Arab-Egyptian History.*(H.Dekmejian,p.180.)

This was hardly the intended effect of the Suez operation and British Middle Eastern policies that had serious political, economic and even psychological impacts on Britain Reynolds emphasises:

*“ ...British policy makers had known for years of their underlying weaknesses, but the public image, accentuated by 1940, 1945 and post-war recovery, was of a country that was still a major power.  
For an Egyptian ex-colonel to twist the lion’s tail and get away with it, was a palpable and lasting blow to national self-esteem*

*and international prestige...'' ( D.Reynolds,p.205.).*

Moreover, Britain after the crisis followed the policy of using its regional allies to topple Nasser by creating problems for him with neighbouring countries .Britain tried to show to Arab leaders that Nasser was a threat for them mainly in kingdoms as Nasser was portrayed as a strong supporter of building up republics. Britain with the USA followed a policy of regional conflicts, rather than an intervention by using Iraq, Jordan , Saudi Arabia and Turkey as they did in Iran after the 1953's coup . Therefore, Britain was no more able to succeed in reaching its goals in the Middle East without American support which proved in all the following crises after the Suez in the region in Syria , Lebanon , Iraq , Yemen and Saudi Arabia. To reflect its new status regionally and globally.

## **II) On Global Powers:**

The East-West struggle for leadership increased in the region as the USA went on its containment policy by enacting the Eisenhower Doctrine , 1957, to halt the emerging Soviet role in the region. The Doctrine aimed to gain loyal regional regimes via military and economic assistance, whereas The USSR increasingly raised its role through subdividing directly and indirectly nationalist movements, which both had the same motivations of bringing the Western powers out of the region. Arab nationalists were obliged to do so as they were portrayed in the West as either being terrorists or Communists. In fact, they were not but, their interests overlapped with the Soviets. Furthermore, a new Middle East seemed to be flourishing out of the Suez Crisis

when the East West struggle became highly connected to the region.

The USA did not appear as a major player in the Middle East just after the crisis, but after World War Two despite its was holding a relative isolationist policy before the War. When The War broke, the US felt the requirement to follow a policy of large scale intervention driven from their fear of Soviet expansionism that would harm their interests. In Suez, the US had the major role in ending the crisis by pressurizing its allies Britain , France and Israel. Britain failed to convince Israel to withdraw their troops from the Sinai Peninsula, whereas the US succeeded. The American attitudes and policies toward the crisis were focusing on containing the Soviet union in the Area as the Eisenhower administration members felt that British Imperialism exceeded Soviet intervention in the region that represented a backbone in Western economy. Namely the Suez Canal and oil reserves of the Persian Gulf.

With or without the aid of the British, the Americans were determined to take action in the Middle East. They feared that, in the aftermath of the Suez War and the Israeli military success, the whole Middle East might fall under the sway of the Soviet bloc. Eisenhower, in his memoirs, stated:” *the Soviet Union’s objectives in the region included control of the Canal and cutting the oil supplies of the European powers. This would gravely ‘weaken Western civilisation ’*

( D.Eisenhower,p79.). The United States did not consider Nasser a communist but they did wonder whether, in his desire to rid himself of Western imperialism, he would merely exchange it for the Soviet interests. It was considered in the US that Recent relations with Egypt appear to indicate that the United States cannot successfully deal

with President Nasser. America had to pursue a new policy in the Middle East.

After Nasser's rejection of the Baghdad Pact, Dulles suggested a program authorized through Congress to build the United States position in the Middle East. Eisenhower believed that only America could 'save that area' by filling the vacuum that the humiliation of Britain had caused. America's new policy appeared to be based on the premise that Nasser had to be kept away from the Saudi , America's closest regional ally. The US wanted to isolate Nasser from his deep strategic environment via supporting regional rivals to be American eyes in the region. This was to be achieved by calling up against international communism. Eisenhower points in his memoir : *“ to do nothing and lose the whole Middle East to the communist would be worse ”* ( D.Eisenhower,p81.). The US as Britain did deploy on old rivalries among the Arab countries to seek leading role by political means unlike what Britain did in Suez. Yet, driven by its fear from soviet expansionism, the US did not follow a policy necessarily in favour of Britain though Mc Millan became more closely related to American policy in the region. After Mc Millan's call for using power in Syria, 1957, America rejected fearing Soviet intervention .Dulles stated:

*“...In American eyes the use of force by others is justifiable in almost any circumstances when it can be shown to be directed against communism; but that conversely when the connection cannot be show , there are almost no circumstances in which they can be shown connected to support it ... ”* ( Dulles ,p.153.).

Consequently, Eisenhower enacted what came to be known the Eisenhower Doctrine. In January, 1957, President Eisenhower asked The American Congress to have the power to extend economic and military aid and, if necessary, to have power to deploy American troops to any nation in the Middle East that requested help against communist subversion. Eisenhower wanted to signal to Nasser that revolutionary activities that threaten the West's oil supplies would not be tolerated. In Britain, The Doctrine was seen as a unilateral American act; it actively supplanted rather than complemented British power. Dulles accused the British of being Unilateral when invading Egypt and commented: "*...If I were an American boy, I would rather not to have a French or British soldier beside me...*" ( J.F.Dulles,p154.)

The Eisenhower administration also saw the Middle East as being influential for future foreign policy not only for the United States but also its allies. The region contains a large percentage of the world's oil supply, and it was perceived that if it were to fall to communism, the United States and its allies would suffer immense economic consequences. The military action provisions of the Eisenhower Doctrine were applied in the Lebanon Crisis the following year, when America intervened in response to a request by that country's president who feared Nasser's influence for his country after the Egyptian-Syrian unification. The US increasingly interfered in the Middle East after Suez crisis replacing old colonial powers which proved to be incapable neither to solve their ancient problems nor to meet the increasing Soviet threat mainly in Egypt and Syria that were already in an alliance with the members of the Warsaw Pact.

### **III) On Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the Middle East:**

In the Middle East, The crisis resulted in a new order as president Nasser proved to be capable of managing increasing traffic via the Suez Canal. This was the last link in the chain that included the removal of the British Base, as Nasser's government was not put down as the tripartite invasion had desired. Nasser's success politically despite his military defeat, raised his position not only in the region but also in the entire Third World as he was portrayed as an anti colonialist hero , and thus, national movements all over the World were encouraged by his example.

The Suez crisis caused harsh economic and military troubles for Nasser. After the end of the war, he tried to rebuilt the country's economy and army. Increasingly, his role in the Middle East was flourishing as a result of sympathetic attitudes held within almost all Arab citizens towards his anti colonial policies. Nasser was seen as a hero of Arabs after being resisting to three powerful countries. Inspired by his nationalist Convictions, he went into a series of resistance against Western policies aiming at harming him by using local actors such as King Saud and the Hashemite dynasty in Iraq and Jordan. Particularly The West played on his policies of establishing Arab republics based on social Nationalism to alert royal system of ambitious Nasserism.

After the crisis, the region went into conflicting alliances which resulted in serious crises. The Eisenhower Doctrine which aimed to establish and help loyal regimes to the USA created a headache for Nasser ,mainly after the Jordanian-Saudi withdrawal

from the Arab Solidarity Pact of 1955 . In response to Western interference in Arab affaires, Nasser went into Alliances to resist Western pressures by trying to meet the Western policy of isolating him from his vital environment in the region. Therefore, he followed a policy of resistance outside his borders to challenge western interests and its allies as he did in Jordan and Syria in 1957, in Lebanon and Iraq in 1958, and in Saudi Arabia and Yemen in 1961.

The Suez crisis completely changed the policies of Arab regimes. Before the crisis Jordan had been one of Britain's closest regional allies .Nasser tried to gain as much sympathizers as possible within Jordan by subdividing Nabulsi's government in Jordan. By the beginning of 1957, king Hussein, under pressure of his pro-Nasser Prime Minister, agreed to align Jordan with the Arab Solidarity Pact. As a consequence of Suez and their adherence to the Pact, Jordanians wished to abrogate the military alliance with Britain , which gave Nasser the right to station his troops in Jordan as well as defending the small kingdom in case of foreign attack.

The Jordanian request for the abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty was Conceded by the British .Yet, under western pressures, King Hussein surprisingly forced Nabalssi to resign in April 1957 claiming that he was cooperating with communists and conspiring with Nasser to overthrow him. King Hussein sought American help, which came the form of pressures on King Saud who came in support of Hussein with Iraq despite the old rivalries among them. Nasser portrayed Hussein as a tool of imperialism in the region. Moreover, King Saud of Arabia was increasingly resenting Nasser's popularity among Saudi people and his reference

to Saudi oil as belonging to the Arabs. Consequently, the Arab Solidarity Pact was shattered. In those circumstances, only Syria remained in favour of Nasser's policy. Thus, proved a relative retreat in Nasser's status in the region when losing three major countries at once. King Saud despite his old rivalries with the Hashemite declared that: '*... The Baghdad pact was in accordance with the United Nations charter and in benefit of Arab world . ( A.Dawinsha,p.411.)*. Nasser thus was weakened through using local actors against his policies instead of military actions already proved to be a total failure in Suez. According to Mc Namara: '*... Britain after being convinced by the US had succeeded in sustaining Kings Hussein and Saud against their syrio-Egyptian plot...*' ( R.Mc Namara,p.79.).

After isolating Nasser in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and relatively in Lebanon; Nasser did all his best to keep Syria in his camp. Syria had been the cause of much instability since its independence in the Middle East mainly due to the conflict between pro western agendas and strong supporters of Arab Nationalism..The Baath Party, the strongest nationalist party in Syria shared Nasser's views of Arab unity. The Party members succeeded in accessing to serious positions in the army as well as in other sensitive political spots. The Party saw Nasser as a foundation for its grand dream of Arab Unity and a support for its own power at home because he would for sure support the party in his campaign to reach authority in Syria. For Nasser, The involvement in Syria had many reasons ; accomplishing his desire of Arab Unity, forbidding Syria from drifting into either of the competing blocs , and to avoid any other western attempt to isolate him in the area.

In January 1958, a delegation of Syrian Army came to negotiate the unity in Cairo. Nasser suggested a strong central government based in Cairo under his presidency, the exclusion of the army from the political life, and the abolition of all political parties except his own. The Syrian agreed on these terms sacrificing themselves for the dream of Arab Unity. On February 1, 1958, The United Arab Republic was proclaimed. Nasser declared : ‘...*Today Arab Nationalism is not just a matter of slogans and shouts, it has become an actual reality*’ ( M.Karmava,p.89.) .The foundation of the UAR was to destroy what was left of Britain’s power in the Middle East.

The creation of the UAR marked the complete success of the Nasserit project in Syria. Hopes that the British and the Americans might have entertained that Syria could be brought into the Western camp were finished. Reactions from the West and the other Arab powers were unfavourable Dulles, Lloyd and the other foreign ministers of the Baghdad Pact were meeting when informed about the fact. The tone of the meeting was intensely hostile to the Egyptian- Syrian merger. Nuri al-Said, the Iraqi Prime Minister, spoke at considerable length. He said that

*‘the union idea was being pushed by the Soviet Union and by Nasser. Nasser’s object was to obtain domination over the Arab world and union with Syria would certainly be followed by heavy pressure to bring the other countries under his control... It was difficult to know exactly what should be done about Union with Egypt, but certainly it should be opposed.’* ( Lloyd,p94.).

The other Arab leaders felt similarly about the union. What was surprising

perhaps, was that the British and the Americans as led by Lloyd and Dulles appeared to write a blank cheque for any forceful action that the Arabs might take. Lloyd intervened early in the discussion saying :

*“ it was clear that the proposed union was a danger to all our interests.. but the question is how and whether we were able to do it successfully; to fail would be a diplomatic victory for the other side. . ” ( Lloyed,p97.).*

The creation of the UAR was a huge blow to Iraq still key regional British ally. Nuri Said still hoped to bring Syria into his camp. Britain tried to reinforce its axis to deal with the new situation by subdividing local Syrian politicians to end the union. However, Nasser successfully achieved what he wanted in Syria. He went on Seeking a more influencing role in the area through supporting Arab nationalists all over the Arab world mainly in Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia which created troubles for those countries' leaders. In May, 1958, In Lebanon for example, a clash was almost inevitable with the west after the call of president Camille Chamoune for western help to meet problems pro Nasser's activists factions .Nasser came to challenge western interests in the Arab World in a way of enlarging the sphere of conflict and thus, securing himself by creating problems for the West elsewhere.

Because most of the Egyptian-Syrian activity was aimed at Jordan and Lebanon, the British and the Americans had believed that Iraq was a stable and secure ally. Nuri

Said and the Iraqi monarchy were weakened gradually by the successive crises of the Baghdad Pact, Suez and the constant Egyptian propaganda. Britain was well aware of the undercurrent of support for Nasser on the streets, believed that Iraq was safe from revolution. Within the Iraqi army, a Free Officer movement similar to the Egyptian model had been in existence for some time. In early July, a plot against King Hussein of Jordan was uncovered in Jordan. Nuri reacted by ordering his troops led by Abdalkarim Qasim, to move an Iraqi infantry brigade to Jordan. Instead, Qasim took the opportunity to overthrow the Iraqi government in the early hours of July, 14. For a couple of days, mobs ruled the streets. Nuri, the King and the royal family were all murdered. Iraq was the Arab country with the most economic potential, combining a substantial population with substantial oil reserves. Therefore, losing Iraq to the revolutionary forces in the Middle East was a devastating blow to the West's cause. It forced Britain, to defend last-ditch positions in the Persian Gulf, such as Kuwait. Britain thus had to challenge Nasser through another Arab regime for the time being. In other words it transformed the basis of the Anglo-Egyptian relationship completely.

News of the revolution in Iraq must have come as a devastating blow to the British Cabinet. Not only had the Iraqi monarchy fallen, but there was also a plea from President Chamoun for the deployment of Anglo-American forces in Lebanon. To the British, the figure at the centre of all this turmoil was President

Nasser. With the question of using force in Iraq, the attention of the allies was turned to securing the Lebanon and Jordan. Within hours of Chamoun's request for the deployment of forces, the United States moved marines into Beirut. This was a unilateral United States action and the British were specifically requested by Eisenhower to keep out.

The attempt to focus the blame for the whole crisis on the United Arab Republic was a major concern of the British government. The Commonwealth Secretary, Lord Home, was even more explicit in his denunciation of the United Arab Republic:

*“Unless somebody puts a stop to this process which the United Arab Republic is fomenting in this part of the world, then not only shall we see the whole of the Middle East go, but the rot will spread to Africa and beyond.”* (Eliot,p.166.).

Britain's lack of intervention pushed it to recognize the new Iraqi regime and that 'good relations' should be established with it, and that it might be possible to exploit the natural differences in outlook between the Iraqis and the Egyptians. When the crisis broke, Nasser appeared to have been worried that the Anglo-American operations in the Lebanon and Jordan were aimed at toppling the new Iraqi regime or even his own regime. With this fear in mind, he immediately set off to the Soviet Union to get Russian support in the event of an Anglo-American operation to retake Iraq. The Soviet refused and Nasser, in spite of the disappointment in Moscow,

concluded a military pact with the new regime in Baghdad<sup>21</sup>. President Nasser thus, gained a new ally in the region though the Iraqi new government will not be as cooperative as Nasser desired.

Despite the relative detente that followed the Iraqi crisis, Anglo-Egyptian relations went again badly mainly during the Yemeni crisis. Upon acceding to the premiership in Britain, in 1964, Douglas-Home ordered a review of British policy towards the Yemen. What was most worrying to the British government was the increasing signs that an Egyptian-backed campaign against British rule in South Arabia was taking shape. The British strongly suspected Yemeni and Egyptian involvement. Moreover, it was the signal for the beginning of an urban guerrilla war aimed at driving the British out of the area. Nasser began to gear up for a major anti-British offensive strengthened by a successful Arab summit in Cairo, 1964.

President Nasser was equally prepared to escalate. On 23 April, he made his first visit to Yemen and attacked British policy and bases once more. This further increased the determination of Britain to strike back. Butler commented the Egyptian supportive attitudes towards Yemeni revolutionary activities by saying :

*The British cabinet was not proposing to take part overtly in the Yemen war Nevertheless, we were quite unwilling to allow the UAR to get away with the present situation, and we would not wish to see the Royalist cause go under ( R.Louis,p1986.).*

A clash seemed to be inevitable, the war began in Yemen between royalists of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen and factions of the Yemen Arab Republic from 1962 to 1970. The war began with a coup d'etat carried out by the republican leader, Abdullah as-Sallal, which dethroned the newly crowned Imam Al-Badr and declared Yemen a republic under his presidency. The Imam escaped to the Saudi Arabian border and rallied popular support.

The royalist side received support from Saudi Arabia, while the republicans were supported by Egypt and the Soviet Union. Both foreign irregular and conventional forces were involved. The Egyptian President, supported the republicans with as many as 70,000 troops. Despite several military moves and peace conferences, the war sank into a stalemate. Egypt's commitment to the war is considered to have been detrimental to its performance in the Six-Day War of June 1967, after which Nasser found it increasingly difficult to maintain his army's involvement and began to pull his forces out of Yemen.

The Yemen War caused heavy implications for the Saudi royal family when a pro-Nasser clique was formed, culminating in the declaration of the Free Princes by Talal ibn Abdalaziz. After Nasser allowed the Free Princes movement to operate from Cairo, it gained a considerable following among minor Saudi princes and the co-

founder of the organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Abdulla Al Tariki

In addition to those developments, Algeria became independent of France. Nasser considered this a victory for himself and the Arab nationalist movement. Then, on 8 February 1963, a military coup led by Ba'athists and Nasserists was staged in Iraq, overthrowing Qasim who was shot dead. Although Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr orchestrated the coup, Nasser's sympathizer Abdel Salam Aref was chosen to be the new president. The Iraqi and Syrian regimes, both ruled by the Ba'ath party, soon sent Nasser delegations to push for a new Arab union on 14 March 1963. Nasser berated the attendees for being "phony nationalists" and constantly changing direction. He presented them a detailed plan for unity, favouring a federal system which began with the merger of defence and foreign policy. A four-year term for president was stipulated, in addition to legislative councils being responsible for overseeing the functions of the state. The measures would be implemented slowly and in segments.

By the end of his lecture, Nasser stated that he was the "*leader of the Arabs and without me you are nothing. Either take what I have to offer you or leave and never return.*" ( A.Dawinsha,p486.).

After all the crises following Suez, President Nasser proved his capacity to challenge Britain in almost all the Arab countries throughout the 1950's up to the Six days war,1967 , which is considered as the decisive moment of Nasser's downfall in terms of influence in the region after the harsh defeat of Arabs against Israel. The war

caused tremendous troubles for Nasser at home as well as in the Arab world until his death in 1970. But still he remained the most influential political figure in the modern Arab history.

## **Conclusion:**

The Suez Crisis, 1956 came to prove that the whole Middle East had indeed entered a new era of successive crises. The British-Egyptian struggle did not come to an end until the 1970's. During this period, Britain could no more solve the political mess in the Middle East as it did before when it was at its peak of imperial power. The US flourished as the major player from the western bloc with its allies. Whereas, the USSR challenged western interests through different strong relations with local actors as well as with revolutionary movements. President Nasser came to be the hero of Arabs, and consequently, he played a significant role in the area throughout his rule up to the harsh defeat in the Six Days War of 1967.

For Britain, The Suez Crisis marked the most influencing incident of its decline in the Middle East. After the crisis, Britain looked for an American partnership to deal with the new situation in the region. Moreover, the crisis marked the failure of British Foreign policy because it did not just fail to reach its goals, but still it caused a serious disagreement among the members of the western bloc, which was mainly concerned by the containment policies toward the USSR. Also Britain was proved to be forceless

in its attempt to maintain its imperial status. Of course, not only the Suez Crisis which was the cause of Britain's imperial status decline, but other factors played a significant role, such as its economic problems inherited from the Second World War and the immense losses in its empire, mainly the Indian subcontinent.

The USA did not emerge in the region from nowhere. The crisis emphasized its leading role in the region as its two important European allies were declining there. Though the US succeeded to some extent in playing the leading role, but the policy of containing the Soviet Union in the Middle East failed through the Eisenhower Doctrine. Thus, the US could not put the Egyptian leader down neither in Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq or in other sensitive areas, of the Arab world, nor neutralizing him efficiently from the USSR. The US policy was to isolate Nasser from any possible ally in the area politically via subdividing old rivals of Nasser in the region unlike British policies which used arms and force.

The USSR relatively benefited from the situation by playing on the anti colonial sentiments of the Arabs as it very often considered capitalism as the highest stage of imperialism. The USSR, additionally, went on a more decisive policy via seeking economic and political success over the west mainly by Arm deals and great projects and investments Both President Nasser and the USSR profited from each other to

topple the western presence in the region.

In Egypt, despite the military defeat in the Suez War and its consequences on the economy of the country, The Egyptian leader successfully challenged western interests not only in the Suez Canal but also in almost all the countries of the region. He could do so as Arab Nationalism was in its peak. Nasser's policy was to protect himself from all the attempts made by the west to isolate him from his allies in the region and to neutralize him from probable allies within the Eastern Bloc. Neither goals were achieved. Also, his attitudes made the Arabs afraid of possible direct interference in their affaires which created for him troubles in the area. Only the Six Days war put en end to his role. Yet, his experience remains the most significant in modern Arab history, for challenging the west.

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