

PRE-SUEZ CRISIS ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN EGYPT, 1950-1954

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is Anglo-American relations in Egypt during the early Cold War period. The goal is to show that relations between the Western allies were more contentious than the analysis previously offered by a number of leading scholars. This has been done by examining early Cold War Western strategy for the defense of the Middle East and Anglo-Egyptian negotiations related to the future of the large British military base in the Suez Canal region. What this paper reveals is that rather than working in concert, as others have argued, Great Britain and the United States during this period sparred over tactics and strategy. The major source of contention between the Western powers centered on Britain's irrational commitment to an antiquated foreign policy based on 19th century principles of imperial domination and exploitation. Whereas Britain wanted to combine Western strategy for the defense of the Middle East with its plan to reconstitute its Empire, the United States sought a new strategic outlook that more thoroughly incorporated the nationalist dreams and economic aspirations of the countries in the region.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND: BRITAIN ALONE CANNOT SECURE THE MIDDLE EAST.....	6
3. THE COLD WAR AND THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CANAL ZONE BASE: THE AMERICANS GET INVOLVED, 1950-1957.....	14
4. REVOLUTION IN EGYPT AND TRUMAN LEAVES OFFICE, JULY 1952 TO JANUARY 1953.....	27
5. THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION TAKES OFFICE AND BRITAIN FINALLY AGREES TO EGYPTIAN TERMS, 1953-1954.....	33
6. CONCLUSION.....	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	50

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the end World War II, Great Britain remained the predominant Western power in the Middle East. Because of this, Western allied planners agreed that directly after the war the strategically important Middle East would continue to be a part of Great Britain's sphere of influence. With the onset of the Cold War in the Middle East (roughly 1946), however, both Washington and London came to realize that Great Britain alone could not protect, from both internal and external threats, Western interests in the region. The monumental cost of fighting World War II coupled with the rising tide of post-war nationalist movements had not only decimated Britain's ability to protect and lord over its vast (though quickly fading) colonial possessions, but the combination also weakened substantially Britain's capacity to even prop up and support those countries that fell into its sphere of influence.

Perhaps the most crucial reason, however, as to why Britain could not eventually exert enough influence and power throughout the region, was the fact that after the war Britain remained irrationally committed, much to the chagrin of American policy planners later, to an antiquated foreign policy based on 19th century principles of imperial domination and exploitation in the areas where it could still exert a modicum of power. Whereas Britain saw an opportunity to wed Western strategy for the defense of the Middle East to its desire to reconstitute its Empire, the United States sought a new strategic outlook that more thoroughly incorporated the nationalist dreams and economic aspirations of the countries in the region. Ultimately, this created a situation where

instead of working in close concert to implement a unified plan for the Western defense of the Middle East, London and Washington, especially in Egypt, sparred over strategy.¹

These differing strategic goals became a source of great irritation between London and Washington during the early Cold War period. This paper focuses on the clash between these essentially competing strategies, as they played out during the contentious Anglo-Egyptian negotiations (1950-1954) to settle the Canal Zone base dispute. In a word, using the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations to settle the Suez Canal Zone dispute as a case study, this paper will examine and analyze US-Anglo relations during this time.

¹ William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Zach Levey and Elie Podeh, eds., *Britain and the Middle East: From Imperial Power to Junior Partner* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); William Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky, eds., *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements 1943-1955* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998); Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three From the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997); Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Washington: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 1-46; Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 23-55; Ray Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain and Nasser's Egypt, 1953-1957* (New York: ST. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000), 1-47; Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 119-137; Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 407-519; Stephen P. Cohen, *Beyond America's Grasp: A Century of Failed Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 3-203; Tore T. Petersen, "Suez 1956: European colonial interests and US cold war prerogatives," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer, ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 11-25; Steven Z. Frieberger, *Dawn Over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953-1957* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992); Diane B. Kunz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 6-35; Gail E. Meyer, *Egypt and the United States: The Formative Years* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1980); for a good recent study that focuses on the Persian Gulf and extends the focus to include a later period of the Cold War, see W. Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Most historians agree that the events leading up to and including the 1956 Suez Crisis was essentially the story of the rise of *Pax Americana* in the Middle East at the expense of the outdated model of world order under European Imperialism. While this paper does not dispute the fact that after World War II American influence in the region was waxing and British power was quickly eroding, it does question the way in which some leading historians have portrayed the Anglo-American relationship during the decade preceding the 1956 Suez Crisis. Peter L. Hahn, who wrote perhaps the most authoritative account of American, British and Egyptian relations prior to the 1956 Suez Crisis, asserts that the United States and Great Britain “consistently maintained a close partnership” throughout the pre-Suez Crisis era in Egypt. Essentially, Hahn contends that the United States, while having some minor disagreements over tactics, “consistently” supported the British in its intransigent imperial stance vis-à-vis Egyptian nationalist aspirations. William Roger Louis, one of the most influential scholars focusing on British Imperial decline in the Middle East, is somewhat divided over the subject of pre-Suez Crisis Anglo-American relations. He sees American policy at times working in unison with British imperial defense policies, while in other instances he believes an anti-colonial trend in United States policy caused fissures in Anglo-American relations. In the end, though, Louis essentially concurs with Hahn, arguing that any American displeasure over British imperial tendencies toward Egypt was trumped by an overriding concern that the United States lacked the means to alone thwart Soviet expansion into the Middle East.

The purpose of this paper then is to demonstrate that the Anglo-American relationship during the pre-Suez Crisis was more caustic than the analysis proffered by noted historians such as Louis and Hahn. Moreover, due to the fact that the United States,

in the end, refused to support the British Imperial position vis-à-vis Egypt, the British had no choice but to accept a settlement with the Egyptians that was fundamentally inferior to what the British claimed would be the “worst case scenario” when the negotiations began. As such, the 1956 Suez Crisis was not, as many historians argue, the point where the Americans and the British stopped working in concert in the Middle East. It was merely the final British action that forced Washington to assume almost total control of Western defense of the Middle East.²

Finally, it should be noted that Washington’s unaccommodating stance toward London’s imperial designs in Egypt must be viewed as part of a broader American antipathy toward British imperial conduct throughout the Middle East. Beginning in the mid to late 1940s, Washington became increasingly irritated with British oil policy in Iran. Washington denounced Britain’s intransigent position toward Tehran’s insistence to renegotiate a decidedly pro-British 1933 compromise agreement over oil profits. Tehran and Washington wanted London to negotiate a new settlement that split oil profits with Tehran equally – something along the lines of the 50/50 agreement that Washington had with the House of Saud in Riyadh. When London refused to compromise, offering little more than the original 80/20 split, the Iranian government, in 1951, nationalized Iranian oil, causing Anglo-Iranian relations to boil over to the point where Great Britain threatened military intervention.

² On Hahn, see Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); for the quote, see Peter L. Hahn, “Discord or Partnership? British and American policy toward Egypt, 1942-56,” in Cohen and Kolinsky, *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East* 162-182; For Louis, see William Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, 451-501, 589-608; on the Suez Crisis, see William Roger Louis and Roger Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh, eds., *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1990).

A cursory glance of the historical record of what happened after democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq nationalized Iran's oil would lead one to believe that Washington and London worked in close concert toward Western imperial aims. Indeed, Washington and London colluded to successfully overthrow Prime Minister Mosaddeq in 1953. But the American backed coup d'état to depose Mosaddeq had little to do with securing British imperial economic interests. The fear in Washington was that Mosaddeq and his Tudeh Party were a pawns of the Soviets. In fact Mosaddeq warned Washington that if United States did not intervene on behalf of the Iranian nationalists in their dispute with Great Britain, they would seek assistance from Moscow. The motivation for the United States then, in successfully backing the coup that removed Mosaddeq from power, was to secure the position of the undeniably pro-West Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi. In the end, the British, spurred by American insistence, accepted a negotiated settlement with Iran after the coup that was even less than the 50/50 split that Washington originally proposed – Iran gained full sovereignty over any future contracts concerning oil production within its borders, as well as 50 percent of future profits from existing British constructed and maintained oil wells.³

³ Highlighting American insistence that Britain renegotiate its unfair deal with Iran over oil proceeds is not an attempt to minimize the fact that Washington operated from an agenda that would poison Western relations with Iran to the present day. Although Washington eventually forced British Imperialism out of Iran, American domination of Iran replaced it. Until the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Washington gave almost unlimited backing to the deeply unpopular pro-Western despot Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, which infuriated Iranian nationalists and religious leaders. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004); Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2006; Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003); Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), 617-627; Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 62-83; Mark Gaisorowski, "US Foreign Policy Toward Iran During the Mussadiq Era," and Sir Sam Falle, "The Mussadiq Era in Iran, 1951-1953: A Contemporary Diplomat's View," in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, David W. Lesch ed., 4th ed. (Boulder:

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: BRITAIN ALONE CANNOT SECURE THE MIDDLE EAST

With a greatly weakened and somewhat deluded Great Britain charged with the Western defense of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf at the beginning of the Cold War, fears of Soviet expansion into the strategically vital region loomed large in the minds of the American architects of post-war Western strategy. The devastating German invasion deep into the heart of the Soviet Union had forced Moscow early in the war to move most of its heavy industry east, away from its western front with Central Europe and closer to its border with the Middle East - where it remained for some time after the war. And because the Soviet Union's major oil producing regions (Baku and Grozny) were located just West of Turkey and just north of Syria, Iraq, and Iran, the region of the Middle East, according to a July 1946 Central Intelligence Group (CIG) report, ranked higher in strategic importance to Moscow than even Eastern Europe. The report went further, however, arguing that the West could only assume that the Soviets would, over the next several months, pursue aggressive policies that would directly challenge British power throughout the entire region of the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, and Persian Gulf. The Soviets would attempt to establish "friendly" governments in Greece, Turkey, and Iran. Beyond attempts to set up "friendly" governments, the Soviets, the CIG

Westview Press, 2007), 51-65, 66-74; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119-131; John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 166-167.

report argued, would also endeavor to exploit virulent anti-British nationalist movements, which were ubiquitous throughout the region – though most notably in Iran and Egypt.⁴

What the U.S. intelligence report failed to recognize, however, was Great Britain's plan to cut its losses in countries like Greece and Turkey in order to bolster its position in countries important to the survival of its Empire such as Egypt. Officials in London could not conceive a plan for the Western defense of the Middle East unless it was tied to their irrational strategy of resurrecting its Empire and Great Power status. In late February 1947, after London informed Washington that it could not continue to send economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey, Secretary of State George Marshall lamented that this was akin to a full abdication from the Middle East by Great Britain. Perhaps Marshall was a bit hasty in his assessment, though he was not too far off. Indeed, had he understood the plans being devised in London to cut British losses in some areas of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean in order to support its imperial designs in other areas like Egypt, Marshall would have been livid rather than alarmed. In the event, nevertheless, motivated by the aim to resurrect their Empire and recognizing they lacked the capability to thwart Soviet encroachment into the region or stem the rising tide of anti-British post-war nationalist movements, British officials looked to the United States for help.⁵

⁴ The Central Intelligence Group was the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency, established in 1947. Central Intelligence Group, "Soviet Foreign and Military Policy" July 23, 1946, Doc. 001, 6-7, Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI), <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/assessing-the-soviet-threat-the-early-cold-war-years/docs.html> (accessed January 30, 2009).

⁵ On February 23, 1947, setting the stage for America's announcement of the Truman Doctrine, Great Britain formally informed the United States that it could not afford to spend roughly \$2.6 billion a year in today's money to support Turkey and Greece. (To be fair to the British, even without the motives to

The United States was willing to lend support to Britain because both Washington and London were on the same page as far as the strategic importance of the region was concerned. The most obvious place for the United States to step in and bolster the West's position in the region was Iran. During the early part of World War II, the Germans wanted to use Iran as a base for supporting its invasion of the Soviet Union, while the Americans and the British needed to secure Iran as safe route to resupply the battered Soviet Army. The problem for the Allies was that the then ruler of Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi, was decidedly pro-Axis and German influence in Iran was paramount. After Reza Shah balked at an ultimatum given by the Allies to drive out German influence and allow Iran to be used as a staging area to resupply the beleaguered Soviets fighting the Nazis, the British and Soviets, from bases nearby, entered Iran in August 1941 and split the country into three zones. The Soviets controlled Iran in the north and the British occupied Iran in the south. An area in the middle, which included the capital city of Tehran, remained nominally under Iranian control. By September 1941, however, the Allies forced Reza Shah to abdicate his throne in favor his pro-Allied son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. After the war ended the Allied occupation forces remained. With the onset of the Cold War, the United States, applying strong diplomatic support to the position of the now pro-Western Iranian government as well the British (who had

resurrect the Empire, could not continue to afford to send \$2.6 billion in aid to Greece and Turkey after the war.) On the British informing the Americans that they could not support Greece and Turkey, as well as Marshall's concern, see Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), 245.

massive economic interests in Iran related to its oil industry), helped oust the Soviets from northern Iran in late 1946.⁶

Similar such victories for Western planners in the region during the early Cold War followed. By providing \$4.2 billion in today's money in economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey through the policies connected to the Truman Doctrine, the United States in 1947 bolstered the Western position in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Western position was further strengthened vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East when Greece and Turkey, through Washington's insistence, became members of NATO in early 1952. As for the rest of the Middle East during the early part of the Cold War (aside from Israel for ideological and political reasons and Saudi Arabia, where the United States had considerable economic interests in the continued development of Saudi oil fields), the United States hoped that Great Britain could reverse its deteriorating position in order to lead the campaign to at the very least deter any future Soviet encroachment.⁷

⁶ On United States diplomatic pressure to force the Soviets out of Iran, see Bruce R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 130-203; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969), 196-198; Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101; Central Intelligence Group, "Weekly Summary Excerpt: The Azerbaijan Settlement," June 14, 1946, Doc. 001, 4, CSI, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/assessing-the-soviet-threat-the-early-cold-war-years/docs.html> (accessed October 1, 2014).

⁷ Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*; Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire*, 6-7; Fraser J. Harbutt, *The Cold War Era* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), 33-34. For an interesting inside account of the development, issuance, and congressional acceptance of the Truman Doctrine, see Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 220-225; for another inside account, see Ambassador George McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983), 18-26.

For the United States, the overriding concern was blocking Soviet expansion into the region. This was true for both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Allowing the Middle East to fall to the Soviets was a nightmare for American foreign policy planners, because almost certainly it would mean the loss of Middle Eastern oil. Although Middle Eastern oil was not a domestic concern for the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Western European markets and continued post-war recovery were absolutely dependent on it.

Therefore, American policy toward the Middle East during the late 1940s and early 1950s focused on countering Soviet initiatives through attempts at stabilizing Middle Eastern countries and orienting their governments and people toward the West. In order to accomplish this goal, American policy planners offered Middle Eastern leaders aid packages and sought to establish a framework for the defense of the Middle East that would be Western led but included the armed forces of Middle Eastern countries. Because the US alone, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, lacked the necessary resources and manpower in the Middle East to successfully implement its strategy, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations wanted to utilize Britain's remaining power and influence in the region toward pursuing Western—as opposed to exclusively British—goals. But the United States also looked to harness Middle Eastern desires for economic prosperity, nationalist aspirations, and concerns over external and internal safety. Both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations believed that the countries of the Middle

East could be enticed, through promises of independence and economic and military aid, to join the West in a defense organization against Soviet expansion.⁸

Although the need for a Western-oriented defense organization to block Soviet expansion into the Middle East was universally agreed upon throughout the Atlantic community, Great Britain had other priorities that were fundamentally at odds with Washington's. Chief among these was the goal of reasserting Britain's status as a Great Power by reconstituting the British Empire. Essentially, this meant that Britain would attempt to strengthen its ties with such Commonwealth countries as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well as maintain and bolster its position in the imperial domains it still held.

After India secured its independence from Britain in 1947, the significance of Asia waned in British Imperial policy planning. The Middle East primarily, but Africa too, became the focus of Britain's campaign to revitalize the empire. In 1945, the foreign secretary in Churchill's Conservative cabinet (1940-1945, 1951-1955), Anthony Eden, asserted that "The Middle Eastern area...with Egypt and the Suez Canal at its core, is the meeting place of two continents and, if Turkey be added, of three. It is thus one of the

⁸ Under Truman, see National Security Council (NSC), "United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab States and Israel NSC 129/1," 24 April 1952, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com.libproxy.temple.edu/nsa/documents/PD/00297/all.pdf> (accessed January 30, 2009); Under Eisenhower, see NSC, "United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East NSC 155/1," 17 June 1953, DNSA, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com.libproxy.temple.edu/nsa/documents/PD/00343/all.pdf> (accessed January 30, 2009); For a report on the importance of Middle Eastern oil with regards to Western European Markets, see Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "National Intelligence Estimate: The Importance of Iranian and Middle East Oil to Western Europe under Peacetime Conditions NIE/4," 8 January 1951, DNSA, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com.libproxy.temple.edu/nsa/documents/IR/00230/all.pdf> (accessed January 30, 2009); Also, see John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, 167-170; William B. Quandt, "America and the Middle East: A Fifty-Year Overview," in *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*, ed. L. Carl Brown (New York: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2001), 59-60, 62-64.

most important strategic areas in the world, and it is an area the defence of which is a matter of *life and death to the British Empire* [emphasis added].” A year later, in 1946, Ernest Bevin, the foreign minister in Clement Atlee’s new Labour cabinet (1945-1951), concurred with Eden’s earlier assessment. Arguing on behalf of “Imperial Defence,” Bevin stated that “it is essential that [Britain] should maintain [its] position in the Mediterranean and Red Sea [the valuable link between the two being the Suez Canal]. It is not only a question of preserving this *life-line* [emphasis added] in time of war, but also the vital importance of acting in peace-time on the soft under-belly of Europe from the Mediterranean.”⁹

A second priority for the British was to modernize its colonial economies and strengthen economic ties between London and its colonial periphery. This was an ambitious plan that was in line with the progressive rhetoric of post-war planning manifestos such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill's Atlantic Charter (August 14, 1941). In a frank discussion about the British with Saudi King Ibn Saud in February 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stressed, “We like the English, but we also know the English and how they insist on doing good themselves...The English...work and sacrifice to bring freedom and prosperity to the world, but on the condition that it be brought by them and marked ‘made in Britain’.” Thus, even as early as 1945, American officials were sensitive to the nationalist

⁹For Eden, see CAB 66/65 WP (45) 256, 13 April 45, The National Archive Website, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>, [hereafter abbreviated as TNAW], (accessed January 30, 2009); For Bevin, see CAB 129/9 CP (46) 165, 18 April 1946, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009); On Bevin, also see Mohamed H. Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1986) 14-15.

aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East vis-à-vis the imperial policies of Great Britain.¹⁰

The main British goal, however, was to continue to financially exploit colonial territories to help fund post-war recovery at home, which included constructing a domestically popular forward-thinking, yet tremendously costly, social welfare state. In the end, British planners believed that not only would the emerging markets for manufactured goods and the abundance of natural resources located in the Middle East and Africa fuel post-war British recovery at home, but also that the British influence in these countries would allow Britain to retain its status as a “Great Power” so that it could play its part in the defense of the region – in concert with its emerging superpower ally, the United States. Moreover – because the British base in the Suez Canal Zone was the largest Western military installation in the world after the war, and the canal itself remained the major artery connecting Britain to its Commonwealth countries and the valuable natural resources (oil) in the Middle East – Egypt, as both Eden and Bevin stressed, became ground zero in Britain’s campaign to reconstitute the British Empire.¹¹

¹⁰ President Franklin Roosevelt quoted in Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 8

¹¹ John Kent, “The Egyptian Base and the Defence of the Middle East, 1945-54,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21, no. 3 (1993): 45-65; Nicholas Owen, “Britain and Decolonization: The Labour Governments and the Middle East, 1945-51,” in *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East*, ed. Cohen and Kolinsky, 3-22; Michael J. Cohen, “The Strategic Role of the Middle East after the War,” in *Ibid.*, 23-37; Rami Ginat and Meir Noema, “The Egyptian Jewel in the British Imperialist Crown: An Overview (1882-1956) in *Britain and the Middle East*, ed. Levey and Podeh, 177-198; Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-1962*, 1-23; Ritchie Ovendale, “Egypt and the Suez Base Agreement,” in *The Foreign Policy of Churchill’s Peacetime Administration, 1951-1955*, ed. John W. Young (London: Leicester University Press, 1988), 135-155; Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, 451-501, 589-638; Guy Laron, *Origins of the Suez Crisis: Postwar Development Diplomacy and the Struggle over Third World Industrialization 1945-1956* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 13-42.

CHAPTER 3

THE COLD WAR AND THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CANAL ZONE BASE: THE AMERICANS GET INVOLVED, 1950-1951

The conclusion of World War II in 1945 marked the beginning of a new era in Egyptian nationalist aspirations. Encouraged by such events as the pronouncement of the Atlantic Charter and the establishment of the United Nations (October 24, 1945), Egyptians were united in their desire to see the last vestige of British colonial control, the military occupation of the Suez Canal Zone, removed from their territory. In fact, there was only one policy that unified every Egyptian nationalist political party or movement, including such disparate political and social ideologies as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian communists: removing all remnants of British power in Egypt.

In order to accomplish this goal, the post-war Egyptian government under King Farouk entered into negotiations with the British to end, a decade before it was due to expire (1956), the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Ostensibly, the purpose of the 1936 treaty was to end the half-century long British colonial control and military occupation of Egypt. In reality, though, the British could still maintain a force of 10,000 troops during peacetime at the Canal Zone base, as well as assert control over the entire country if any area of the British Empire or Egypt itself was in danger of being attacked. The Suez Canal, the lifeline of the British Empire, was deemed too important in 1936 to leave in the hands of a population that many British policy makers believed, to put it mildly, could not be trusted to operate and maintain it according to British standards. Moreover, because strategy and operations required the West to enlarge the base during World War

II, the Canal Zone area was transformed into a sprawling complex of 38 army camps and ten airfields. By 1945 the Canal Zone complex was the largest Western military base in the world. For Great Britain, the Canal Zone base was its center of power not only in the Middle East, but throughout the Empire, dwindling as its imperial holdings were. For the Egyptians, though, the Canal Zone base could only be viewed through the bitter lens of colonial domination.¹²

Beyond the fact that in the early post-war era the Suez Canal base represented perhaps Britain's greatest image of imperial power and the canal itself was still considered vitally important to Britain and the rest of Western Europe's post-war recovery, the onset of the Cold War forced many British officials associated with defense strategy to take notice of the base's importance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. And for Washington, the notion that Western control of the Suez Canal base might prove decisive in protecting Western interests in the region and stopping the Soviet Union from expanding into the Middle East was a strategy worth pursuing. In November 1950, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin informed the cabinet that "the strategic emphasis has in fact shifted since 1936 and our primary strategic requirement is now not so much the defence of the Suez Canal itself as the maintenance of a base in Egypt capable of

¹² On the British in Egypt and Egyptian nationalism, see Steven A. Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahir Square* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9-38; Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1988); For the text of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, see J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record, 1914-1956 Vol. II* (Princeton: D. Van Norstrand Company, Inc., 1956), 203-211; On the imperial importance of Suez Canal Zone base, see CAB 66/65 WP (45) 256, 13 April 45, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009) and CAB 129/9 CP (46) 165, 18 April 1946, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009); On the size of the Canal Zone base by 1945 and the fact that the British could not trust the Egyptians to maintain it, see Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945-1954* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 124.

rapid expansion on the outbreak of war, in order to support a major campaign in the Middle East.”¹³

Moreover, the British military establishment by 1950 was convinced that the Suez Canal base was absolutely essential against any future Soviet invasion of the West. Many American and British strategists believed that the Soviets could, if war erupted, rapidly overrun Western Europe. And to protect its exposed left flank during such an attack, the Soviets would invade the Middle East – a significant prize for the Soviets would be the Suez Canal. If the Soviets captured the Suez Canal, they could effectively deny all oil exports to the West (a vital commodity for waging war). Additionally, if a Soviet invasion of the Middle East was successful, it would also considerably reduce any chance of a Western counterattack. Without the number of trained ground troops to meet a Soviet offensive anywhere in Europe or the Middle East, British military planners believed that the only weapon in their arsenal to limit a Soviet onslaught would be a major air campaign launched from bases located in the Middle East (the Suez Canal Base being the largest and most important) against such strategic Soviet targets as its oil refineries and heavy industry. Thus, British planners deemed the Suez Canal base a requisite for protecting not only the Middle East, but Western Europe too.¹⁴

¹³ For Bevin quote, see CAB 129/43 CP (50) 284, 27 November 1950, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009).

¹⁴ British and American defense planners believed that Western Europe, save Great Britain, would be overrun very quickly. Thus, the bases in the Middle East were deemed only viable place to launch a Western counterattack. This was not necessarily a bad thing. The Egyptian base was somewhat protected because of its distance from any future war waged in Europe, but still closer than most Western bases to strategic Soviet targets. See Cohen, “The Strategic role of the Middle East,” in *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East*, ed. Cohen and Kolinsky, 25-30.

As much as officials in London believed in the vital necessity of securing unhindered access and absolute control of the Suez Canal base to thwart a massive Soviet invasion of the West, they also understood that such a strategy required American backing. The British had to convince American officials to commit to the British plan to make the Suez Canal base in Egypt not only the keystone of the defense of the Middle East, but also the staging area for a massive aerial counterattack against the Soviet oil producing regions just west of Turkey and just north of Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

In September of 1950, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs George McGhee traveled to London to meet with British officials concerning plans for the defense of the Middle East. Michael Wright, the British Assistant Under-Secretary of State, informed McGhee about Britain's Egypt-centered strategy. Relaying to McGhee the substance of a report produced by the British Chiefs of Staff, the British delegation explained that a pivotal aspect of the report called for an increased effort to stabilize the states of the Middle East in order to keep them in the Western camp. One of the best ways to accomplish this, as it was outlined in the British Chiefs of Staff report, was through "the retention of bases in Egypt (*the key to the area*) which is indispensable. Efforts should be intensified to obtain a satisfactory defense arrangement with Egypt." Two months later, in a memorandum to the Cabinet, Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin reported that the United States had accepted Britain's Egypt-centered Middle East Plan. According to Bevin, "The United States Government agree [sic] with our assessment of the strategic importance of Egypt. [The United States] have undertaken to give us appropriate diplomatic support with the Egyptians... [And the United States] recently informed us that they are prepared to associate themselves with us in making a joint

Anglo-American approach to the Egyptian Government about defence facilities in Egypt.”¹⁵

At this juncture, however, Bevin overestimated the level of enthusiasm the Americans had for Britain’s Egypt-centered defense plan for the Middle East. The major concern for the Americans was that the British defense plan, which was focused on the Inner Ring (Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq), did not effectively cover the existing oilfields in the region. The Americans, wanting to use Turkey’s relative strength in the region, proposed a plan that would defend the Middle East using Western bases located in the countries that made up the Outer Ring (Turkey, Iraq, and Iran). Indeed, some American planners wondered whether the British plan was nothing more than a defense of Egypt – meaning a defense of the British Empire rather than an actual strategic defense of the entire region. By early 1951, though, officials in Washington agreed that even if the Western defense plan for the Middle East switched to focus on the countries that made up the Outer Ring, the Suez Canal base would still need to be the center of command for the entire region.¹⁶

By the fall of 1951 London had successfully convinced Washington of the strategic importance to the West of the Suez Canal base. American Cold War defense

¹⁵ “Record of Informal United States-United Kingdom Discussions, London, Monday Morning, September 18, 1950,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Near East, South Asia, and Africa 1950*, V, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), 194 [hereafter cited as *FRUS* followed by volume title, year, number]; For Bevin, see CAB 129/43 CP (50) 284, 27 November 1950, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009)

¹⁶ On Inner Ring vs. Outer Ring, see “Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (McGhee) to the Secretary of State,” *FRUS, The Near East and Africa 1951*, V, 7; For the comment by US planners regarding the British plan as only a defense of Egypt, see Kent, “The Egyptian Base and the Defense of the Middle East, 1945-54,” 49; On the American acquiescence that the Suez Canal base was important regardless of which plan was enacted, see comment by General Collins in “State Department Draft of Minutes of Discussions at the State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, January 30, 1951,” *FRUS, The Near East and Africa 1951*, V, 41.

planners believed then that it was necessary to get directly involved in Anglo-Egyptian negotiations over use and control of the Suez Canal base. “The present crisis in Anglo-Egyptian relations,” according to an October 1951 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) report produced by the CIA’s Office of National Estimates, “is of particular importance to the US and the West because it involves the keystone of Western defense capabilities in the Middle East – specifically, the maintenance of a base in the Suez Canal area for the deployment and support of defending forces for the Middle Eastern area.” The report went on to explain:

The existing base is of unique value for the following reasons. It is sufficiently removed from the Soviet orbit to be reasonably secure against Soviet surprise attack. It is so located that it could be readily reinforced to resist an overland campaign. At the same time, it can support long-range bombers capable of attacking key areas in the USSR. It is so located as to provide protection for the important communications centering on the Suez Canal. It is supported by a partially industrialized area with adequate internal communications (including ports and airfields), and a large, if not highly-skilled, labor force. Finally its facilities and stores are already well-developed and are even now capable of supporting military operations. These facilities and stores are easily expandable...No other bases in the Middle East-Eastern Mediterranean area, either individually or collectively, could compensate for the loss by the West of control of this base, even if such other bases were further developed.¹⁷

Therefore, in September 1951, after months of transatlantic negotiations, the United States and Britain agreed to the terms of a proposal to the Egyptians in order to settle the Anglo-Egyptian dispute over the Suez Canal base. Largely due to the perseverance of Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs George McGhee,

¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), NIE-44, “The National Intelligence Estimate: The British Position in Egypt,” 15 October 1951, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, [hereafter abbreviated as FOIAERR], http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000010476.pdf (accessed January 30, 2009).

the United States and Britain, with the support of France and Turkey, devised a plan that called for the creation of Middle East Command (MEC), which was parallel in structure to that of the successfully negotiated collective security treaty in Asia – the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, or SEATO (September 1954). The MEC proposal to Egypt stipulated that Britain would supply the chief military officer to fill the post of Supreme Allied Command in the Middle East and the headquarters of MEC would be in Cairo. Included in this structure would be a number of Egyptian officers in a Middle East Chief of Staff Committee. The Suez Canal base would ostensibly be turned over to the control of the Egyptians, but it would be under the auspices of MEC, which was clearly under British and Western command. Any British troops that were not deemed necessary to maintain the Suez Canal base under MEC, Washington and London proposed, would be removed – the exact number of British military personnel that would leave was intentionally left rather vague by officials in London. The MEC proposal, with some changes over the next three years or so, would be the Western basis for negotiations with the Egyptians until Secretary of State Dulles' trip to the region in May 1953.¹⁸

On October 13, 1951, the Anglo-American (with French and Turkish support) Egypt-centered MEC plan for the defense of the Middle East was delivered to the Egyptian government. Egyptian Prime Minister Nahas Pasha rejected the proposal without, according to United States Secretary of State Dean Acheson, reading its details. For the Egyptians, the structure of MEC was nothing more than the continuation of the British military occupation of Egypt and the Canal Zone base under a different guise.

¹⁸ For the creation of the proposal of the MEC to Egypt, see McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World*, 24.

Therefore, the Egyptian Prime Minister and the Egyptian Parliament rejected the MEC proposal out of hand and decided to unilaterally abrogate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. The Egyptian position would not waver from this point forward. Egyptian leaders would not agree to negotiate a Western led Middle East defense structure based in Egypt until London agreed to a full and immediate withdrawal of all its military personnel stationed on Egyptian territory.¹⁹

Egypt's decision to abrogate the 1936 treaty and the West's duplicitous tactics (as perceived in Cairo), fanned the flames of Egyptian nationalist desires, emboldening large numbers of Egyptians to take to the streets. Within days, tensions between the British and the Egyptians in the Canal Zone reached deadly levels. One Egyptian demonstration against the British spilled onto the base, where a large Egyptian mob attacked and burned cars and food storage centers for the British military. While at Port Said, another Egyptian mob attacked British soldiers. The British responded by firing indiscriminately into the crowd to suppress the uprisings. *The London Times*, covering these incidents, reported that in Port Said one British soldier was injured, some 40 Egyptians were killed, and another 200 more Egyptians were injured. As violent demonstrations against the British occupation continued to rise, officials in London warned the United States that the British military might have to take drastic measures such as cutting off fuel and essential supplies to major Egyptian cities. And if that failed to quash the uprisings, London

¹⁹ For Acheson's assertion that Egyptians did not read the MEC offer, see Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 564; On Egyptian rejection, see CIA, SE-23, "Special Estimate: Prospects for an Inclusive Middle East Defense Organization" 17 March 1952, FOIAERR, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000010480.pdf (accessed January 30, 2009).

warned officials in Washington that a British military reoccupation of Egypt would be considered.²⁰

Although Washington was sensitive to London's anger over attacks against British subjects and property, agreeing that the British had the right to defend themselves, the Americans were not willing to back the British in either the use of force to reoccupy the country or even its plan to cut fuel and other vital supplies to major Egyptian cities. Washington believed that London was overreacting and grew concerned that if it became public knowledge that the US condoned such actions, world opinion would come down decisively in Egypt's favor. Pressure from Washington forced London toward a more restrained strategy in the aftermath of Egypt's abrogation of the 1936 treaty. The British did, however, increase troop levels in the Canal Zone, expanding the number of British soldiers there, by the end of 1951, to 64,000 - with 20,000 more soon to follow. Though the British backed down from threats to reoccupy Egypt, the increase of British military personnel on Egyptian soil caused an almost complete breakdown of Anglo-Egyptian relations.²¹

²⁰ Correspondent, "Reinforcements for Suez Canal Garrison," *The Times*, October 17, 1951, The Times Digital Archive 1785-2008, http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ttda/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=TTDA&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=1&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C38%29Reinforcements+for+Suez+Canal+Garrison%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=temple_main&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=CS102452561&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y (accessed October 4, 2014); On increased levels of violence in the Suez region and Washington's response to drastic British measures, see "Memorandum for the files by the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews), October 15, 1951," *FRUS, The Near East and Africa 1951*, V, 402-ff.

²¹ For increased British troop levels in Egypt, see Kent, "The Egyptian Base and the Defence of the Middle East, 1945-54," 51.

Also, in October of 1951 there was a change of government in Britain, which brought the Conservatives under Winston Churchill back to power. Churchill returned to office determined to stem Britain's imperial decline by reversing, as he understood it, Labour's policy of retreating from positions of strength or, to put it more bluntly, Labour's policy of "scuttle." The fact was not lost on Churchill that under the Labour government, the British had withdrawn from India in 1947 and from Palestine in 1948. As for the Suez Canal base, Churchill's cabinet held the same view, though more stridently, as Atlee's – the Suez Canal base was not only strategically important, but it was also Britain's greatest symbol of imperial strength. As such, Churchill's cabinet was even less willing than Atlee's (at least initially) to negotiate a serious troop withdrawal from Egypt. Rather than negotiate, Churchill, the unreconstructed imperialist, wanted to dictate terms to the Egyptians. William Roger Louis aptly writes, "[Churchill] believed that the Egyptians, like other 'Oriental' peoples, should be handled with firmness at all times and with force if necessary... [and Churchill] never wavered from his Victorian opinion that the Egyptians were inferior and essentially cowardly people."²²

Beyond Churchill's bigoted perception of the Egyptian people, he remained adamantly opposed to presiding over the "liquidation" of the British Empire. According to Churchill, Britain would be relegated to a second or third rate power if the Empire collapsed. This irrational attachment to resurrecting the British Empire was the folly of London's post-war foreign policy. The devastating costs of fighting the war coupled with a new world order under two competing superpowers had already moved Great Britain

²² William Roger Louis, "Prelude to Suez: Churchill and Egypt," in *Ends of British Imperialism*, 609-613.

into a second or third tier power. Nevertheless, committed to preventing the collapse and reconstituting the empire, Churchill identified the massive British garrison in Egypt controlling the Suez Canal as the last remaining pillar of imperial strength.²³

A few weeks prior to delivering the MEC proposal to the Egyptians, members from President Harry Truman's State Department reported that the British Chiefs of Staff, perhaps sensing that the British position would soon change under Churchill, wanted to "whittle down" the offer that would be presented to the Egyptians. The Americans, even though they supported the MEC proposal, were becoming increasingly disenchanted with London's intransigence over Egyptian demands of troop withdrawal and Britain's imperious use of force. To be sure, a few weeks after the violent outbursts in the Suez Canal area, Churchill, in language that seems to predict the 1956 collusion with France and Israel to invade Egypt, informed Eden "that if we [Britain] have any more of their [Egyptian] cheek we will set the Jews on them and drive them into the gutter, from which they should never have emerged." Washington, however, remained committed to finding a solution to the Anglo-Egyptian impasse that did not include backing British use of force or imperial interests. In November 1951, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, when discussing general policy for the Middle East with the new British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, rebuked British imperial tendencies by stating in no uncertain terms that "[the British] must learn to live in the world as it is." Moreover, in late December 1951, a new NSC report warned, in a direct reference to the British, that Western interests in the Middle East could no longer be defended in a "19th century fashion." The message from

²³ Ibid.

Washington to London was clear. As much as Washington wanted, perhaps even needed, the British to lead the Western campaign to secure the Middle East against Soviet encroachment, the British needed to relinquish all hopes of reviving its antiquated imperial strategy. And if this meant that Britain had to overhaul its strategic outlook (taking in the fact that it was no longer an imperial power and now only a junior partner) for the greater good of Western interests, then so be it.²⁴

The lack of American support for British imperial tendencies did not go unnoticed in London. Former Ambassador to the United States Oliver Franks and Superintending Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs James Bowker addressed British concerns over the lack of American support in a series of letters. Writing to Bowker, Franks explained:

George [McGhee] is clearly deeply impressed with the power and violence of the Nationalist [sic] movements which have grown up in major Middle Eastern Countries. [McGhee] sees them as examples of a much wider movement in men's minds...[McGhee] believes this narrow, heady nationalism is something which has come to stay...In this [McGhee] is reflecting much more than his personal view. *I should judge that he speaks for the general opinion of the State Department* [emphasis added]... [McGhee] believes that somehow or other we [the British] have got to get our relations with these countries on the basis of equality and do it in such a way that is recognized by these countries that they are being treated as equals and partners. [McGhee] would relate this view not merely to the rise of nationalism in the Middle East but also to the position we have all taken up in the United Nations which makes some more *old-fashioned* [emphasis added] ways of dealing with these countries very difficult or impossible...I think [McGhee] is deeply worried about [British] policies and methods of approach in the Middle East...[McGhee] thinks if we are

²⁴ On Washington's concern that the British wanted to water down what was originally offered to the Egyptians, see "Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Jones) and the Deputy Director, Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs (Dorsz) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (McGhee)," *FRUS, The Near East and Africa 1951*, V, 204; Winston Churchill quoted in Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Decent to Suez: Diaries 1951-56*, ed. John Charmley (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 29. Dean Acheson quoted in *Ibid*, 27; "Draft Study by the National Security Council, December 27, 1951," *FRUS, The Near East and Africa 1951*, V, 259.

to preserve our interests and our position we have got to somehow to be able to put a convincing new look upon our relationships with Middle Eastern countries. At Present [the Egyptians] do not feel that we come to them as equals and partners *however helpful we may be as guides and advisors* [emphasis added]...In the particular case of Egypt I think members of the State Department have really begun to ask themselves whether there is not a limit to the extent to which they can go along with us.

Bowker replied with an unrealistic yet self-serving assessment of the British position in the region. In language that reflected the world view of many in Whitehall and Downing Street, he wrote that “at present...we think that [McGhee], *like many Americans* [emphasis added], tends, perhaps unconsciously, to overlook or discount the real volume of goodwill which we, more than the Americans or any other foreigners, retain in certain parts of the Middle East.” Fundamentally, as the correspondence between Franks and Bowker indicates, British officials refused to come to grips with the fact that, even as early as 1951, the Americans would not support their imperial ambitions, especially in the Middle East. Moreover, Bowker's response points to perhaps how out of touch with reality British officials were with regard to their strategy of reviving the Empire.²⁵

²⁵ Both letters are reprinted in McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World*, 385-387.

CHAPTER 4
REVOLUTION IN EGYPT AND TRUMAN LEAVES OFFICE, JULY 1952 TO
JANUARY 1953

During the first half of 1952, Anglo-Egyptian negotiations languished over two important considerations. First, as stated earlier, the Egyptian government was unwilling to negotiate the establishment of MEC, later to be termed the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), until the British agreed to a withdraw of all British military personnel stationed in Egyptian territory. The second point of contention was Sudan. Since 1899, an agreement between Cairo and London stated that the Sudan would be administered by both Britain and Egypt, but in reality the Sudan was, since 1899, a colony of Britain. The Egyptian government, under the feckless King Farouk, believed that because the two countries shared the Nile, it was essential that they unite under the crown of Egypt. As for the British, they argued that “just as the Egyptians wanted to be independent of Britain, the Sudanese did not want to be a colony of Egypt.” The British added, in that indomitable Victorian spirit, that they were grooming the Sudanese for self-government and it would be *immoral* to grant King Farouk the title of King of Egypt and the Sudan.²⁶

²⁶ On the Anglo-Egyptian stalemate and Egyptian claims to Sudan, see Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt*, 42-43; Acheson, 565-566; Goldschmidt, Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State*, 77; Gabriel R. Warburg, “The Sudan’s Path to Independence: Continuity and Change in Egypt’s Policy Toward the Sudan,” in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change*, Shimon Shamir, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 309-324; On the notion of Britain’s “moral responsibility” to the Sudanese, see “Memorandum by the Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Berry) to the Secretary of State, February 12, 1952,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 1762.

As for the Americans, as early as January 1952, United States officials seriously considered a unilateral move to recognize Farouk as King of Sudan, though in name only. Beyond that, however, most officials in Washington, by June 1952, were greatly concerned with the trajectory of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. If a Western defense of the Middle East, which was Egypt-centered, was going to be successful, the British needed to solve its most salient issues with the Egyptians, even if it meant losing absolute control over the massive Suez Canal base. Referring back to the concerns of 1950-51, General Collins, in a meeting between the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, questioned whether the British were too focused on the Inner Ring – meaning Egypt. Primarily, General Collins speculated on record whether or not it was time for Washington to consider options for the defense of the Middle East that were not tied to perhaps British imperial concerns. In August 1952, H. Freeman Matthews, the Deputy Under-Secretary of State, seconded General Collins' view, asking the Defense Department for an entire reassessment of the American Middle East defense plan. His fear, paralleling General Collins's concern, was that it was too closely linked with Britain's focus on Egypt and the Inner Ring.²⁷

Regardless of a sincere desire to reassess the West's Egypt-centered Middle East strategy, which was undoubtedly in peril because of Egypt's refusal to discuss defense plans until British soldiers were withdrawn, the Americans were determined to help the British and the Egyptians reach a settlement – for all the reasons that were outlined in the

²⁷ “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, January 28, 1952,” *Ibid.*, 1758; “Department of State Minutes of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 18, 1952,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 1, 240; “The Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews) to the Secretary of Defense (Lovett), August 15, 1952,” *Ibid.*, 266-267.

October 1951 National Intelligence Estimate report. The Suez Canal base complex and the Canal itself remained important to the West's position in the Middle East. It would be ideal, according to Washington, to keep the Suez Canal base open to the West in any future war with the Soviets; however, it would be unrealistic to think that this could be accomplished without Egyptian acquiescence. What the British came to realize then was that the Americans would not support in any way Britain's obdurate position regarding its desire to maintain such a large number of soldiers in Egypt – the keystone of its imperial power in the region. In March 1952 Secretary of State Acheson, in a cable sent to the US Embassy in London, made this point very clear:

Since our objectives are the free and unimpeded use of the Suez Canal at all times, the maintenance of strategic facilities in Egypt in fully operative condition, and the achievement of *voluntary* [emphasis added] Egypt association in ME [Middle East] defense, since it appears impossible to attain our objectives without minimum Egypt cooperation and assistance and since it is improbable that such cooperation and assistance can be obtained without agreement on the withdrawal of [British] forces from the [Canal Zone] base, it is likely that it will be necessary to come to a settlement with Egypt which [would] not involve the [continued] presence of [British] forces (other than technicians) in Egypt in peacetime.

Remarkably, it would take the British another two years of contentious negotiations with the Egyptians to finally come to this same conclusion, which, it should be noted here, eventually became the basis of the July 1954 Anglo-Egyptian settlement.²⁸

²⁸ “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, March 26, 1952,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 1782; Britain would refuse until 1954 to negotiate a settlement that involved a withdrawal of British forces until the Egyptians accepted the terms of MEC and later MEDO, which would mean British troops stationed in Egypt would be under “Allied” command. Indeed, the British were concerned that a vacuum of power would ensue if British troops were pulled out before an agreement was reached with Egypt regarding MEDO. More important for Eden, though, was the fact that British prestige and influence (imperial stature) in the region would be decimated if British troops were forced to leave. See, CAB 129/49 C (52) 32, 11 February 1952, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009).

In July 1952, a group of young Egyptian military officers – with the support of the Egyptian military and tacit approval from other leading Egyptian nationalist political parties and organizations – forced King Farouk into exile, and a few months later dissolved the Egyptian parliament. By December 1952 Egypt was firmly in the hands of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), with Gamal Abd al-Nasir as its guiding force and the popular General Naguib as its figurehead. The primary grievance the young officers who initiated the coup had centered on the humiliating defeat of the Egyptian army in its 1948 war against Israel. The Egyptian military felt betrayed by their political leaders in Cairo, especially King Farouk. Beyond that, however, the continued occupation of Egyptian territory by British soldiers and the Egyptian government's inability to remove the British after World War II was a leading factor as well.²⁹

One byproduct of the coup had a positive influence on the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. The issue related to the king's desire to be recognized as the sovereign of Sudan was resolved when he abdicated his throne and the RCC exiled him to Italy. Nevertheless, the core problem associated with Anglo-Egyptian negotiations remained – Britain's reluctance to withdraw any of its soldiers from Egypt until the Egyptian government agreed to the terms of Western strategy for the defense of the Middle East. While Washington and London were still in agreement that a settlement based on MEDO – which would give the West the authority to use the base in any future war with the Soviets and would put the maintenance of the base under the auspices of a multi-national,

²⁹ Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt*, 39-63; Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 79-93.

Western-led defense organization – the two Western powers disagreed sharply over tactics to secure Egyptian acceptance of the plan.³⁰

In late September 1952 General Naguib informed the US Ambassador in Egypt, Jefferson Caffery, that the RCC was prepared – if the US was willing to supply a small amount of military aid to secure the RCC’s position in Egypt – to give Washington secret assurances concerning Egypt’s future involvement in MEDO. By December 1952 American officials were convinced that if they could supply the RCC with a token amount of military equipment, the military junta in Egypt would be amenable to a MEDO based negotiated settlement with Britain. While the State Department was in the process of securing funds for Egypt, British officials started to protest. They were not convinced that “secret assurances” from Cairo were enough to strike a deal. For Britain, any concession made to Egypt before the RCC was willing to sign an agreement over MEDO was tantamount to defeat. The gulf between the British and American positions boiled down to the fact that the British wanted to use any aid as leverage and the US wanted to use some aid as an enticement. The British also warned the Americans that some of the weapons the United States wanted to supply to Egypt could be used, if hostilities erupted again, against British subjects. The Americans were not especially convinced. But Truman’s tenure in office was about to expire. The lame duck president was not willing to make a decision on military aid; rather, he would leave that judgment to his successor

³⁰ On the RCC not initially demanding, as King Farouk did, the unity of Egypt and Sudan, see Freiberger, *Dawn over Suez*, 57.

Dwight D. Eisenhower. Truman did, however, agree to give \$90 million in today's money in economic aid – much to the chagrin of British officials.³¹

³¹ On the Naguib message to Caffery, see “The Ambassador in Egypt (Caffery) to the State Department, September 18, 1952,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 1860; for US desire to supply Military and economic aid to Egypt, see “Memorandum by the deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, December 30, 1952,” *Ibid.*, 1924-ff; On the gulf between Britain and the US over Aid to Egypt, “The Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Perkins) to the Secretary of State-designate (Dulles), December 31, 1952,” *Ibid.*, 1931; “The Ambassador in Egypt (Caffery) to the Department of State, January 4, 1953,” *Ibid.*, 1951; On Truman’s decision to grant \$90 million in aid to Egypt, see “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, January 7, 1953,” *Ibid.*, 1954-1955.

CHAPTER 5
THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION TAKES OFFICE AND BRITAIN
FINALLY AGREES TO EGYPTIAN TERMS, 1953-54

The last two months of the Truman administration were trying times for the British. In December 1952, Anthony Eden's private secretary, Evelyn Shuckburgh, lamented, "the Americans [are] not backing us anywhere. In fact, having destroyed the Dutch empire, the United States are [sic] now engaged in undermining the French and British empires as hard as they can." Later in January 1953, Shuckburgh exclaimed, "There is evidence that Caffery, the United States Ambassador in Cairo, is actually working against us with the Egyptians...In Egypt and Persia: the Americans are refusing to support us." Churchill, for his part, was incensed over recent developments in the negotiations with the Egyptians. According to John "Jock" Colville, Churchill's private secretary, Churchill compared recent Western tactics vis-à-vis Egypt to appeasement, commenting that "he never knew before that Munich was situated on the Nile." Colville added that "Churchill would never give way to Egypt...[Churchill] positively hoped [the British would] not succeed in getting into conversations with the Egyptians on defence which might lead to our abandonment of the Canal Zone." Reporting on the views of the British Chiefs of Staff at this time, Shuckburgh wrote that they believed that the events in Egypt were proving to be "another stage in policy of scuttle which began in India and ended at Abadan." The primary concern of the British Chiefs of Staff regarding Egyptian negotiations, Shuckburgh wrote, was that it would ultimately "lead to the abandonment of

our African colonies.” Churchill and the men who supported his policies were attempting, Shuckburgh concluded, to “arrest history.”³²

If Churchill and Eden embraced any illusions that the new Eisenhower administration might be more amenable than the Truman administration to Britain’s desire to reconstitute its imperial strength through maintaining its present position in Egypt, they were greatly disappointed. The Eisenhower administration’s strategy for Western world order would play a large role in destroying any dreams Britain harbored for reconstituting its empire and resuming its role as a significant world power.

One of the chief architects of the Eisenhower administration’s foreign policy was Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. During the two decades between World War I and World War II, Dulles came to the conclusion that a world order based on a balance of power created by competing European empires was decidedly outdated. But more than that, a world order organized through competing European empires would never achieve the type of global stability and security in the modern era that Washington desired. If the cataclysmic World Wars and the onset of the Cold War proved anything, Dulles believed, it was that America would now have to take charge of organizing the Western world order. For Dulles, there were no equal partners in his design for Western world order. The United States would essentially dictate terms to junior partners like Great Britain and France to not only safeguard areas under Western control but perhaps rollback areas under Soviet control.

³² Shuckburgh, *Decent to Suez*, 63, 71, 75-76.

Rooted in the ideas associated with American exceptionalism and the moral Christian precepts of peace, prosperity, and liberty, Dulles envisioned a United States dominated Western world order that was not only distinct from the old world order based on European imperialism, but it would also be truly progressive, incorporating, and modern. Unlike the old world order based on European Imperialism, the new American dominated world order was better suited, according to Dulles, to deal with counties on the periphery like Egypt where nationalists yearned to be free from European colonial rule. And bolstering and securing the periphery – offering them peace, liberty, and American led security – was significant to the overall security of the West, because these were the areas where Soviet encroachment was most likely to occur. In short, even if aspects of Dulles’s vision were never fully implemented, there was no space or leverage left for Britain to implement its strategy of reconstituting the empire and becoming a significant world power.³³

A few weeks before taking office, Eisenhower, after a conversation with Churchill, wrote in his private diary:

[Churchill] talks very animatedly about certain...international problems, especially Egypt and its future. But so far as I can see, he has developed an almost childlike faith that that all of the answers are to be found merely in British-American partnership...Winston is trying to relive the days of World War II. In those days he had the enjoyable feeling that he and our president were sitting on some rather Olympian platform with respect to the rest of the world and directing world affairs from that point of vantage. Even if this picture was an accurate one of those days, it would have no application to the present...In the present international complexities, any

³³ On Secretary of State Dulles’s grand strategy, see Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 164-195.

hope of establishing such a relationship is completely fatuous. Nationalism is on the march...³⁴

A couple of weeks after Eisenhower took office, Churchill, wanting to reestablish the “special relationship” Britain enjoyed with the US during World War II, requested that Eisenhower send a top United States military officer to join Britain in its negotiations with the Egyptians. Churchill’s motive was clear; he wanted the Americans to enter the negotiations in order to put pressure on the Egyptians to accept British terms.

Eisenhower, although not averse to sending an American representative (though the Egyptians would first have to send an invitation before he would consider it), was fully aware of Churchill’s ploy. The Egyptians never did send an invitation, but Churchill still insisted that Eisenhower comply with his request. In a sharply worded response, Eisenhower stated, “my point is this: If the United States walks into a conference room with you, against the wishes of the Egyptian Government, then the obvious interpretation would be that our two governments, together, are there to announce an ultimatum.” It was clear, as early as January 1953, that Eisenhower too had deep misgivings over Britain’s present stance toward Egypt.³⁵

Regardless of the fact that Eisenhower was unwilling, without an invitation from Egypt, to get directly involved in Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, Washington wanted an update from London on how the British government proposed to break its impasse with Egypt over the Suez Canal Base negotiations. At the beginning of 1953, the use of the

³⁴ Robert H. Ferrell ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1981), 223.

³⁵ “Prime Minister Churchill to President Eisenhower, February 18, 1953,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 1989; “President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Churchill, March 19, 1953,” *Ibid.*, 2027.

Suez Canal Base in any future war with the Soviet Union still figured prominently in Washington's plan for the defense of the Middle East. Washington, however, understood that any agreement reached with Egypt would have to involve a withdrawal of British troops. And a full withdrawal or partial withdrawal, as far as Washington was concerned, needed to be settled during the ongoing Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. What Washington demanded from London, at this juncture anyway, was to enter the negotiations with Egypt in way that allowed Egyptians to believe they were being treated in a respectful manner, with deference and understanding paid to their chief concern – British military personnel stationed in Egyptian territory.

As it was, in early 1953, the British were not opposed to withdrawing a significant number of their forces from Egypt. In February 1953, Anthony Eden acknowledged that it was perhaps impossible to reach a satisfactory agreement with the Egyptians while 80,000 British troops occupied the Suez Canal Zone. Throughout the tense post-war negotiations, London had hoped that it could reach an agreement with the Egyptians that would resemble the 1936 treaty, which allowed the British to station 10,000 troops in the region during times of peace. More importantly, there was not a policy official at Whitehall, except perhaps Churchill, who harbored any illusion that the British economy could indefinitely support the then swollen number of military personnel in Egypt during peacetime. Thus, with the economy straining under the burden of overseas expenditures,

by 1953 the British, too, were hoping for a quick settlement with the Egyptians – but the settlement would need to be on terms the British dictated to the Egyptians.³⁶

In early 1953, American officials met with their British counterparts in London to go over a new report drafted by the British Chiefs of Staff that outlined three possible options for settling the Suez Canal base dispute with the Egyptians. The report stated that the ultimate goal, regardless of which option would be achieved, was “the use of a working base in Egypt in war.” Ranging from acceptable to the absolute worst case scenario, the British Chiefs of Staff labeled these three different options Case A (acceptable), Case B (unsatisfactory), and Case C (the worst case scenario). Under Case A, the base would be handed over to the Egyptians, but a force of about 10,000 British military personnel would remain. The important aspects of maintaining the base would be under complete British control, and it was understood that Case A would allow the West to have *immediate* use of the canal base in the event of a shooting war with the Soviets. With Case A, the British would still have control the Suez Canal, which would not only safeguard the most direct route to a number of Commonwealth nations and remaining imperial possessions, but would also serve as a much desired symbol of British power throughout the world.³⁷

Case B was similar to Case A in that the base would be handed over to the Egyptians; however, a much smaller British military presence would remain under Case

³⁶ See “United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East,” July 14, 1953,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 1, 402; On Eden’s views, see CAB 129/59/15 C (53) 65, 16 February 1953, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009).

³⁷ On the three Cases that the British outlined, see “Facilities Required in Peace and War,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 1931.

B. London believed that if a shooting war broke out with the Soviets, it would take the West, under Case B, 60 days to get it fully operational. With Case C, the British military presence would be reduced to a handful of advisors stationed in Egypt to conduct routine inspections. According to this scenario, it would take the West at least 90 days to activate the base in the event of war with the Soviet Union. All of the above cases required that Egypt first agree to incorporate its entire defense structure within the West's proposed MEDO.³⁸

In February 1953, Churchill, in a meeting with his cabinet, made it clear that Case A was as far as he was willing to negotiate. Churchill asserted, "If it's a package [referring to Egypt's need to first accept MEDO] we could go forward. But this is the minimum and not to be whittled away. Case A is [the] least we can accept." With regard to any possible negative response from Washington concerning his demand that the British not accept anything less than Case A, Churchill warned, "[the Americans] should understand that we were not prepared to be bullied or cajoled into withdrawing our troops from Egypt unless we secured in return satisfactory alternative arrangements on the lines indicated...we should not be prepared to see [the British position] whittled away in the course of negotiation."³⁹

Washington was concerned over Churchill's insistence that the Egyptian government accept, as a basis for restarting negotiations, the West's MEDO plan, as well

³⁸ Ibid.; Also, see British General Brian H. Robertson's note to the cabinet on Cases A, B, and C in CAB 129/61 C (53) 192, 7 July 1953, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009).

³⁹ For Churchill's directive to not go below Case A, see CAB 195/11 C.C. 12(53), 17 February 1953, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009); For Churchill's warning that the British would not be "bullied," see CAB 128/26 C.C. (53), 17 February 1953, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009).

as his claim that Case A would be as far as Britain was willing to negotiate. American officials demanded more flexibility from London. Like the Truman administration before it, the new Eisenhower administration believed that the Egyptian government might be more willing to accept MEDO and Britain's proposed Case A if a small grant of military and economic aid was delivered before negotiations were set to begin. Britain was staunchly against giving any aid to Egypt until the Egyptian government formally accepted London's proposal. After a few months of transatlantic negotiations, Eisenhower relented to British demands that the US not make the unilateral decision to supply economic and military aid to Egypt to bring about a successful end to the negotiations of Egypt's role in MEDO. But this was only because Secretary of State Dulles was planning his first fact finding trip to the region in May 1953. It was understood in Washington that after Dulles's trip to the region, general American policy toward Egypt would be reassessed.⁴⁰

During his trip to Cairo, in early May 1953, Dulles came to the conclusion that the British stance toward negotiations with Egypt was irrational. The information gleaned from the Egyptian government and American officials in the region was consistent with what officials in Washington perhaps already knew to be the case. Dulles informed officials back in Washington that Egypt would never agree to British terms. The Egyptians needed the British to agree to a withdrawal of all its troops stationed in the

⁴⁰ On Washington wanting London to approach Egyptian negotiations with more "flexibility," see "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom," *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 2009-2010; On London wanting greater US support for their position, see "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Egypt, March 24, 1953," *Ibid.*, 2032-2034; On Eisenhower's decision to relent to British wishes until Dulles gets back from the region, see "President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Churchill, May 8, 1953," *Ibid.*, 2061-2062.

Suez Canal Zone before negotiations could move forward. The Egyptian government, moreover, was unwilling even to discuss Egypt's involvement in Western defense until the British army agreed to leave all Egyptian territory. Egyptian Officials explained to Secretary Dulles that Egyptian independence, which was the most important domestic and foreign policy goal for the overwhelming majority of Egyptians, could not be obtained until the British military occupation of Egyptian territory was removed. General Naguib told Secretary Dulles the Egyptian tale of Goha. Naguib explained:

Goha sold his house to a friend, stipulating however that one nail on an interior wall of the house remained his property. No sooner had the new owner moved in than Goha showed up to make certain that his nail was safe. He paid repeated visits at all hours of the day and night to examine his property. The result was that a) the new owner went crazy because of these visits; b) Goha married his wife and c) got back the house he sold.⁴¹

A day after hearing General Naguib's story of Goha, Colonel Nasir informed Dulles that without a complete British Withdrawal from Egypt, any discussion of incorporating the Canal Base and Egypt in Western defense of the region was meaningless. Nasir explained that "as long as British influence is in Egypt, there is a psychological block to setting up an area defense arrangement. The Egyptian people think of MEDO as a perpetuation of occupation." By the end of his trip to Cairo, it was clear to Dulles that the Egyptians would never agree to Case A or even to MEDO – because both required a large contingent of British troops to remain in Egypt. On his final day in Cairo, Dulles told Nasir that the US agreed that "British troops should evacuate

⁴¹ "Memorandum of Conversation, Prepared in the Embassy in Cairo, May 11, 1953," *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 1, 3-25; For Naguib's Goha story, see *Ibid.*, 18.

and Egyptian sovereignty should be fully restored.” Remarkably, he then informed Nasir that “the US has no desire to back the UK in imperialism or colonialism.”⁴²

During the first half of 1953, any remaining hope in Washington that the British could successfully conclude an agreement with Egypt in accordance with the Case A proposal and MEDO evaporated. In early June 1953 Dulles briefed the National Security Council on his trip to the Middle East. Concerning the Suez Canal Base and the defense of the Middle East, the secretary of state stated that a “new formula” was needed. Dulles, in no uncertain terms, said that MEDO, which was based on Egyptian cooperation, was “dead.” At best, the West could only hope, according to Dulles, that an agreement could be reached where the Suez Canal Base could be reconstituted in a time of war. This was essentially the same conclusion that Dean Acheson came to back in March 1952. From this point forward, American officials were certain that the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations would ultimately conclude on Egyptian terms.⁴³

After hearing first-hand Dulles’ report on his meetings in Cairo, Eisenhower, in June 1953, wrote to Churchill that “I have come to the conclusion that some step should be made soon to reconcile our minimum defense needs with the very strong nationalist sentiments of the Egyptian Government and people. It appears that it is not possible to conclude a settlement on the basis of Case A...despite its desirability from a military point of view.” Dulles, for his part, sent a message in June 1953 to the American Embassy in London. He stated that in any future discussions with the British, American

⁴² For the conversation between Nasir and Dulles, see *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁴³ “Memorandum of Discussion at the 147th Meeting of the National Security Council, June 1, 1953,” *Ibid.*, 379-386.

officials in London should explain to them that their insistence on Case A coupled with MEDO was an impossible goal to reach. Dulles concluded by stating that the most the British could hope for was something somewhat better than Case C. Churchill's response, on June 15, 1953, was bitter and direct:

In hope of reaching an agreement with you and your predecessor [Truman] we went over all this ground before and agreed to make a number of concessions to the Egyptian point of view. Our object in these discussions was...to obtain...only [US] moral support in what we hoped would be a joint approach to the Egyptian *dictatorship* [emphasis added]. However, you [Eisenhower] decided to defer to Egyptian objections...Since then we [the British] have been disappointed not to receive more support particularly in Cairo from your government in spite of numerous far-reaching concessions which we made in our joint discussions with you.

Churchill stated further that the British stance would not change – he was determined to go ahead with trying to secure a settlement based on Case A and MEDO. Remarkably, Churchill concluded his letter to Eisenhower with a warning not to go ahead with the plan that was hatched at the end of the Truman administration, which called for sending a small amount of military aid to Egypt. Churchill wrote:

If as a result of American encouragement at this juncture or a promise of delivery of arms, Dictator Naguib is emboldened to translate his threats into action, bloodshed on a scale difficult to measure beforehand might well result, and for this we should feel no responsibility, having acted throughout in a sincere spirit for the defence not of British but of inter-allied interests of a high order.

Churchill told Eisenhower that if the British must resort to violence to protect and hold its position in Egypt, the onus would be on Washington – because Eisenhower failed to back the British position.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For Eisenhower's letter to Churchill, see "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, June 10, 1953," *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 2088-2089; for Dulles cable to US

Eisenhower's response came two days later. In it Eisenhower tried to assuage the aging and emotional Churchill. The president told his World War II ally that the United States still supported the British in its desire to reach a settlement with the Egyptians on the Suez Canal Base. But, Eisenhower insisted, the British would have to be more flexible. Reflecting the consensus reached in Washington after Dulles' trip, Eisenhower told Churchill that the most important aspect in any future settlement with the Egyptians was securing an agreement that allowed the West to use the base in a time of war. Eisenhower urged the British to try to find a solution to its impasse with the Egyptians that gave the West the ability to have the base ready within 60 days from the outbreak of any future war with the Soviets.⁴⁵

It was clear from this moment on that assessments of the the strategic value of the Suez base were waning in Washington. Washington began to devise plans for a defense of the Middle East that was not Egypt-centered. With the British and the Egyptians locked in a veritable stalemate over the future of the Suez Canal Base, Washington began to revert to an older plan that called for the defense of the Middle East from the Outer Ring or Northern Tier. Washington wanted the British to conclude a deal with Egypt that allowed it to use the base in the event of war. Once that deal was reached, the British should evacuate Egypt.⁴⁶

Embassy in London, see "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, June 10, 1953," *Ibid.*, 2090-2091; for Churchill's response, see "Prime Minister Churchill to President Eisenhower," *Ibid.*, 2094-2095.

⁴⁵ "The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, June 17, 1953," *Ibid.*, 2098-2099.

⁴⁶ On Washington's turn toward an Outer Ring or Northern Tier strategy (eventually the Baghdad Pact), see "Memorandum of Discussion at the 147th Meeting of the National Security Council, June 1, 1953," *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 1, 379-386; Freiberger, *Dawn Over Suez*, 83-85.

Churchill and a few backbench Conservatives still rejected Washington's assessment that an Egypt-centered strategy for the defense of the Middle East was "dead." Yet, without support from the United States, it was only a matter of time before London would have to acquiesce to Egyptian terms for a settlement. The negotiations, nevertheless, dragged on for another year. The British quibbled over minor things with the Egyptians such as dress codes for any remaining British advisors, length of time for a withdrawal of British troops, and what constituted an act of war that would allow the West to use the base. But by early 1954 even Churchill had come to accept that retaining the Suez Canal Base was a lost cause. He reluctantly conceded that Americans no longer thought that a Western plan for the defense of the Middle East could be based in Egypt and the British could not afford to keep its bloated force in the region. A less direct but perhaps more decisive influence on Churchill's thinking was the successful American test in early March 1954 of a hydrogen bomb that was 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945. The test of a bomb of this magnitude made obsolete any military base that was as large as the one at Suez. Why would you station 80,000 troops in one place, only to have them vaporized in an instant? The next month Churchill informed his cabinet that "our strategic needs in the Middle East had been radically changed by the development of thermo-nuclear weapons...Our withdrawal from Egypt could be presented as part of a redeployment of our forces in the Middle East based on a re-assessment of our essential strategic needs in the area." In July, after an agreement was reached with Egypt on Egyptian terms, Churchill stated in Parliament:

I have not in the slightest degree concealed in public speech how much I regretted the course of events in Egypt. But I had not held my mind closed to the tremendous changes that have taken place in the whole strategic

position in the world which make the thoughts which were well-founded and well knit together a year ago utterly obsolete, and which have changed the opinions of every competent soldier that I have been able to meet.⁴⁷

The agreement reached was less than what the British deemed the “worst case scenario” just a year earlier. London agreed to hand over control of the Suez Canal base to the Egyptians and a full withdrawal of British military personnel from Egyptian soil. Any British technical advisors that remained would have to be contracted through a civilian organization. The base, however, would be open to the West if Egypt, any other member of the Arab League, or Turkey was in imminent danger of being attacked. Including Turkey in the Anglo-Egyptian agreement was the only true concession that London was able to secure.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ On the British economy and military struggling to support the Suez base, see CAB 129/65 C. (54) 29, 27 January 1954, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009); On Churchill’s assessment on the development of the hydrogen bomb, see CAB 195/12 C. 47 (54), 7 July 1954, TNAW (accessed January 30, 2009); Churchill quoted in William Roger Louis, “Prelude to Suez: Churchill and Egypt” in *Ends of British Imperialism*, 624-625; For two very good overviews of the last year or so of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, see Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez*, 55-81 and William Roger Louis, “Prelude to Suez: Churchill and Egypt” in *Ends of British Imperialism*, 612-625.

⁴⁸ An agreement between the British and the Egyptians was reached in July 1954, but the actual treaty was not signed until October 1954, see “Editorial Note,” *FRUS, The Near and Middle East 1952-54*, IX, 2, 2288-2289; for a detailed account of the final months of Anglo-Egyptian base settlement negotiations, see Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956*, 155-179.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Regardless of Churchill's claim that his strategic vision of the British base in Egypt was fundamentally altered when the Americans in March 1954 successfully detonated a hydrogen bomb, the ultimate decision to vacate the Suez Canal base and withdraw all British military personnel from Egyptian soil was a consequence of Egyptian resolve to end British colonial domination and Washington's refusal to support its junior partner's irrational strategy to resurrect its Empire after World War II. Thus, there were two essential reasons why London could not dictate terms to Egypt along the lines of the original 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The first was that the Egyptians, regardless of who was in power in Cairo, London, or Washington, refused to yield to British demands. After withstanding 70 years colonial occupation under the British, the Egyptians were determined to end their long national humiliation. Unless the British were prepared to forcefully occupy all of Egypt and install a puppet government in Cairo, there was no chance that the Egyptians would ever accept British troops remaining in the Canal Zone.

The second reason why the British could not dictate terms to the Egyptians was that at no point were the Americans willing to support London's imperial designs for Egypt. As long as British strategy in Egypt coincided with American defense plans for the entire Middle East, Washington was willing to lend support to its junior partner. However, whenever British strategy veered toward irrational designs to reconstitute the British Empire from its base in the Suez Canal Zone, Washington pulled back its support.

To be sure, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations saw the strategic importance of the Canal Zone base, but neither were willing to allow Britain to do what it would take to hold it – meaning they were not willing to allow London keep the base through the use of force and colonial domination.

The October 1954 agreement reached between London and Cairo was supposed to end, for good, British designs to control the Suez Canal Zone. But just two years later, after Nasir nationalized the Suez Canal Company and seemed to be on the verge of aligning Egyptian interests with Moscow's, the British, under Prime Minister Anthony Eden, colluded with the French and Israelis to retake the Canal Zone. Eden's ploy failed abysmally. The military operation to depose Nasir and retake the Canal was bungled from the start. More important for the ultimate outcome, Washington, once again, refused to support London's irrational position. In fact, Washington employed a host of diplomatic and economic weapons to compel the British, French, and Israelis to quickly abandon their folly.⁴⁹

Anthony Eden, foreign minister in Churchill's cabinet and prime minister during the 1956 Suez Crisis, had been intricately involved in negotiations with Washington over early Cold War strategy for the protection of the Middle East. He therefore should have known that colluding to forcefully retake the Suez Canal would infuriate both President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles and Washington would stop the ill-fated campaign as quickly as it began. But Britain's hope to resurrect its Empire and Great Power status blocked its capacity to understand and accept its new role as a junior partner

⁴⁹ On the Suez Crisis, see Louis and Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*; Ilan Troen and Shemesh, eds., *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal*;

in an American led Western world order. Many have rightly concluded that Eden was a victim of his own emotional attachment to a British Empire that no longer existed. The same can be said of Churchill and the majority of London's officials for the previous decade – or longer.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 487-515; Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism*, 609-664.

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