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The Road to Suez: British Diplomacy, the Suez  
Canal and the Egyptian-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1956

by

Stewart John Henry Cunningham

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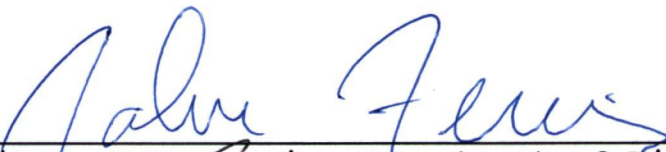
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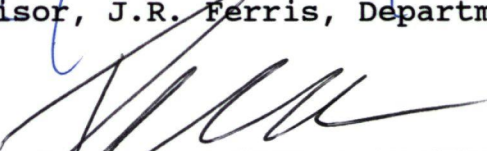
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## **ABSTRACT**

After 1948, British governments tried to retain Britain's base in the Suez Canal Zone for regional defence purposes and imperial prestige, despite its declining strategic importance. Anglo-Israeli cooperation was seen as subordinate to, and following, conclusion of an Anglo-Egyptian agreement permitting retention of the base. Britain failed to respond to a series of Israeli overtures, and refused to take actions that might alienate Egypt, including enforcing transit rights in the Suez Canal, despite Egyptian actions demonstrating the unlikelihood of a satisfactory agreement. After a 1954 agreement extricated Britain from its position in the Canal Zone, the government failed to act upon the Anglo-Israeli interest in enforcing free passage through the canal, instead engaging in destabilizing efforts to create a regional defence pact and impose an ambitious regional settlement. Only in the unpropitious circumstances of Egypt's seizure of the canal did Britain perceive this shared interest and act upon it.

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# ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT

AIOC	Anglo-Iranian Oil Company
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIGS	Chief, Imperial General Staff
COS	Chiefs of Staff
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MEC	Middle East Command
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Council
RAF	Royal Air Force
SAC	Strategic Air Command
UN	United Nations

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, historians of British policy in the Middle East have examined the previously neglected period between the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the Suez crisis, including the 1954 withdrawal of British forces from the Suez Canal Zone base. Yet the relationship between British policy and the Arab-Israeli conflict has yet to be adequately studied. Discussions of British efforts to retain control of the Canal Zone base and the later decision to withdraw have stressed the bilateral relationship between Britain and Egypt. This thesis attempts a tentative exploration of the subject within the broader context of the Arab-Israeli, specifically the Egyptian-Israeli, conflict, as it affected British policy.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter One discusses the perceived indispensability of the Canal Zone base to Britain's position in the Middle East as it shaped British policy and traces the evolution of British relations with Israel and Egypt through early 1951. Chapter Two examines Britain's efforts to retain its position in the Canal Zone base by proposing the Middle East Command (MEC). It also assesses the impact of the search for agreement with Egypt on Anglo-Israeli relations, and Britain's failure to enforce free transit rights in the Suez Canal, to which the British government was nominally committed. It concludes with a discussion of the decision to withdraw and the events leading up to the 1954 Anglo-Egyptian agreement.

Chapter Three treats the Parliamentary debate on the 1954 agreement and comments on the consequences of British withdrawal. The thesis concludes with reflections on the merits of British policy in this period and weighs the merits of alternative policies.

Britain's strategic position after World War Two limited its freedom of manoeuvre. That position, which rested on cooperation with key Arab states, was so important that its abandonment was politically unthinkable. Voluntary abandonment of any area of influence was problematic because any single surrender might threaten the whole by undermining the prestige and image of power which kept local states in thrall to Britain.

There was a tension between Britain's two major objectives in the region: retention of its imperial position, and defence of the region from Soviet invasion or subversion. While the former dictated continued reliance on Britain's traditional Arab client states, the latter implied cooperation with Israel, identified by the Chiefs of Staff (COS) as the strongest local military power as early as the end of 1948. The persistence of Arab-Israeli conflict after the partition of Palestine and the 1948 war seemed to make strong ties with both sides, and thus the two objectives, mutually exclusive. From 1949 to 1956, British policymakers were timid in considering strategic cooperation with Israel and hesitant in responding to successive Israeli overtures, largely because



they feared that stronger Anglo-Israeli ties would elicit Arab enmity. Their analyses often overstated both the consequences in the Arab world of closer Anglo-Israeli relations and the obstacles in Israel to cooperation with Britain. On occasion, British policies themselves added to the difficulty of Anglo-Israeli strategic cooperation.

One school of thought has attributed British coolness toward Israel to anti-Semitism.<sup>2</sup> Anti-Semitic sentiments were present and indeed widely acceptable in the Foreign Office.<sup>3</sup> Similar charges can be levelled at important politicians of the period. Ernest Bevin saw Jews as no more than a religious community, at best a very parochial attitude.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Eden once wrote to an aide, "if we must have preferences, let me murmur in your ear that I prefer Arabs to Jews". This aide, reasonably enough, concluded that his master "loves Arabs and hates Jews".<sup>5</sup>

Those with anti-Semitic tendencies were often strongly pro-Arab. Arabists in the Foreign Office and the Conservative Party felt an affinity for the ways of the Bedouin and the Arab aristocracy.<sup>6</sup> Among some Labour politicians and reformist officials, there was a tendency to see the Arab world as trapped in feudalism, from which British development aid would provide an escape, leading to the supersession of reactionary ruling dynasties by social democratic governments.<sup>7</sup>

The role of anti-Semitic and pro-Arab sentiment in

policymaking should not be exaggerated. Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism often went hand-in-hand, but the two are cognate, not identical, phenomena. An anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist and paternalistic pro-Arab predisposition existed in much of Britain's foreign policy establishment, yet the effects of that predisposition were diffuse and limited. Particular policy decisions turned on calculations, right or wrong, of Britain's national interest. An animus toward Israel, while widespread, was only one of many factors.

Foreign Office Arabists, for example, rarely based their policy prescriptions on personal prejudice alone. They were preoccupied by the perceived need to retain Arab goodwill in an age of imperial vulnerability and British dependence on Middle Eastern oil.<sup>8</sup> Bevin and the advocates of "development diplomacy" were not moved solely by concern for the Arab peasant; they believed new social democratic governments would sympathize with Britain's Labour government, support its foreign policy and use their large sterling balances in ways that would help the British economy.<sup>9</sup>

Proponents of Anglo-Israeli partnership were also motivated by their conception of Britain's interest, not purely disinterested Zionism. Indeed, some men with histories of personal anti-Semitism took a pro-Israel line on policy questions. Britain's first Ambassador to Israel, Sir Alexander Knox Helm, lamented that the Jewish state lacked "what is commonly regarded as the charm of the East" and was

likely to remain "essentially drab and materialistic", yet he urged pro-Israel policies on his political masters, convinced that strategic cooperation with Israel was in the British interest.<sup>10</sup>

For that matter, Eden, despite his Arabist past, became strongly pro-Israel after the Suez crisis, even serving as Chairman of the Conservative Party's Israel Committee, apparently in the belief that Israel was a more reliable ally than its Arab adversaries.<sup>11</sup> By the same token, Winston Churchill, who was unusually philo-Semitic for a man of his generation, took pro-Zionist positions when they were politically useful and often discarded them when they were not. His early support for the Balfour Declaration was rooted in his view that a Jewish national home in Palestine would be a bulwark of British influence. His commitment to Zionism was so lukewarm that when Zionist terrorists assassinated his friend Lord Moyne in 1944, he shelved his plan for partition, leaving the 1939 White Paper, which severely curtailed Jewish emigration to Palestine and was anathema to Zionists, in effect.<sup>12</sup>

Both the Labour governments of 1945-51 and the Conservative government headed by Churchill from 1951 to 1955 regarded the Canal Zone base as central to Britain's position in the Middle East and to the requirements of regional defence. There were politicians in both major parties who favoured cooperation with Israel as the basis of British

policy in the region. Within Cabinet discussions, however, the case for making the achievement of a new defence arrangement with Egypt the top priority proved too strong. The Suez base, it was argued, could not be readily replaced by facilities in Israel. Redeployment to Israel was possible but prohibitively costly. Even expressing a willingness to redeploy might stiffen Egypt's resolve to eject the British presence. Moreover, stronger Anglo-Israeli ties might further embitter relations with Egypt. Fear of alienating Egypt prevented Britain's government from enforcing free transit rights through the Suez Canal and, in conjunction with economic considerations, from using its financial leverage to induce greater Egyptian compliance with British needs. Concern over prestige also contributed to British reluctance to lose the Suez base.

It was only in the face of domestic spending constraints and changes in the global strategic environment that British policymakers concluded that withdrawal from the Suez base, now more vulnerable and less valuable, was acceptable. Presenting withdrawal in a take-it-or-leave-it offer to Egypt cast it as a British initiative rather than a diplomatic humiliation at Egyptian hands. Yet withdrawal created a regional power vacuum inimical to both British and Israeli interests.

Despite the existence of that vacuum and Egypt's increasingly provocative conduct, Churchill's successor neglected fresh opportunities for cooperation with Israel.

Instead Eden tried to bind the "northern tier" states into a cohesive Baghdad Pact and sought regional security through an Arab-Israeli settlement built around Israeli territorial concessions. This policy left Britain with the worst of both worlds; it failed to elicit real loyalty from key Arab states and indeed further embittered Anglo-Egyptian relations while also denying Britain the benefits of better relations with Israel.

Ultimately, Eden did see the disadvantages of his policy and the possible benefits of cooperation with Israel, but only in the unpropitious circumstances of the emerging Suez crisis.

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## CHAPTER ONE

Britain's postwar Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, saw the Middle East as an area of strategic importance "second only to the United Kingdom itself."<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Clement Attlee flirted with withdrawal, considering redeployment of British troops to sub-Saharan Africa and Australasia, with the Arab world as a buffer between the Soviet Union and British possessions. Bevin, his advisers and the COS argued this would damage British prestige and allow Soviet domination of the Persian Gulf and eastern Mediterranean. Britain would lose the only bases outside the mainland from which it could launch retaliatory air strikes against the Soviet Union and perhaps access to Dollar-free oil.<sup>2</sup> Bevin's alternative plan included conciliation of moderate nationalists, development assistance and collaboration on area defence, with reduced British forces.<sup>3</sup>

The centre of Britain's Middle Eastern position and of regional defence plans was the immense British base in the Suez Canal Zone, which contained military and civil facilities, as well as far more troops than were permitted by the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, the legal basis of Britain's military presence.<sup>4</sup> The 1936 arrangement, framed in response to the military threat of Fascist Italy, was designed for the defence of the Canal itself, not the region as a whole, which now concerned British policymakers. The peacetime presence of British troops might not be necessary if Britain were



permitted to evacuate the Canal Zone base while retaining a right of re-occupation in an emergency. In response to a wave of violent nationalist agitation against the British presence, a 1946 mission led by Lord Stansgate, the Air Minister, suggested such an arrangement. When Egyptian negotiators refused to grant a right of re-occupation, the British government, in order to avert an increase in Egyptian hostility, came back with a new offer including an Anglo-Egyptian defence board for consultation, but no right of re-occupation.<sup>5</sup> The "Bevin-Sidky protocol" of October 1946 embodied this proposal but collapsed when Britain contradicted Egyptian claims that the protocol's recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over the Sudan implied union with Egypt. Nationalist agitation toppled the Sidky government and negotiations broke down over the Sudanese question in January of 1947. Britain's government announced its forces would remain in Egypt until the 1936 treaty expired in 1956, while Egypt ultimately sought a U.N. Security Council declaration that the treaty was void.<sup>6</sup>

British willingness to evacuate without a right of re-occupation was not, as it might seem, a recognition of relative weakness. As Bevin told the Cabinet Defence Committee, British forces in Palestine were still able to virtually surround Egypt and intimidate the Egyptian Government into compliance with British requests.<sup>7</sup>

In light of the strategic interdependence of Egypt and

Palestine, the abandonment of the Palestine Mandate inevitably created new challenges for Britain. Once Britain's alternative to partition, an end to communal violence through the creation of Arab and Jewish provinces within a federal state, was rejected by both Arabs and Jews, Bevin and his advisers referred the Mandate to the U.N. and accepted the inevitability of partition. Britain's most trusted local ally, Transjordan, was encouraged to seize as much as it could of the lands allocated to Arabs under the August 1948 U.N. partition resolution, while Britain also tried to contain the Arab-Israeli conflict by imposing an arms embargo on both sides, in conjunction with the U.S. government.<sup>8</sup>

After an October 1948 offensive left Israel in possession of much of the Negev, Britain's position in the region seemed to be in danger. The COS had considered making Gaza and the Negev Britain's principal military position in the Middle East outside Egypt. Now the loss of that territory was imminent, and Britain anticipated an attack on Transjordan, bringing British treaty obligations into effect. Anglo-American pressure halted the Israeli advance and in January 1949 a U.N. ceasefire took effect.<sup>9</sup>

A month earlier the COS had informed the Foreign Office that Israel was clearly the strongest local military power in the Middle East. After Israeli forces shot down five RAF Spitfires over Egyptian territory shortly before the ceasefire took effect, the Middle East Commanders-in-Chief argued

explicitly for better relations with Israel, whose military might, they concluded, was indispensable to regional defence against a Soviet thrust into the region.<sup>10</sup>

Israel was also a fait accompli, whose American backing dictated an Anglo-Israeli rapprochement.<sup>11</sup> Health Minister Aneurin Bevan argued in Cabinet for recognition of Israel, which would be "glad to give us all the facilities needed to establish strong military bases in Palestine". Bevin resisted early recognition, unwilling to risk Arab hostility.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent British policy attempted to stabilize the region and avoid choosing between Israel and the Arab states. Britain tried to reassure the Arab World by sending troops to Aqaba and reinforcing the RAF base at Amman. To avoid alarming Israel, the Arab Legion was not rearmed and Transjordanian territorial gains were not guaranteed by the Anglo-Transjordan Treaty.<sup>13</sup> During inconclusive Israel-Jordan talks in 1949-50, Britain pressed King Abdullah of Jordan to demand the Negev as a condition of peace, but he preferred a buffer zone between Jordan and Egypt.<sup>14</sup> In April 1950 Britain accepted Jordan's formal annexation of the West Bank and persuaded the U.S. government that annexation was more likely to produce stability than leaving the West Bank in juridical limbo. Bevin also secured Cabinet acceptance of extending the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty to the West Bank but reassured Israel and America by stating that Britain would not establish peacetime bases there, and formally recognizing Israel.<sup>15</sup>

Bevin noted the desirability of getting both Israel and the Arab states formally committed to the Western bloc, apparently envisioning an alliance analogous to NATO.<sup>16</sup> Such an alliance would also provide a framework within which Britain might retain control of the Canal Zone base. With Palestine lost, Britain was less able to secure Egyptian cooperation through intimidation, and might have to choose between retracting its expressed willingness to evacuate and accepting the loss of its strategic domination of Egypt. Egyptian cooperation seemed less likely after staff talks between Field Marshal Slim, now CIGS, and his Egyptian counterparts broke down in mid-1950 over Egypt's unwillingness to discuss participation in a defensive alliance before British withdrawal from the Canal Zone was arranged.<sup>17</sup>

At the May 1950 Foreign Ministers meeting British representatives made the case for a regional pact including Turkey and linked to NATO, hoping American support would make Egypt more compliant. U.S. State Department officials replied that the Western powers lacked the necessary supply capabilities and should concentrate on anchoring NATO in the European theatre before extending it to the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>18</sup>

Aware that a regional pact was impractical without American support, Bevin raised a fresh issue with Secretary of State Dean Acheson. He urged a declaration by Britain, France and America, the three powers selling arms in the region,

opposing forcible border revision and asking Middle Eastern states for assurances that arms sold to them would be used solely for regional defence.<sup>19</sup> The May 25 Tripartite Declaration to this effect was, among other things, implicit recognition by Britain of Israel's possession of the Negev, a fact Britain was clearly in no position to alter unilaterally.<sup>20</sup> The Declaration also committed the U.S. to any actions needed to stop Israeli aggression; in British eyes, as a future Foreign Office Assistant Under-Secretary for the Middle East later noted, it was axiomatic that the Declaration "was originally designed ... as a defence of Arab states against an Israeli attack".<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, while Britain accepted Israel's existence and sought its cooperation, a certain wariness remained. Before partition, Bevin had worried that the Soviets would fill a Jewish state with indoctrinated immigrants, turning it into a Soviet satellite.<sup>22</sup> He later looked askance at Israel's policy of non-identification with either power bloc, a necessity in light of the Anglo-American arms embargo and Israel's dependence on Soviet arms. Bevin took the policy seriously and worried that Israel might seek economic domination of the region, "imposing her own ideas of neutrality on the Arab world". Good relations with Israel could not be at the expense of friendship with the Arab states, who were "more willing... to commit themselves to the anti-Communist camp".<sup>23</sup>

One tool for keeping Egypt and the other Arab states

friendly was arms sales. In July 1949 the COS had noted Egypt's desire to buy arms, and Slim had warned that if Britain refused to sell Egypt might withdraw from Anglo-Egyptian negotiations and seek arms from Czechoslovakia or Switzerland.<sup>24</sup> Britain rescinded its arms embargo almost nine months before the signing of the Tripartite Declaration, and increased the flow of arms to the Arab states thereafter. Egypt was the principal beneficiary of this trend; from July 1950 to December 1951 Egypt was scheduled to receive 30 heavy anti-aircraft guns, 16 Centurion tanks and 90 aircraft. Britain had offered no tanks or aircraft (with the exception of 6 Austers offered to Jordan for observation purposes) to any other Middle Eastern state.<sup>25</sup>

Bevin claimed Egypt and Iraq needed larger defence establishments to keep internal order.<sup>26</sup> The priority given to retaining Arab support was clear; Britain wished to avoid conflict with Israel, but if it had to choose between Israel and the Arabs, felt compelled to tilt toward the Arab states. Sir Wm. Strang, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, told Israeli diplomats Britain would not sell arms to Israel until it had made peace with its neighbours. No similar condition applied to the Arab states. An Israeli diplomat told Kenneth Younger, a junior Minister at the Foreign Office, this would discourage the Arab states from seeking peace since "they would know that until peace was made Israel would be unable to obtain arms from Britain".<sup>27</sup>

In July 1950, once Israel had taken a pro-Western position on the Korean conflict, Younger suggested letting Israel buy arms, to further improve relations, and align Britain's arms sales policy with the more evenhanded policies of France and America.<sup>28</sup> In August the Defence Committee, now more concerned about the prospect of a Soviet move into the Middle East and thus the need for regional defence, approved Younger's suggestion in principle. The increase in Britain's own rearmament programme choked off the supply of arms for other purposes, however, and no sales were made at that time.<sup>29</sup>

The Korean War opened a fresh chapter in Israel's relations with Britain as with the West as a whole. Israel condemned North Korean aggression in the U.N. and supported a military response. Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett claimed disingenuously that there was no break with non-identification, since the "police action" was a U.N. undertaking, not that of either superpower. While this may have helped fend off charges that the government was inconsistent in its policies, it was not taken seriously by the Soviets, who shifted to a more anti-Israel line.<sup>30</sup>

There were several reasons for Israel's position. In need of U.S. friendship and economic aid, the Israeli government had reason to follow the American lead; while Truman was pro-Israel, "his friendship had to be carefully tended" and Acheson's State Department "held Israel in very limited affection".<sup>31</sup> There was also an evolving pro-Western

consensus in Israel, a function not only of abstract devotion to democracy, but of the obvious difference in the condition of Jews in the Western and Soviet blocs. Pro-Soviet sentiment was largely confined to the Mapam grouping (which was to be definitively discredited when the Prague Trials and Doctors' Plot affair showed the absurdity of the notion that the Soviets could be true friends to Israel and Jewry).<sup>32</sup>

British and American officials, meeting in July 1950, agreed that "when the chips were down Israel would be basically with us" and concluded both Israel's cooperation and the British position in Egypt were necessary for the defence of the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> The COS agreed, and found in Israel's position on Korea ground for "hopes that she might side with the Western powers" in the event of a Soviet incursion into the region. Yet cooperation with Israel, they warned, could require concessions which "could not be granted except at the risk of alienating the Arab states". In this case, relations with the Arab states must take priority. Yet as long as Britain was committed to retaining the Canal Zone base the strategic interdependence of Egypt and Israel was inescapable. To the COS the base made Egypt's defence necessary, yet Haifa was the principal port on the Levant coast, and the rail and road lines of communication necessary for Egypt's defence ran through Israel. Securing these lines without Israeli co-operation would be "a costly operation" and "politically embarrassing". It was also virtually impossible



to hold a line of defence far enough from Egypt to prevent Soviet short-range aircraft from reaching the Canal Zone base without including Israel in defensive dispositions.

By 1957, the COS estimated, Israel's army would include 30,000 regulars, 12,000 conscripts and a trained reserve of at least 90,000. If adequately equipped, it would be "considerably more effective on a unit for unit basis than any other Middle East army".<sup>34</sup>

In October and November possibilities for short-term co-operation with Israel materialized. Both the British and Israel governments had reservations about the steadiness of American leadership in Korea, and feared that an advance by U.N. forces toward the Chinese border would precipitate Chinese involvement and a wider war. After Chinese troops crossed the Yalu and repulsed U.N. forces in late November, the Truman administration proposed a Security Council resolution branding China an aggressor. Bevin was ill, leaving Attlee in direct control of British foreign policy. He and Hugh Gaitskell, Chancellor of the Exchequer, feared action against China would lead to Chinese moves against Hong Kong or Malaya, but favoured abstention in order to retain U.S. goodwill. Bevan, Younger and War Minister John Strachey thought Britain should oppose the resolution.

On 25th January 1951 Britain's Ambassador to the U.N., Sir Gladwyn Jebb, working closely with his Israeli counterpart, Abba Evan, presented an amendment to the

resolution, stating no action against China would take place before efforts at conciliation were made. U.S. acceptance of the amendment and passage of the amended resolution saved the British government from both a Cabinet crisis and a possible split with America.<sup>35</sup>

Israel's help had not gone unnoticed; when Ambassador Elath visited the Foreign Office on 10th January, Bevin thanked his guest for Eban's efforts on behalf of a ceasefire and the creation of a demilitarized zone near China's border. He also promised to inform Elath of the conclusions of a forthcoming conference of Commonwealth governments which had doubts about U.S. policy in Korea.<sup>36</sup>

Helm's despatches from Tel Aviv described the emerging view in the Knesset that a new group of powers was forming, "resolutely opposed to Communism", but more prudent than the alarmingly bellicose elements in the U.S. The Israeli press in particular reflected the notion "that this group of powers is forming round the British Commonwealth".<sup>37</sup> This echoed Bevin's own earlier hopes for a British-led "third force", independent of both superpowers,<sup>38</sup> if too late to be terribly appealing in Britain. (If anything, opinion in the Foreign Office was that Israel might tend to overstate Anglo-American differences.<sup>39</sup>)

Helm also recorded displays of Soviet hostility that seemed to nudge Israel deeper into the Western camp, including objections to a proposed Israeli Ambassador to Moscow, who

might have served as a rallying point for Soviet Jews. According to the Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry, discrimination against these Jews "was being carried to considerable lengths".<sup>40</sup>

The tentative emergence of an Anglo-Israeli community of interest was accomplished by the appearance of new obstacles to Anglo-Egyptian cooperation. Egypt had never concluded a peace treaty with Israel and interfered with the passage of commercial vessels through the Suez Canal to Haifa, which it defended as an exercise of belligerent rights. The interference with Israeli commerce offended Zionist M.P.s, and Egypt's ban on the passage of tankers to the British refinery at Haifa provided an incentive for Britain to push for restoration of full transit rights. Israel had asked the U.S. and Britain to take action at the U.N. However, opposition from State Department officials who feared this would alienate Egypt from the West, combined with British reluctance to antagonize Egypt while the negotiations surrounding defence cooperation were still going on, prevented effective action.<sup>41</sup>

Egypt's Wafd government, elected in February 1950, took an increasingly rigid nationalist line in talks with Britain, eventually declaring the 1936 treaty invalid as a basis for negotiations. On 25th October Britain's Defence Committee approved the delivery of 16 Centurion tanks for which Egypt had made partial payment. Egypt's obduracy gave ammunition to backbench opponents of the sale, including Richard Crossman,

who told the House of Commons on 22nd November that after Egypt "achieved the second round against Israel, the next use of the tanks will be against us".<sup>42</sup> At a Cabinet meeting the next day Bevan reported considerable opposition to the sale among Labour backbenchers, who saw no reason for Britain to sell arms to a state that was obstructing commerce through the Canal and "seeking to deprive us of the military facilities to which we were entitled under the treaty".<sup>43</sup> Cabinet agreed to withhold delivery until Bevin reported further on the likely course of talks with Egypt.

On 30th November Bevin, soon to resume discussions with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, warned his colleagues Egypt was likely to refuse any agreement under which British troops would remain in peacetime. In this case, "he would have no alternative but to make it clear that we should stand upon our rights under the Treaty until such time as it expired". His colleagues noted the weakness of the British position; with more troops in the Canal Zone than the treaty allowed (many of them administrative), Britain could plausibly be charged with violating its terms. The only hopeful note Bevin sounded was that agreement might be possible on terms that would limit British use of the base to wartime, allow Egyptians to guard it in peacetime and leave British technicians on site.

An unidentified Minister observed that if Egypt's interference with commerce through the Canal was based on the claim that formal peace with Israel had not been secured, "the

same argument could be used to justify our decision to suspend the supply of Centurion tanks". Bevin, in what reads like a veiled reference to the Zionist basis of much opposition to the transaction, replied that "it was not to be assumed that these protests would not be renewed if the Egyptian Government adopted a more accommodating attitude" on the question of the base. If arms sales to Egypt resumed, "it would be difficult to refuse similar facilities to other states in the Middle East". There was also concern in the House of Commons that it was unwise to export large quantities of arms when Britain's own forces were inadequately equipped.<sup>44</sup>

On 8th December Bevin met with the COS and recounted his recent talks with Egypt's Foreign Minister, Saleh el Din. Agreement might be possible with the Egyptians running the base in peace but Britain retaining full rights of access in war. After the existing treaty expired, Britain would be allowed periodic inspections of the base. Until then, Britain would train and equip Egyptian forces. The two states would also conclude an Air Defence Agreement. "One possibility for compensating for our loss of facilities in the Canal Zone", Bevin added, "might be to negotiate a separate agreement with Israel". Saleh el Din had made it clear that Egypt could not enter a defence agreement including both Britain and Israel but "would raise no objection to our having a separate agreement with Israel".

Discussing "the possibility of enlisting the help of the

United States Government either in our approach to Egypt or to Israel", Air Marshal Sir John Slessor noted that during recent Joint Chiefs of Staff talks "the United States Chiefs had thought that it might be wise not to press the question of bringing Israel into our defence arrangements... for fear of upsetting Egypt". The Americans had suggested that if Egypt insisted on British evacuation a joint Anglo-American demarche should be made, offering the Egyptians participation in a tripartite defence arrangement. Bevin worried, however, that bringing an American presence into Egypt would strike Stalin as provocative.<sup>45</sup>

At the 14th December Cabinet meeting Bevin outlined the possible settlement, under which the Canal Zone base would cease to be Britain's principal military facility in the region. Gaitskell was troubled by the likelihood that constructing an alternative base in Israel or Cyrenaica "might cost a very large sum. He hoped, therefore, that nothing would be said... which would lead the Egyptian government or public to believe that, if sufficiently pressed, the United Kingdom Government would be prepared to leave the Canal Zone and construct a costly base elsewhere".

Other ministers feared a premature commitment by Britain to such a settlement would encourage the Egyptian government to "make a public statement to that effect in Cairo and, by raising Egyptian expectations, make it more difficult to secure a satisfactory settlement". Bevin was authorised to

continue negotiations early in the new year.<sup>46</sup>

The next day a telegram from Britain's Ambassador in Washington, Sir Oliver Franks, raised the possibility of a new role for Israel in British plans for the Middle East. Franks described Moshe Sharett's recent visit to America and talks with State Department officials. Sharett had suggested that America stockpile oil and foodstuffs in Israel for the use of the Western powers in the event of war. Israel was also interested in manufacturing mortars, land mines and ammunition for the defence of Greece and Turkey. Loy Henderson of the State Department told Franks "there was a growing receptivity in Israel to the idea of United Kingdom/Israel cooperation... Israel's stockpiling suggestion would seem to provide a convenient manner in which the United Kingdom could approach Israel for the desired facilities in war".<sup>47</sup>

Britain's Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces, General Sir Brian Robertson, was scheduled to visit the Middle Eastern capitals in February 1951. Israel was added to his itinerary; the COS briefing for his trip instructed him to "probe how far the Israel Government seems prepared to co-operate". He was to avoid discussing British negotiations with Egypt and enquire about: Israel's willingness to end its ban on overflights and offer Britain an air corridor, the stationing of Commonwealth land and air forces on Israeli soil in wartime, and the prospects of wartime transit rights and industrial cooperation. It was still the COS assumption that

despite what the Israeli Government might think and say, public opinion "still largely favours non-identification". Memories of the British occupation and concern that overt alignment with the West would imperil Soviet Jewry would constrain Israel's response to British initiatives. This was not only a dubious reading of Israeli public opinion but ignored the fact that, in Soviet eyes, Israel was already in the Western camp. The danger of adverse Arab reaction was "a further reason for not going too far or too fast with the Israelis". If the Israelis asked for help in raising the blockade of the canal and building a pipeline to Haifa, Robertson "should reply that these are political matters, outside your terms of reference".<sup>48</sup>

When the Defence Committee discussed the forthcoming visit on 16th February, Defence Minister Emanuel Shinwell thought it unlikely that Israel would grant Britain bases in peacetime, although there might be "a better chance" in war. Gaitskell, normally pro-Israel, wanted it clearly understood that Israel could expect no financial help from a fiscally strapped British government. Britain had already released the Israelis' blocked sterling balances, and "they had no reason to expect further generosity for the time being". If they wanted arms, "they would have to pay for them". As for industrial cooperation, George Strauss, Minister of Supply, "did not think that Israel was in a position to offer us much... but there would be advantages in creating an



industrial link".<sup>49</sup>

On 22nd February the Committee considered a COS study which concluded that a main base in Egypt would remain crucial to Middle Eastern defence. After 1956 Britain's strategic plans would require the Egypt base to be functioning in peace and capable of full reactivation on short notice should war break out, or an interim base to be established elsewhere to support British forces in peace and during the early stages of a war while the Egypt base was being reactivated.

Israel was the only feasible location for an interim base because of its central location. A base in Israel could deploy forces to meet any Soviet threat and defend both the main and interim bases. Construction of the base, however, could cost as much as 50 million pounds. The need to supply administrative personnel to reactivate the Egypt base at the opening of hostilities would, owing to the shortage of personnel shipping capacity, result in a slower build-up of combat troops. Moreover, stationing the necessary British ground troops and RAF installations raised the question of whether Israel would accept "what is tantamount to a BRITISH occupation". Defence of the Middle East also required transit rights through Israel, which might be jeopardized by being linked to a more ambitious proposal of military collaboration involving the re-admission of large numbers of U.K. troops.

The COS concluded that a settlement of the kind discussed by Bevin and Saleh el Din would secure Britain's interests.

If Britain undertook to withdraw combat and headquarters troops from Egypt as soon as possible, gradually introducing civilian administration and an Anglo-Egyptian police presence, the Egyptians would be likely to accept a new agreement, providing British access in war by 1956. Britain would then lease the base, leaving behind only civilians and the RAF presence needed for air defence.<sup>50</sup>

Despite Shinwell's contention that commitment to an early withdrawal would be "a dangerous mistake", and that Britain should retain the permitted 10,000 troops in the Canal Zone for now, the Cabinet agreed in principle that the COS suggestion might form part of a new offer to Egypt.<sup>51</sup>

That night, at the end of his visit to Israel, Robertson met with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, Sharett and the Israeli Chief of Staff. Ben-Gurion said "he saw a great danger to civilisation in the world to-day and he believed Israel should act as if she were a member of the British Commonwealth" in international emergencies. He conceded that he was speaking for himself and "there were people in Israel who held quite other opinions". He was willing to admit British officers for further discussions if they wore plainclothes and came under the auspices of Britain's legations. When Robertson asked about a British air corridor, he "was told that this required consideration: I understand they are concerned that a precedent may be created for other countries". Ben-Gurion, Robertson concluded, "spoke with

intense feeling and seriousness... it was intended to be a big event in Anglo-Israeli relations".<sup>52</sup>

In the following weeks Foreign Office analysts examined Ben-Gurion's suggestion. James Wardrop of the Foreign Office Eastern Department speculated that the proposal might have been made in the hope that Britain would reject it, which would "make it more difficult (if not impossible) for us to obtain from Israel the facilities we require". Ben-Gurion was essentially seeking more strategic collaboration between Britain and Israel, but his reference to the Commonwealth caused some confusion. "The precise relationship", Wardrop noted, "is hard to visualize". There was no doubt, however, that "considerable practical advantages (e.g. the highest priority in the issue of arms)" would accrue to Israel. Ben-Gurion, he wrote, had stressed the personal nature of his suggestion and Britain should not "assume that the kind of arrangement he has now proposed would necessarily be respected and implemented should some other Government get into power".<sup>53</sup>

R.J. Bowker, Assistant Under-Secretary for Middle Eastern Affairs, suggested Ben-Gurion's was "a difficult offer to answer because it is tantamount to suggesting that we should straightaway establish a relationship which can only result from long association and established confidence".<sup>54</sup>

Strang suggested Bevin's own talks with the Israeli Ambassador and Robertson's visit had "broken the ice, with one rather surprising result". It was too soon to make concrete

recommendations, "but there is something useful to be made of all this, if we play the hand well".<sup>55</sup>

On the night of 5th March Bevin, Strang and Bowker discussed the Israeli proposal in the broader context of British policy in the Middle East as a whole. Bevin said relations with Israel should be addressed in conjunction with relations with Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. Britain should aim at establishing special relationships with all four states, though the form would vary. In Egypt, "we were aiming at an agreement under which we should keep an active base in peace for use in war. This would mean establishing with Egypt quite as special a relationship as the Israel Prime Minister had suggested... with Israel". Different forms of aid to each country could improve relations. For Israel, Bevin suggested, "we might among other things help over the citrus crop and potash".<sup>56</sup>

At a 22nd March meeting of the COS Committee, Sir Nevil Brownjohn stressed the importance of Britain's wartime requirements in Israel. In his view, "bearing in mind certain constitutional limitations and the question of our relations with the Arab States, we should be as forthcoming as possible". The Foreign Office's draft telegrams to Helm, instructing him to inform the Israelis of Britain's commitment to improved relations but point out the impossibility of a relationship analogous to Commonwealth membership, "seemed to him likely to have rather a damping effect". G.W. Furlonge,

Head of the Eastern Department, agreed to modify the telegrams.<sup>57</sup>

In his correspondence with Helm, Furlonge observed that it was, after all, Ben-Gurion himself who had stressed that the Anglo-Israeli cooperation he envisioned was in the context of an emergency.<sup>58</sup> Helm's own impression was "that, though we were talking about the emergency of war, the Israel Prime Minister's remarks related not merely to that emergency but to what he hoped could be our day to day relations in peacetime as well as war".<sup>59</sup>

After months of ill health, Bevin resigned as Foreign Secretary on 9th March, to be succeeded by Herbert Morrison. At the 2nd April Cabinet meeting Morrison presented a memorandum outlining the three courses of action Britain could pursue with Egypt: resuming negotiations with a willingness to make further concessions, informing Egypt that Britain was unwilling to resume negotiations on treaty revision at all, and resuming negotiations without the willingness to make substantial concessions.<sup>60</sup>

The first course was impractical since British requirements, as defined by the COS, "could not be reduced without gravely endangering our military position in the Middle East". The second would place Britain in a politically indefensible position in 1956. By default, the third was left as the only practical policy.

Bevin, who remained in the Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal,

remarked that treaty revision in a way that allowed the Egyptians to see themselves as equal partners with Britain might lead to similar arrangements with the other states in the region. Because the Canal Zone base was crucial to Britain's position in the Middle East, reaching a new agreement with Egypt regarding the base had to precede a new arrangement with Israel; "we could not negotiate with Israel until we had come to terms with Egypt, but treaties with both might open the way to restoring satisfactory relations between the two".

Britain could withdraw its troops from Egypt over several years, during which British officers would train the Egyptian forces. The COS insisted on a right of re-entry in wartime, "and we should best be able to exercise this right if we had been able to build up in the meantime relations of real cordiality between the armed forces of the two countries."<sup>61</sup>

## NOTES

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40. Helm to Eastern Department, 30 January 1951, FO 371/91714.
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42. Parliamentary Debates (Commons) (hereafter H. of C. Debs., with date and column number), His Majesty's Stationery Office, London: 22 November 1950, column 446.

43. CC(50) 77, 23 November 1950, CAB 21/1924.
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45. "Egypt: Record of a Conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Chiefs of Staff on the 8th December, 1950 at 3.30 p.m.", *ibid.*
46. Extract from CC(50) 86, 14 December 1950, *ibid.*
47. Franks to Foreign Office, 15 December 1950, DEFE 7/203.
48. "Brief for General Robertson's Visit to Israel", DO (51) 8, 13 February 1951, CAB 131/11.
49. "Minutes of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street, SW1, on Friday, 16th February, 1951, at 4 p.m.", CAB 131/10.
50. "Egypt: British Forces in the Middle East", DO (51) 12, CAB 21/1978. A few months earlier, CIGS Slim had made the case that abandoning the Egypt base in the context of the Korean conflict and the possibility of a global war "would be regarded almost as an act of treachery by the other N.A.T.O. powers". Extract from Minutes of COS (50) 188, 29 November 1950 *ibid.*
51. Extract from DO (51) 3, 21 February 1951, *ibid.*
52. Robertson's account appears in Tel Aviv to Foreign Office, 22 February 1951, DEFE 7/203.
53. Note by Wardrop, 26 February 1951, FO 37191716.
54. Note by Bowker, 1 March 1951, *ibid.*
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## CHAPTER TWO

The policy Bevin articulated, that of pursuing agreement with Egypt before seeking closer cooperation with Israel, had its problems. If, as Cabinet decided after discussing Morrison's memorandum, Britain was to continue negotiating but offer no substantive concessions, agreement would seem unlikely. The vigorous use of whatever leverage Britain might have over Egypt in other fields of activity, in order to induce a more forthcoming attitude, would appear to be a useful tactic for the British government to employ. Yet Britain was reluctant to do so when this entailed sacrifice in terms of economic interest and prestige.

On 15 March 1951, Douglas Jay, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, informed the House of Commons that Britain and Egypt had reached agreement on the disposition of Egypt's sterling balance of 230 millions. One hundred and fifty million would be released over the next 10-13½ years; release of the remainder would be negotiated before that period ended. Britain would also supply Egypt with 11 million pounds in petroleum products a year.

Churchill asked if the agreement would go forward "irrespective of the illegal blockade" maintained by Egypt in the Suez Canal. Jay replied that Egyptian policy in the Canal had no connection with a "purely financial" transaction.<sup>1</sup> On the 20th Eden argued that an important financial transaction "cannot be divorced from the general political relations

between the two countries". The Egyptian blockade, he stated, was clearly contrary to the 1888 Suez Canal Convention. Because of the blockade, the Haifa refinery, which could produce 4m tons of refined oil annually, was now producing a quarter of that, with a cost to Britain of at least 20m pounds a year.<sup>2</sup>

The government, however, was unwilling to undermine the sterling area, and with it Britain's image as an important financial, as well as military, power. British reluctance to use this economic weapon to extract concessions from Egypt was made clear in the reassurances the Foreign Office instructed the Ambassador in Cairo, Sir Ralph Stevenson, to relay to Egypt's Foreign Minister; while the blockade was resented, the government "stuck to their guns in spite of heavy attacks by the Opposition" and "there was no question of repudiation" of the agreement.<sup>3</sup>

British policymakers had some grounds for hoping that Egyptian concessions in defence arrangements could be secured in another way. An important factor was America's new interest in regional defence.

American attitudes had changed over the years. After the 1947 "Pentagon talks" British and American strategic planners had devised a de facto joint strategy for Middle Eastern defence, based on Egypt, with a SAC offensive from British airfields as the crucial element in the allied defence and counterattack against a Soviet invasion. By mid-1949 it was

clear that U.S. planners were departing from the British view of regional defence and were only interested in securing Gulf oil and retaining strategic air bases in the region. The Defence Department then adopted a new plan in which the Canal Zone was no longer necessary as a bomber base. In October of 1949 the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), General Omar Bradley, told Air Marshal Tedder the Americans now preferred to concentrate their efforts on European defence and avoid entanglement in Middle Eastern issues.<sup>4</sup> This accounted for the cool reception given to Bevin's suggestion for a regional pact at the May 1950 meeting of Foreign Ministers.

The Korean War had changed things by making an invasion of the region seem more likely. At the July meeting of British and American officials the British delegates had pushed for a greater American commitment to the defence of the region, arguing that Britain's resources were stretched thin.<sup>5</sup> By January 1951 members of the State Department Policy Planning Staff were making the case for British and American participation in an eastern Mediterranean defence organization similar to, but separate from, NATO. The JCS, however, would not go beyond linking NATO with the Middle East by offering membership to Greece and Turkey. Congress, they argued, would be more willing to accept a limited commitment and Britain's pride would be served by having a command, separate from NATO, in the Middle East, which might also ease Anglo-Egyptian

agreement on the Canal Zone. Negotiations between the State and Defence Departments produced a compromise whereby Greece and Turkey were invited to join NATO and the question of a Middle East organization was left open for the time being.<sup>6</sup>

On 15 May an American aide-mémoire formally notified the Foreign Office of U.S. support for the accession of Greece and Turkey to NATO.<sup>7</sup> The COS were concerned that Turkey's involvement would draw it into European defence at the expense of its commitment to the defence of the Middle East. Greek and Turkish membership might also prompt requests to join from other Middle Eastern states whose involvement might not be useful, and would add to NATO's administrative burden. The U.S., and to a lesser extent Britain, might also be pressed to divert resources for the defence of Greece and Turkey, at the expense of Middle Eastern defence. On balance, they concluded, these drawbacks were outweighed by the fact that America would be, however tenuously, brought into regional defence.<sup>8</sup>

There might also be political difficulties; France opposed full membership for Greece and Turkey and the Scandinavian members might prove reluctant to extend their commitments. The central consideration, Morrison told the Cabinet, was that the proposal "would extend American military commitments into the Eastern Mediterranean. This has always been our object".<sup>9</sup>

While this interim measure went ahead the State Department continued lobbying for the more comprehensive



solution of a regional security pact. A new organization, the Policy Planning Staff argued, would allow for the co-ordination of European and Middle Eastern defence and end the impasse over the Canal Zone base. U.S. involvement would prevent the new arrangement from looking like a continuation of British occupation by other means, and thus ease Egyptian acceptance.<sup>10</sup>

At a 24 May meeting Oliver Franks and Air Chief Marshal William Elliott were told by the State Department and JCS that America would back a Middle East Command indirectly connected to NATO.<sup>11</sup> The details only emerged from Anglo-American talks in June and July. The British preference was for a Supreme Allied Command, Middle East, to be held by a British commander, thus preserving Britain's position in the region. He would work with a NATO Middle East Standing Group, linking NATO and the MEC. The Middle East States would be represented on a defence advisory board.<sup>12</sup> The Americans feared close ties between NATO and the MEC, since a command that was essentially an extension of NATO, with a very limited role for local states, might prove unacceptable to an Egyptian government that had to accommodate nationalist sentiment. Close ties might also lead to the commitment of U.S. combat troops, which the Defence Department, otherwise amenable to direct links, wanted to avoid.<sup>13</sup> There were also Anglo-American differences over the command of naval forces in the Mediterranean. The Americans wanted the naval forces supporting NATO's southern

flank under the command of an American Admiral, while the British Cabinet had agreed it was politically necessary to bring Mediterranean sea communications under the control of a British commander.<sup>14</sup>

These disagreements were resolved at an 8 June meeting between Bradley and the British COS and meetings between officials through July.<sup>15</sup> There would be a British Supreme Commander, and strong informal ties between NATO and the MEC. Britain would chair a Middle East Defence Board on which the Arab States would sit as equal partners. As the British hoped, the Americans accepted the location of MEC headquarters in the Canal Zone, as long as this could be done without further Anglo-Egyptian conflict.<sup>16</sup>

The emerging Anglo-American consensus on the MEC now altered the dynamics of the Anglo-Egyptian relationship. Following Cabinet approval of the approach to treaty revision regarded as acceptable by the COS, Ambassador Stevenson had been instructed to resume negotiations. Stevenson presented Britain's latest proposals, which had been substantially rejected by Egypt before, on 11 April. On 24 April Egypt presented counter-proposals which not only reiterated the demand for the evacuation of British troops but hinted at the prospect of outright abrogation of the 1936 treaty if an acceptable agreement proved elusive.<sup>17</sup>

On 28 April Morrison warned his colleagues that the Egyptians "are not so much interested in the form of their

relationship with us or in finding suitable political cover for joint Anglo-Egyptian defence arrangements as they are in their immediate objective of getting rid of British troops from Egyptian soil irrespective of their own or Middle East security". The Americans, he added, were disappointed by Egypt's intransigence and "apprehensive lest a further decline in Anglo-Egyptian relations may prejudice their own new approach to the Middle Eastern problem. They consider it essential that our own reply to Egypt should leave the door open for a continuation of negotiations".

Cabinet's principal objective then, was "to avoid a rupture with Egypt". Given the chasm between Britain and Egypt on treaty revision, "the problem...arises of how we can best contrive to keep the negotiations open without making any concessions of substance". This might be achieved by raising again the question of the Sudan, insisting that union between Egypt and the Sudan could only be with Sudanese consent. Egypt was unlikely to concede on this matter, where its position was legally, morally and politically weak.<sup>18</sup>

Stevenson resumed discussions on the future of the Sudan that summer. The apparent impossibility of reaching an acceptable settlement with Egypt, in conjunction with other events, shifted the British government towards a more assertive stance on the question of transit rights in the Suez Canal.

By now, the Nahas government in Cairo had not only

tightened the blockade regulations but acquired from Saudi Arabia the islands of Tiran and Senafir in the Straits of Tiran. This would have the effect of rendering a projected Israeli port at Eilat, on the Gulf of Aqaba, virtually unusable. On 12 June 1951 the UN Truce Supervisors denounced the Egyptian blockade as a violation of the Armistice Agreement with Israel, rather than a legitimate exercise of belligerent rights.<sup>19</sup>

Inside and outside of Parliament, opposition members pressed for a more vigorous stance. Most noticeably, Eden delivered an Empire Day address in which he asserted, with Churchill by his side, "giving away just international rights does not win peace", and called for the government to send destroyers to escort tankers to Haifa.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, as Britain suffered from one of the recurrent sterling crises of the early post-war period, the fiscal burden imposed by the blockade on Haifa was unusually heavy.<sup>21</sup> With the costs of inaction high and agreement with Egypt seemingly very remote, the government brought a resolution, calling on Egypt to raise the blockade, to the Security Council.<sup>22</sup>

State Department officials knew the measure was offensive to the Egyptians, but saw it as preferable to a British effort to force the Canal. In anticipation of such a step, Egypt mobilized artillery and tanks near the Canal, making armed conflict seem alarmingly near. American representatives did meet with Egyptian officials and tried in vain to secure at

least a weakening of the blockade.<sup>23</sup> The U.S. also succeeded in delaying a vote on the resolution, hoping time would produce a solution. On 1 September the resolution passed, with the once pro-Israel USSR among those abstaining.<sup>24</sup>

The resolution itself was not enough to remove the blockade but did intensify Egyptian hostility. The Nahas government felt compelled by the pressure of nationalist opinion to move in the direction of formal abrogation, despite the support of King Farouk, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister for treaty revision compatible with their understanding of Egypt's sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

As the Egyptians moved towards abrogation, the British government rushed to present the MEC proposal. Morrison's letter to Acheson of 15 August suggests that, despite his doubts about Egypt's good faith, he thought the MEC proposal, with American backing, might be a vehicle for a settlement. Yet his restatement of Britain's case also reads as if it were designed to absolve the British government of responsibility in American eyes should agreement fail to materialize.

Egypt, he wrote, would never be able to defend itself against attack by a major power. Britain could not withdraw not only because of cost but because the Suez base was essential to regional defence. Britain was serving not only its own interests but those of "all freedom-loving nations. No question of imperialism exists". U.S. bomber bases were welcome in Britain and "we do not see why the Egyptians should

object to our presence for similar reasons in their country". "If Britain were ejected from Egypt, not only would the establishment of the proposed Allied Command be of little practical value but the effect on the Turks might be most unsettling". There was "at least a chance...that if we show a firm and united front, while demonstrating our willingness to meet the reasonable wishes of Egypt, the consequences of a refusal to withdraw may not be so terrible after all".<sup>26</sup> At the September meeting of Foreign Ministers Morrison reiterated his position that the MEC would make agreement with Egypt and its participation in regional defence possible, while Acheson expressed the State Department view that more concessions would be needed to make the proposal acceptable to Egyptian nationalist opinion.<sup>27</sup>

As agreement with Egypt under the MEC seemed to move closer, British policy toward Israel became, if anything, more cautious. Morrison wrote in July that defence cooperation within the MEC framework left little scope for overt Israeli involvement. Even a proposal for conversations including Israeli representatives "would be doomed in advance by the refusal of the Arab States to take part in any meeting attended by Israel".<sup>28</sup> The MEC, one official wrote, was "a means of solving our political difficulties with Egypt. This will mean having Egypt in the Command and it would seem, therefore, that we cannot have Israel". Any cooperation with Israel "will have to take place on a bilateral basis".<sup>29</sup> The

Foreign Office had no plan for such bilateral cooperation and therefore nothing concrete to offer Israel.

In a late August meeting with John Chadwick, the British chargé in Tel Aviv, Michael Comay of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to press speculation about the creation of a defence pact for the Middle East. If such speculation were well-founded, he thought it natural that the Western powers would give Israel "an indication of the broad outlines of policy and of the part they hoped that Israel would play". Chadwick downplayed the significance of the MEC. which, he suggested, "would be in a looser form than Comay seemed to think". The pact "did not necessarily affect the pragmatic approach" discussed during the Robertson visit, "namely that we should develop practical means of cooperation on defence matters".<sup>30</sup>

Furlonge reminded Chadwick of the unwillingness of the Arab states, especially Egypt, "to become involved jointly with Israel" in any defence arrangement. In the long run, co-operation would be through a central body maintaining close liaison with Israel and the individual Arab States. Chadwick was to stress "the Israeli/United Kingdom angle rather than any multilateral relationship", in part because "we are inclined to think that Ben Gurion (sic) himself is more keen on the bilateral relationship", in part because details of the MEC would not be settled until the North Atlantic Council meeting in late September. For the moment "we cannot disclose

our ideas to the Israelis even in the most general terms".<sup>31</sup>

There were doubts about the MEC within the Cabinet, particularly the possibility that Egyptian officers might be in authority over British troops, undermining Britain's position in the Canal Zone.<sup>32</sup> At a 4 October meeting of key ministers Morrison spoke of the need to make an offer to avert Egyptian abrogation; if no offer were made and Egypt abrogated the treaty, "the effect upon public opinion in the United Kingdom would be calamitous". The MEC proposal was "defensible as a logical and reasonable arrangement", even though it might lead to the withdrawal of "a certain proportion of British troops from Egypt". If Egypt rejected the offer, to which the Americans were now committed, "we should denounce this action and leave our troops in Egypt. It was estimated that in that event our troops could safely hold their position in the Canal Zone".<sup>33</sup>

Nahas asked Egypt's parliament to abrogate both the 1936 treaty and the 1888 convention. The MEC proposal was submitted to the Egyptians five days later.<sup>34</sup> On the 15th Saleh el Din told the parliament the offer was utterly unacceptable and would be rejected by the Cabinet. The following day he formally told Ambassador Stevenson of the government's rejection of the proposal.<sup>35</sup>

The British government stated on 9 October that Britain retained her rights under the 1936 treaty and 1888 convention. This meant, Morrison wrote to Attlee, "that we stay in Egypt.



But we are no less committed to pressing on with the agreed proposals" for the MEC. Britain should also inform the Americans of its willingness to "sit it out" in the Canal Zone, bringing in reinforcements to buttress its position. In an emergency a British commander might have to hold the base by force without Anglo-American consultation, something Britain had been reluctant to concede to the Americans in Korea. If Britain withdrew its reservations over Korea, "the understanding, over Korea and over Egypt, would be very similar; prior consultation if time permitted, but shared responsibility for the decision taken".<sup>36</sup> The Labour government would not have the opportunity to put this policy into effect, since the October 1951 election returned the Conservatives to power.

At lower levels, the policy of pushing ahead with the MEC went on. British and American officials produced a statement announcing that MEC survived Egypt's rejection. Britain, America, France and Turkey would continue encouraging other Middle Eastern States to join. Those responding favourably might receive U.S. military and economic aid.<sup>37</sup>

During the election the Conservatives had lambasted Labour's policy of "scuttle" in the Middle East and promised a more vigorous assertion of British interests.<sup>38</sup> At the first meeting of the new Cabinet Churchill requested acceptance of "the duty of the United Kingdom Government to keep the Suez Canal open to the shipping of the world, using such force as

might be necessary", including providing naval escorts for tankers bound for Haifa. Eden, despite the political hay he had made out of the previous government's policy, was concerned that this measure would trigger an unnecessary conflict and make the conclusion of an agreement with Egypt still more difficult. He secured Cabinet's agreement that while Churchill's principle was valid, it was not "expedient to apply it at the moment to the passage of oil tankers bound for Haifa".<sup>39</sup> This effectively emasculated Churchill's policy.

In the aftermath of Egypt's rejection of the MEC Israeli diplomats made fresh overtures to Britain.<sup>40</sup> Most notably, on 23 November Sharett met Eden in Paris and spoke of a new "parallelism of interest". Britain and Israel both sought "democracy, stability and respect for treaties". Egypt's abrogation of the 1936 treaty was a troubling precedent which might lead to abrogation of armistice agreements by the states bordering Israel. It was in Israel's interest that the Suez Canal be a genuinely international waterway; therefore Israel "supported the British position in Egypt". Sharett said he understood why Israel had not been among the states initially invited to join the MEC. Israel preferred "direct defence arrangements with the United States and the United Kingdom to MEC membership". Membership was problematic in light of continuing Arab hostility and the possibility that Israeli accession to an anti-Soviet pact could lead to reprisals against Soviet Jews.

Two measures, Sharett added, "would be of great advantage" to Britain: modernizing the Haifa refinery and establishing a pipeline from Eilat to Haifa. Oil could then be carried from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean without Egyptian interference.<sup>41</sup>

Both steps had been proposed earlier at lower-level Anglo-Israeli meetings. On 13 November British officials had discussed the two proposals with an officer of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (A.I.O.C.), which owned the refinery. Given the capital investment needed to upgrade the refinery, the uncertainty of current crude supplies and the company's difficulty securing payment for locally consumed oil, the proposal struck the company as uneconomical. The pipeline was also commercially dubious, since any drop in Canal dues would wipe out the savings from lower transport costs. The A.I.O.C. representative also suggested "that we had missed the best opportunity for putting a tanker through the Canal at the time when the Egyptian Sterling balances were still under discussion".<sup>42</sup>

The COS were wary since Egypt and other Arab States might view British investment in the proposed pipeline as "an unfriendly act" and a defence agreement might be rendered more elusive. In light of Egypt's attitude Britain might have to provide naval protection for shipping to and from Eilat. If agreement proved utterly impossible, however, the pipeline could be useful. In war it could be valuable, but only "as an

insurance against a closure of the Suez Canal".<sup>43</sup>

Eden, now in a more hawkish temper, asked Strang "if we are not to encourage the building of the pipeline, can we now take action in respect of the Canal", since "our control of it must be almost complete?" The Arab States, he noted, "have not helped us much of late. Surely we cannot indefinitely accept that for us to ensure that our own refinery works...is merely looked at as 'U.K. assistance to Israel in increasing her war potential'? Presumably we are also increasing the war potential of the Arab States by our oil production". "Is it not about time", he asked, "we had all this out frankly with the Arabs?"<sup>44</sup>

An assessment at General Headquarters, Middle Eastern Land Forces, concluded that forcing the Canal was militarily practicable but could precipitate a strike by Egyptian employees of the Canal Company as well as Shell employees at Suez and Port Said. Britain would then have to take over Canal operations and maintenance of the Shell facilities. In addition, there was the "possible but unlikely intervention of the Egyptian Navy" to intercept tankers.<sup>45</sup>

There were also economic considerations that made it difficult for Britain to take a hard line with Egypt or co-operate more closely with Israel. Ben-Gurion had suggested to Robertson the possibility of Anglo-Israeli military co-operation based upon Israeli manufacture of military goods for Britain. Extensive discussions took place within the British

government but significant orders did not materialize. Britain was in no position to supply the needed raw materials and "any orders placed could only be at prices competitive with our other sources of supply". There was also considerable unemployment in some British industries, "because of the lack of raw materials and there would certainly be unfavourable reactions at home if orders were placed in Israel".<sup>46</sup>

In March 1952 Israel sought a loan of 15 million pounds, which was refused on the grounds that British balance-of-payments difficulties were severe. In April another loan request, this time for 5 million pounds, to finance the purchase of Sterling Oil, was made in a personal message from President Chaim Weizmann to Churchill. Eden and R.A. Butler, Chancellor of the Exchequer, urged refusal. A loan to buy oil would have "serious repercussions" in British industries such as textile exporters. A loan would also antagonize the Arab States. One way to placate the Arabs was to make the loan conditional on Israel's release of blocked Arab balances, estimated to be from 4-5 million pounds. But Britain would then "have to supply her with the means to comply with this condition". The long-term problem of Israel's economic weakness was one "on which she must look to the U.S. rather than to the United Kingdom for assistance". Churchill refused Weizmann's request and encouraged Israel to seek aid from the U.S.<sup>47</sup>

The British and Egyptian economies were more complementary, largely a function of the British textile industry's dependence on Egyptian cotton. When the rejection of the MEC proposal was followed by anti-British violence in Egypt, the Cabinet decided in late December to delay releasing the 10 million pounds due to be released in 1952 under the Sterling Releases Agreement. At the 3 April meeting Butler informed his colleagues that Egypt was virtually without reserves to cover current obligations and unless the funds were released "might be obliged to impose restrictions which would be damaging to our trade". Despite Churchill's preference for a hard line against Egypt, including the denial of arms, oil and money, the Cabinet agreed that the Chancellor should arrange immediate release of the money.<sup>48</sup>

Churchill and Eden favoured different approaches to Egypt. After the anti-British riots of January 1952, Churchill argued Britain's latest offer had to be changed. The Suez base facilities should be transferred from British control directly to the MEC, with no intervening period of purely Egyptian control. Eden insisted this alteration would hamper the pursuit of an agreement, yet it won Cabinet approval.<sup>49</sup>

The disagreements between Churchill and Eden were largely a function of their divergent assessments of Britain's power relative to other nations, which Churchill believed was growing and did not dictate any rush to conclude a settlement.

Eden saw the cost of overseas commitments as "beyond the resources of this country...there is no reserve and therefore no margin for unforeseen additional obligations". He recommended an orderly reduction in commitments and the replacement of unilateral British security guarantees in Asia and the Middle East by U.S.-backed multilateral arrangements. If this proved impossible, Britons would have to lower their standard of living to spend more abroad or "see their country sink to the level of a second class power, with injury to their essential interests".<sup>50</sup>

In February 1953 he told the Cabinet Britain could not afford to maintain its existing position in the Canal Zone indefinitely; "with our limited resources, it is essential that we should concentrate on the points where our vital strategic needs or the necessities of our economic life are at stake".<sup>51</sup> Yet no systematic review of British commitments followed. Churchill was averse to such an undertaking and Eden himself did not follow through, no doubt for motives including awareness of the effect any contraction might have on British prestige. Despite his grasp of an overall need for retrenchment and frequent doubts about Arab cooperation, Eden realized Britain's presence in the Canal Zone was not only "a stabilizing factor in Middle East politics" but contributed "more than anything else to British influence and prestige throughout the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. It is also a guarantee of the freedom of

shipping" through the Canal.<sup>52</sup>

Through 1952, Anglo-Egyptian talks remained stalled on the issue of Sudanese independence. After a July coup brought General Neguib and the Free Officers to power, Churchill gave in to Eden's entreaties to let the new regime prove itself, although he remained adamant that evacuation take place only once arrangements for a defence organization including Egypt were made. Eden also reminded his Chief of the U.S. desire for a settlement and raised the possibility of American help financing redeployment from the Canal Zone.<sup>53</sup> He was now attempting a re-assessment of Middle East strategy and told a 4 December Cabinet meeting that Cyprus could become the main British base in the region. With facilities in Libya likely under a forthcoming treaty and Neguib apparently friendly, it was possible to devise a regional defence system involving Turkey, Libya and Cyprus, with Egyptian cooperation.<sup>54</sup>

The British government hoped to secure U.S. help in a new approach to Egypt as well as prevent American military aid from reaching Neguib before agreement was reached.<sup>55</sup> This was to prove difficult since America was now taking a more independent line in the region.

After Egypt's rejection of the MEC proposal the American Embassy and the CIA station in Cairo had pursued an aggressive policy of securing American influence over rising Egyptian Army officers. After the 1952 coup the U.S. encouraged the new government's land reform programme and condoned the



dismissal of the conservative civilian Prime Minister Nahas, which infuriated the British. In January 1953 a U.S. diplomat disclosed information on Anglo-American talks about the Middle East to members of the Egyptian government. "If we fail to get an efficient base", a British official later lamented, "it is at least arguable that it would be largely the Americans' fault".<sup>56</sup>

On his January 1953 trip to Washington, Churchill hoped to secure the backing of the incoming President, Dwight Eisenhower, for Britain's position on Egypt. Eisenhower was sceptical of his old comrade's efforts to revive the wartime Anglo-American partnership, and thought that "the two strongest Western powers must not appear before the world as a combination of forces to compel adherence to the status quo".<sup>57</sup>

After a May 1953 tour of the Arab capitals, the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, concluded that the Arabs saw Israel, not the Soviet Union, as the principal threat to their security. The Arab-Israeli conflict created opportunities for the Soviets to exploit. In July the National Security Council (NSC) adopted, as the basis of American policy in the region, NSC-155/1. This document stressed the desirability of defence cooperation among the "northern tier" states bordering the Soviet Union. To reduce Arab-Israeli tensions, Israel should make territorial concessions, repatriate as many as 100,000 Palestinian

refugees and accept a limit on Jewish immigration. Anglo-Egyptian differences should be resolved and a defence pact including Britain, Turkey and other powers created. "The continuation of British forces on Egyptian soil", however, "was an impossibility".<sup>58</sup>

Disappointed by Eisenhower's opposition to close Anglo-American collaboration in the Middle East, Churchill returned to London and attempted to stop the delivery of Meteor jets to Egypt, despite previous Cabinet approval of the transaction. He also criticized Eden's willingness to accept self-government for the Sudan, which he saw as leading to British humiliation. Eden's Principal Private Secretary, Evelyn Shuckburgh, described Churchill "speaking of 'appeasement' and saying he never knew before that Munich was situated on the Nile...he positively desired the talks on the Sudan to fail, just as he positively hoped we should not succeed in getting into conversations with the Egyptians on defence which might lead to our abandonment of the Canal Zone".<sup>59</sup>

Despite Churchill's resistance and the opposition of many Conservative backbenchers, Eden was determined not to renege on the public promises he had given of Sudanese self-government, and an agreement was reached on 12 February, depriving Britain of a convenient obstacle to an overall settlement with Egypt.<sup>60</sup> By November he was forced to acknowledge that Egypt was violating the terms of the Sudan agreement by interfering in Sudanese elections, not the most

reassuring of developments.<sup>61</sup>

When Eden became ill in April Churchill took control of foreign policy himself and instructed British negotiators to insist on a working base in peacetime as part of any agreement with Egypt, regardless of the American preference for a more flexible stance. Despite increasingly anti-British Egyptian rhetoric and an increase in sabotage and terrorism in the Canal Zone, he saw no need for an early settlement. Indeed, with rumours spreading that ex-Nazi officers were secretly training Egyptian troops to operate against British forces in the Canal Zone he anticipated the need to face this threat.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, there was reason to believe the Canal itself was less secure than ever. In February Lord Hankey, the longtime Whitehall mandarin who now sat on the Board of the Suez Canal Company, had warned Churchill that "appetite comes with the eating and the evacuation of the British forces is certain to be followed by a violent agitation for Egypt to declare the concession at an end and to take possession of the Suez Canal".<sup>63</sup>

In July Lord Salisbury, Lord President of the Council, was in Washington, where Dulles lectured him on the need for British concessions to Egypt and the desirability of a defensive system comprising the "northern tier" states. After this discussion, and while negotiations with Libya for training and air facilities were nearing conclusion, talks with Egypt resumed again at Salisbury's instigation (made

easier, no doubt, by a stroke which temporarily sidelined Churchill).<sup>64</sup>

When Eden returned to duty in October, the talks initiated by Salisbury had left only minor points unresolved, chief among them the question of whether an attack on Turkey or Pakistan would be cause for the return of British troops to the Canal Zone.<sup>65</sup>

Equally important, various forces were converging behind evacuation. The COS, who now saw full withdrawal as likely, considered Egyptian cooperation vital. If Britain ultimately withdrew in the face of increasing Egyptian opposition and non-cooperation "withdrawal in those conditions would be regarded as a victory for Egypt and would prejudice our chances of obtaining satisfactory agreements with the other Arab States".<sup>66</sup> Butler was determined to cut defence spending by 180 million pounds for domestic purposes, and the Suez base cost 56 million annually.<sup>67</sup> Antony Head, Secretary of State for War, and Lord Alexander, Minister of Defence, were concerned that this increasingly costly and demoralized force would be vulnerable to attack. Head hoped to make major savings by full redeployment and feared a mere reduction in troop numbers would invite an Egyptian attack too large to be beaten back, humiliating Britain.<sup>68</sup>

Eden had also presided over the development of a regional stance that did not require much in the way of active co-operation from Egypt. Britain's position would be based on

defence cooperation with Jordan and Iraq, as well as bases in Libya, Cyprus and Aden. It was, Eden had concluded, "impossible to make an agreement with these young and transitory Majors in Cairo",<sup>69</sup> and "the chances of Egyptians becoming our friends are slight".<sup>70</sup>

He also believed that "Israel cannot fulfill our purpose", not only because close Anglo-Israeli collaboration might arouse hostility in the Arab world but also because the Israeli government was unwilling to conduct operations or send troops outside Israel's own borders.<sup>71</sup> Armoured forces were to be sent to Aqaba, and the RAF base at Amman, which had been shut down several years earlier, was to be re-opened, in order to show Britain's commitment to defending Jordan against Israeli attack.<sup>72</sup>

Another justification for changing Britain's policy was the change wrought by the H-bomb in the global strategic balance, leaving the Suez base far less important in a Cold War context. Churchill concluded in March 1954 that the base was "less urgent" with "all this Hydrogen business which has swooped down on us".<sup>73</sup> He later concluded that the H-bomb and the prospects for cooperation with Turkey, Iraq and other states had so changed the strategic value of the base that "what is left of it no longer justifies the expense and diversion of our troops". The 40,000 combat troops might be more useful elsewhere. Britain might have to defend Malaya against a Communist attack but "our last regular reserves are

deployed. It would be a pity to take the troops from Germany...here is the obvious reserve".<sup>74</sup>

As Churchill's resistance waned, Eden was able to secure Cabinet approval of a new overture to Egypt, with evacuation over twenty months and the agreement lasting seven years; Egypt's willingness to include an attack on Turkey under the terms of the agreement whetted his appetite for a quick agreement.<sup>75</sup> "In seven years' time", wrote Ivone Kirkpatrick of the Foreign Office, "the power and the numbers of these frightful weapons will be so great that the chance of our wanting to conduct a campaign in the Middle East will be less than it is to-day".<sup>76</sup>

Churchill had made one last bid for U.S. support in resolving the outstanding issues of the treaty's duration and the peacetime availability of the base at the December 1953 Bermuda conference. Eisenhower resisted Churchill's request for a joint approach to Egypt, urged flexibility and stressed that this was an age in which defensive arrangements must not bear the taint of colonialism. "Liberty was more precious than good government", in Egypt as in any other land.<sup>77</sup> The Americans declined to participate in discussions without Egypt's invitation (which of course never came), but were willing to make U.S. aid to Egypt conditional on Egypt's concluding an agreement on the Canal Zone and publicly endorsed the principle of free passage through the Canal.<sup>78</sup>

In July 1954 a party under Antony Head went to Cairo and

rapidly concluded an agreement with the Egyptian government, in which Gamal Abdel Nasser had now become the dominant figure. Head knew his mission "ran the risk of appearing like the last stage of a piecemeal surrender", and tried to avoid this by presenting the offer of a seven-year agreement and withdrawal over twenty months, the most the Egyptians could accept, "on a take-it-or-leave-it basis".<sup>79</sup> The offer was accepted half an hour after it was made, with the Egyptians "moved by deep and startled delight...when they realized that the prize of evacuation which had eluded so many of their predecessors was at last in their grasp".<sup>80</sup>

During the months of diplomatic activity leading to the conclusion of an agreement, Britain had not taken Israel into its confidence. Israel's interest in matters pertaining to the Suez Canal was obvious. It is worth noting that after the Free Officers' coup Ben-Gurion had spoken hopefully of the new regime to the Knesset, and there had been tentative low-level talks between Israeli and Egyptian diplomats.<sup>81</sup> In late 1953, however, Egypt had intensified its blockade of the Canal; now all cargoes bound to and from Israel, even if they were of no military value and carried in non-Israeli ships, were banned. Israel attempted to bring the matter before the U.N. Security Council, but was blocked by the exercise of the Soviet Union's veto.<sup>82</sup>

On 14 April 1953 the Israeli Ambassador had called on Selwyn Lloyd, Minister of State at the Foreign Office,

presenting a note requesting consultation before the resumption of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations. The note was simultaneously released to the press, and a similar message sent to the American government, an apparent effort to secure American pressure on Britain to consult with Israel. On 20 April Lloyd informed the Israeli Ambassador that Britain "did not acknowledge the right of any country to consultation with us about these matters", but did not exclude the possibility; no subsequent discussion appears to have occurred.<sup>83</sup>

The principal sceptic toward the attitude of the Foreign Office was Churchill, who noted "Israel is the most powerful fighting force in the Middle East and may come in handy if Neguib attacks us. We ought never to have allowed the obstruction in the Suez Canal of oil for Haifa".<sup>84</sup> "The idea of selling Israel down the drain in order to persuade the Egyptians to kick us out of the Canal Zone more gently is not one which attracts me", he wrote, concluding "we have probably got to have a showdown with Neguib, and Israel will be an important factor both Parliamentary and military".<sup>85</sup>

As the conclusion of the withdrawal agreement moved closer, it became clear that Churchill, while he might have grasped intellectually the case for withdrawal from the Canal Zone, had a deep emotional reluctance to accept it. "I may have to say something in the Suez debate, but I shall put Anthony in front", he told his physician, "it's his business. If he likes this policy of scuttle in Egypt he must defend



it". Despite his visceral opposition to relinquishing the trappings of empire he tried to "console himself with the fact that the...troops can be used elsewhere, and that it will mean a substantial economy".<sup>86</sup>

Churchill was not above giving sporadic encouragement to the "Suez Group" of Conservative backbenchers who opposed withdrawal. "I'm glad somebody has some spirit left", he remarked, "they are right to make their protest".<sup>87</sup> As early as December 1953 forty-one Conservative backbenchers had tabled a motion calling for suspension of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, "in view of the breaches by Egypt of the recently signed Anglo-Egyptian agreement which have been repeatedly condemned by the Foreign Secretary, of the persistent denials of free passage through the Suez Canal to cargoes destined for Israel, and of the continued Egyptian acts of hostility towards Great Britain".<sup>88</sup> These issues would arise again in the Parliamentary debate on the forthcoming agreement itself.

## NOTES

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4. JP(40)126, 3 November 1949, DEFE 4/26.
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6. Hahn, op. cit., pp. 28-29, Devereux, op. cit., pp. 17-24
7. A copy is bound with CP(51) 130, CAB 129/45.
8. "Turkey and Greece and the North Atlantic Treaty: Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff", n.d. but clearly mid-May of 1951, CAB 129/45.
9. "Admission of Greece and Turkey to the North Atlantic Treaty: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", CP(51)130, 17 May 1951, ibid.
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12. Minutes of Meeting, 19 June 1951, ibid, Volume 3, pp. 535-45.
13. Hahn, op. cit., pp. 30-31.
14. CC(51)36, 22 May 1951, CAB 128/19. See also "Command Arrangements: Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff", DO(51) 62, 5 June 1951, CAB 131/11.

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17. Britain's proposals appear as Annex 1, Egypt's reply as Annex 2, in CP(51)140, CAB 129/45.
18. "Egypt: Defence Negotiations: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 28 May 1951, CP(51)140, CAB 129/45.
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24. For the text of the resolution, see *ibid.*, pp. 848-49. See also Hahn, op. cit., p. 33.
25. Hahn, op. cit., p. 34.
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28. Morrison to Shinwell, 18 July 1951, FO 800/649.
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31. Furlonge to Chadwick, 4 September 1951, *ibid.*
32. DO(51)81, CAB 131/11.
33. Gen. 382/1st meeting, 4 October 1951, CAB 130/71.
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April, 22 April 1953, PREM 11/465.

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### CHAPTER THREE

The government brought the pending agreement before the House of Commons in late July. Head defended it on the familiar grounds: the H-bomb and the reduced importance of the Canal Zone base; the need to use the troops to build up a strategic reserve; and the prospect of a less acrimonious relationship with Egypt. Attlee claimed that the difference in destructive power between the A-bomb and the H-bomb did not really account for "all the change in the position which existed when we left office". The matter "could have been settled on better terms and in fact on these very terms two years ago". He called for fresh efforts to establish a base at Haifa or Alexandretta, noting "in order to carry out our obligations and in order to keep the peace" it was necessary that there be "British troops somewhere in the region". "What has become", he asked, "of all the talk about the Suez Canal as an international waterway which must be kept open? The Prime Minister has used the phrase over and over again". Egypt, he concluded, had been in default on the 1888 convention for years, "and yet nothing has been done about it". Now Britain was creating "a vacuum".<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of British troops there was only the presence of the Suez Canal Company to maintain transit rights. The Leader of the Liberal Party, Jo Grimond, asked if the government had plans for "putting the Canal under international control or putting in an international force to

protect it, if we are not there ourselves?" In purely economic terms, argued Head, it was self-defeating for the Egyptians to close the Suez Canal; "it is as much of a life-line to them as to anyone else".<sup>2</sup>

Other critics urged a new policy of close cooperation with Israel, which Crossman described as "a friendly country with a friendly people, which might really be a reliable ally in time of trouble".<sup>3</sup> George Wigg reminded the House that the Israeli Army was "the most effective fighting force in the Middle East", and well-positioned to defend the Canal Zone; "if there was any danger of invasion when we go out the Israeli Army would be on the Egyptian border in a couple of days".<sup>4</sup>

The Suez rebels also made their concerns plain. Julian Amery lamented what he termed the "virtually unconditional evacuation of the Canal Zone" and wondered aloud if the government had yet devised an effective replacement for the position in Egypt. "I cannot help feeling", he went on, "that the decision was taken to quit the Suez Canal before we had decided where to go".<sup>5</sup> Brigadier Prior-Palmer noted that redeployment was "complete and absolute commonsense for a hot war". The defence of Britain's interests in the region was "not only a question of a hot war, however". In the absence of a British force to deter or reverse such an act, Egypt might now be in a position to assert full control of the Canal Zone, and then seek approval from the U.N.

In response to accusations that he had been encouraging the Suez Group and generally obstructing the conclusion of a withdrawal agreement, Churchill did speak in defence of the proposed settlement. He emphasized the H-bomb and the changed strategic environment, pointing out "how utterly out of all proportion to the Suez Canal and the position which we held in Egypt are the appalling development and the appalling spectacle which imagination raises before us".<sup>7</sup>

When discussion turned to the question of the freedom of the canal itself, Eden was the principal champion of the proposed agreement just as he had been, within the Cabinet, its principal architect. Egyptian restrictions on transit rights, he suggested, were a product of the Arab-Israeli conflict. "It is in that context", he went on, "that Egypt has stopped the passage of certain strategic goods to Israel. The whole House wants to try to reduce tensions and to get a final settlement between the Arabs and the Israelis. I ask...whether it is not a good idea to start improving our relations with Egypt and making that a better foundation". He also noted that the 1936 treaty was set to expire in two years, after which no British troops could remain anyway. Any defence cooperation with Egypt would have to be based on a relationship of equality, not disguised colonial domination.<sup>8</sup>

The treaty, however, had provisions for extension, if both parties agreed, or arbitration by a third party. Britain might have retained its position if it had won in arbitration

or if Egypt had refused to submit to the process; yet this would have risked damage to relations with the U.S., the Arab world and the non-white Commonwealth. Eden, like Bevin before him, "had been too liberal in his pronouncements when the prospects for agreement seemed remote for it now to be possible to turn back".<sup>9</sup>

Other elements of Eden's justification for the agreement were somewhat disingenuous. For one thing, it ignored the recent intensification of the blockade. Misleading in a subtler way was the emphasis on better relations with Egypt. Eden did hope relations with Egypt would improve, and wanted Egyptian support for an Arab-Israeli settlement to stabilize the region. Yet his new conception of regional defence did not really depend on Egypt's friendship, which he realized was probably unobtainable. By and large, Egypt's active support of British policy was unnecessary. Passive acquiescence in British designs, and the absence of any direct threat to British interests, would suffice. Britain would have little reason to quarrel with Egyptian actions that did not threaten its own interests.

On 22 September, as the formalities of drafting the agreement went ahead, Ambassador Elath visited Eden and raised Israeli concerns about the status of the canal after Britain's withdrawal. Eden did not respond in writing until almost a month later, suggesting that the agreement "will result in a general lessening of tension in the Middle East. By

increasing confidence between the Arab States and the West it should facilitate the solution of major problems in the area". A clause in the agreement would commit both signatories to respect the 1888 convention. Yet Egypt had earlier claimed that its blockade was a legitimate exercise of belligerent rights, not a violation of the convention's guarantee of transit rights. The British Government, Eden wrote, "continue to desire a settlement of this question in accordance with the Resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations". Yet he proposed no new steps to ensure that the expressed wish of the Security Council was translated into reality. He closed by reiterating Britain's commitment to the Tripartite Declaration and setting out bromides about the need "to bring about a peaceful settlement of the tragic dispute between Israel and the Arab States. Such a settlement is essential if the countries are to develop their full prosperity and to be able to defend themselves against any threat of aggression from the outside".<sup>10</sup> The final text of the agreement, which was signed on 19 October, somewhat ambiguously committed both parties to the 1888 convention but also described the canal as "an integral part of Egypt".<sup>11</sup> This obscured rather than resolved the tension between the canal's status as part of Egypt and its function as an international waterway.

On 28 September an Israeli vessel, the Bat-Galim, entered the southern approaches of the canal. The Israeli Government "thought that if the Egyptian authorities refused her

passage, the United Nations would be compelled to consider the case and oblige the Egyptian Government to respect international law and allow freedom of transit to Israeli ships through Suez".<sup>12</sup> Refusal of passage would also serve to dramatize the consequences of British withdrawal and, perhaps, encourage reconsideration.

A less prudent attempt to prevent British withdrawal was a covert operation in the summer of 1954, in which Israeli agents were sent to blow up British and American facilities in Egypt and allow Britain and America to conclude that it was the work of Egyptians. The operation was badly bungled; a bomb exploded in the pocket of one of the agents, leading to the arrest of those involved. Some were executed, others were jailed, to be released in 1967.<sup>13</sup>

As for the Bat-Galim, the Egyptians seized both vessel and crew. Israel brought the matter before the Security Council in December 1954 and January 1955, with no result. The Egyptian government confiscated the ship but ultimately repatriated the crew, sending them home through the Gaza Strip.<sup>14</sup> Egypt's conduct in this matter, claimed the Israeli Foreign Ministry, displayed "its complete indifference to the most elementary international obligations". In addition, the loss of the British buffer between Israel and Egypt was cause for concern; "the transfer of the Canal Zone, with all its installations, into Egypt's possession alters the military and strategic balance to Egypt's advantage, without any request

having been made to Egypt that it should modify its attitude towards Israel or calm the latter's well-founded apprehension".<sup>15</sup>

Israel's concerns were not sufficient to change British policy. In the months immediately after the conclusion of the agreement, Anglo-Egyptian relations seemed to improve. While Nasser had rejected participation in a Western defence organization and indulged in neutralist rhetoric at the Bandung gathering, he did not actively work against Britain's interests. Shuckburgh successfully urged Eden to seek Egyptian aid in devising a regional settlement and abandon, at least for the time being, any residual hope of bringing the Egyptians into a defence pact. "It would be more useful if they would help us over Israel", he concluded.<sup>16</sup>

The pursuit of a regional settlement and the creation of a defence arrangement centred around Baghdad can be seen as the two prongs of Britain's new policy in the Middle East. Eden hoped to secure Egypt's acquiescence in the "northern tier" strategy, yet British support for defensive arrangements in which the Hashemites played a major role inevitably challenged Nasser for the leadership of the Arab world. The first step in shaping the new defence regime, the conclusion of a Turco-Iraqi treaty, left the Egyptian Government "in a state of fury". When the Egyptian Ambassador had lunch with Eden in February 1955, Shuckburgh realized the Egyptians "will not be comforted. I had no idea they were quite so jealous of

Iraq".<sup>17</sup> Nasser's opposition to the treaty and fear of Iraqi ambitions forced Britain to choose between defence cooperation with Baghdad and securing Egyptian acceptance of British policy. Iraq's Nuri Sa'id was anxious to follow up on the Turco-Iraqi agreement with an Anglo-Iraqi one. Anglo-Iraqi discussions ended on 22 February. Two days later the Turco-Iraqi treaty was signed. Britain formally endorsed the new Baghdad Pact, despite Nasser's hostility; Britain had made its choice.<sup>18</sup>

Four days later this diplomatic affront to Nasser was followed by a military humiliation when an Israeli raid against Egyptian military facilities in Gaza left thirty-six Egyptian soldiers and two civilians dead.<sup>19</sup> This raid was part of a general Israeli policy of mounting large-scale reprisal raids into Arab states from which bands of Arab infiltrators (fedayeen) conducted raids into Israel. Raids had begun to come from Egypt, where the government had previously exercised a restraining influence over the fedayeen. Ben-Gurion, who had returned from a temporary retirement at Sde Boker to serve as Defence Minister under Moshe Sharett, saw this as the start of a guerrilla war on all borders. Such a development was particularly ominous in the context of the Baghdad Pact. This arrangement, in which Jordanian participation looked probable, would constitute an alliance system that could be turned against Israel as easily as it could be used to defend against a Soviet attack. The American government, despite Dulles's



preference for bilateral agreements with the "northern tier" states and concern that the Baghdad Pact would exacerbate nationalist rivalries, went along with the British policy, selling arms to Iraq in 1954 as well as arming Egypt. The state that had once been the closest thing to an ally of Israel among the major powers was now arming Israel's adversaries and pursuing a policy of "impartiality". With some reason Israeli leaders began to fear diplomatic isolation and a growing military threat.<sup>20</sup>

After July elections, Ben-Gurion himself formed a government and pursued an intensified reprisal policy despite Arab, U.N. and growing Western opposition, convinced Israel had to look after its own morale and show its military superiority to the Arab states. While Britain and America were unwilling to sell large quantities of arms to Israel, France, looking for a new role in the Middle East, was not. In late 1954 France supplied Israel with its first jet fighters, Ouragans, and in mid-1955 promised to sell Israel the advanced Mystère II as well as 155-millimetre guns and AMX-13 tanks.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime, the British and American governments promoted an Arab-Israeli settlement under the code-name of Alpha. Shuckburgh and the State Department's Francis Russell developed the proposal, which would involve Israeli cession of much of the Negev and repatriation of some 75,000 refugees. The Western powers would enforce the lifting of the Arab

world's economic sanctions against Israel, and guarantee the new borders. Egyptian cooperation would be sought first. Israel would not be told of the plan until it was well under way, in order to prevent the Israeli government from sabotaging the project.<sup>22</sup> Arms sales to Egypt and other Arab states might be needed to buy support. Israel, due to the qualitative advantages its forces had over its rivals in training and morale, would not receive such offers. Further supplies of weaponry to Israel would only encourage Israeli aggression. Israel, Eden noted, was "militarily strong and politically apprehensive...a dangerous state of affairs".<sup>23</sup>

In early 1955 Ambassador Stevenson, Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan and the U.S. Ambassador in Cairo, Henry Byroade, tried to convince Nasser of the benefits of the proposal. Nasser and Foreign Minister Mahmud Fawzi said a settlement might be possible but the full cession of the Negev was absolutely necessary. Both Egypt and Israel (which learned of the plan soon after its conception) rejected a compromise proposal that would have left Israel with a land corridor to Eilat.<sup>24</sup> In August Dulles outlined a modified version of Alpha in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations. The emphasis was on the guarantees of Israeli borders and the resettlement of refugees, not the territorial concessions expected of Israel.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the address was warmly received in Israel but harshly criticized in much of the Arab world. Egypt's response was ambiguous.<sup>26</sup>

The British government, always mindful of Zionist influence in American politics, had feared "that we are going to be forced to put forward a solution much too favourable to the Jews".<sup>27</sup> Now Britain was upset by Dulles's speech, which had made Alpha public and threatened to arouse opposition in the Arab world to cooperation with the Western powers.<sup>28</sup>

The Middle Eastern situation was to become still more complicated a month later. After the Gaza clash and the signing of the Baghdad Pact, Nasser moved to strengthen his political and military position, in relation to both Israel and his rivals for leadership of the Arab world. Cairo Radio spewed out anti-Israel and anti-Western propaganda, praising the activities of the Mau Mau in Kenya and the F.L.N. in Algeria. On 27 September Nasser announced the conclusion of an arms deal with Czechoslovakia, including 300 medium and heavy tanks and 200 MiG-15 jet fighters.<sup>29</sup> In both armour and jet fighters, Egypt would have a 4-to-1 quantitative advantage over Israel. According to General Moshe Dayan, "it was not only the disparity in quantity but also the superiority in quality which decisively upset the arms scales. The Migs and Ilyushins which the Egyptians received were at least two stages ahead of the Meteors and Ouragans then in our possession, and their modern T-34 Soviet tanks were infinitely better than our old Sherman Mark 3s".<sup>30</sup> Israel now had a strong reason to consider a preemptive attack before Egypt could assimilate the new weapons. Dayan thought assimilation

might take 6 to 8 months, while others anticipated a period of 2 years.<sup>31</sup>

The British and American governments learned of the deal before it was announced. On 26 September Macmillan, Dulles and several of their officials met in Washington. Nasser's actions, Macmillan suggested, were "a breach at least of the spirit of the Suez base agreement. The world will not allow the USSR to become the guardian of the Suez Canal". Britain, he added, had not completed its withdrawal from the Canal Zone; "a demand might arise in Parliament to stop withdrawal. If we had your support, we might call the whole thing off". Dulles made no commitment on the part of the U.S. Government. Russell and Shuckburgh seized upon the new situation as a justification for accelerating work on Alpha, claiming this might bring Egypt back into the Western camp. "Can the Soviet-Egyptian agreement", Shuckburgh asked, "be used to persuade Israel that she had better make more substantial concessions than we previously had in mind"? Dulles agreed that Israel might be pressed to "give up a bigger slice of the Negev". Russell suggested it might be possible to reach an understanding with Nasser "if he would agree immediately to an Alpha settlement and would strictly limit the arms purchased...to those definitively contracted for".<sup>32</sup>

In the same month that he concluded the Czech arms deal Nasser further strengthened the blockade of Israel. All passage by sea or air through the Gulf of Aqaba would be

treated as passage through Egyptian territory, requiring 72 hours' notice. No Israeli planes or ships would be allowed passage through the Straits of Tiran. Failure to act, General Dayan wrote to Ben-Gurion, would be "a de facto surrender of our freedom of shipping and flight through the Straits of Tiran. Furthermore, the fact cannot be ignored that on this subject unequivocal declarations have been made by you and by your predecessor as Prime Minister". Israel had also communicated to Egypt "the policy of the Government which holds that Israel will not agree to a one-sided adherence to the Armistice Agreements". It was desirable, he argued, for Israel to secure transit rights through the Straits of Tiran by seizing them militarily as soon as possible.<sup>33</sup>

Britain, like the other maritime powers, took no action to punish Egypt or force it to change its policy. Macmillan told the House of Commons that British vessels bound for the Gulf of Aqaba were notifying the customs authorities at Port Said and Suez. The government, he stated, "have always maintained our legal position, but we have adopted a de facto arrangement...for practical purposes we have accepted a situation which enables practical things to be carried out". Kenneth Younger asked why the Egyptians would "pay any attention to our legal objections when, in fact, we are giving way to them upon the only thing that matters to them, which is to have British ships complying with their illegal regulations"? Macmillan could only reply that while there

were "difficulties in the position which we have adopted", it was "the most practical one in the circumstances".<sup>34</sup>

The British government failed to take a firmer line against Egypt's recent provocations in part because Nasser, anxious to avoid alienating the Western powers permanently, told the Americans he was prepared to seek an immediate settlement with Israel.<sup>35</sup> Both Britain and America moved forward with new initiatives to salvage the Alpha project.

On 9 November Eden spoke at the Guildhall in favour of a compromise between Israel's existing boundaries and those set out in the 1947 partition resolution.<sup>36</sup> The Egyptian government was informed that this would entail cession of the Negev. Nasser promised to promote an Arab League discussion of the proposal.<sup>37</sup> Ben-Gurion denounced Eden's speech, claiming "the proposal to reduce Israel's territory in favour of her neighbours is entirely without legal, moral or logical basis and therefore not to be considered".<sup>38</sup> Nothing came of the proposal; indeed Nasser actively undermined it, blocking Iraqi attempts to promote Arab League discussions of the plan.<sup>39</sup>

The American initiative revolved around a January 1956 mission to Egypt by Robert Anderson, a former Deputy Secretary of Defence and a close friend of the President. Anderson presented Nasser with a revised version of Alpha, code-named Gamma. By March the initiative had collapsed; Nasser withdrew approval of a tentative schedule for negotiations, refused to

engage in any direct talks with Israel and stated he would offer no further cooperation unless America disavowed the Baghdad Pact.<sup>40</sup>

Britain had taken another step independently of the U.S. In order to strengthen the Baghdad Pact and marginalize Nasser, Britain had attempted to secure Jordanian accession to the Pact. General Sir Gerald Templer, CIGS, went to Jordan in December, offering tanks, guns, an enhanced RAF presence at Amman and Mafrag and reaffirmation of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty in exchange for Jordan's joining the Pact. Dulles warned Macmillan that "an immediate move to expand the Baghdad Pact would probably deny us Nasser's cooperation".<sup>41</sup> Palestinian Ministers from the West Bank blocked Cabinet approval of accession and brought down the government. In the face of violent agitation in the streets of Amman, the new government declined the offer. The British Ambassador's car was stoned, and the mission as a whole was seen as a total humiliation for Britain.<sup>42</sup> Nasser's opposition to enlarging the Pact and his resentment of the Templer mission may partially explain his failure to follow through on his promises to support Alpha.<sup>43</sup>

Now that Alpha and its variants had clearly failed to win Nasser's support, the British and American governments formulated a new policy. A State Department memorandum of late March outlined the new approach, code-named Omega. Britain and America would allow negotiations on aid in funding

the Aswan Dam to drag on, arms shipments to Egypt would end, Iraq would get a radio station to counter Egyptian propaganda, Britain would continue to cooperate on a bilateral basis with Jordan and America would support (but not join) the Baghdad Pact. Israel would not be offered U.S. weapons but Canada and France might supply some arms.<sup>44</sup>

In Washington, Eban and his colleagues lobbied pro-Zionist members of Congress to push for an end to all thought of American aid for the Aswan Dam. Moving to preempt Congressional action, Dulles informed Egypt's Ambassador on 19 July that U.S. support for the project was withdrawn.<sup>45</sup> A week later Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal.

The 1888 convention and with it the Suez Canal Company's concession was set to expire in 1968, barring Egyptian agreement to an extension, which was unlikely. Britain and France had tried for years to arrange a conference of maritime powers to revise and strengthen the guarantees in the convention and create a new international regime for the canal. The American government, reluctant to create a precedent that might ultimately be used to undermine U.S. control of the Panama Canal, had hindered these efforts. In 1955 67m metric tons of oil and oil products had passed northwards through the Suez Canal, 20m tons of it destined for Britain. Oil traffic was expected to rise to 254m tons by 1968 and 335m by 1972. A Cabinet Office paper warned that "the Constantinople Convention is no longer an effective



instrument" for safeguarding the integrity of the canal. Moreover, "when Egypt acquires full control, it is to be expected that she will seek to force up the Canal dues and possibly to indulge in flag discriminations at our expense". Britain should arrange a new regime for the canal while it retained some leverage to do so; a blockade on capital for canal improvements was one possibility, an offer to Egypt of full control at an earlier date in exchange for stronger guarantees was another.<sup>46</sup>

In 1956 Eden did express Britain's commitment to the free flow of oil through the canal (and willingness to fight for it) to a visiting Khrushchev and Bulganin.<sup>47</sup> On 7 May a Conservative backbencher, John Peyton, asked the government to "lay down, in the name of international law, the Conditions for the future of the Suez Canal",<sup>48</sup> since Nasser clearly could not be trusted to allow freedom of transit. When British and American officials discussed abandoning U.S. help for the Aswan Dam as part of Omega, Michael Johnston of the Treasury warned that Nasser might seek revenge; "there is not much he can do against the U.S. but a lot he can do against us. Obvious examples are renewed pressure on the Suez Canal Company or stirring up trouble in the Gulf".<sup>49</sup> Britain had no plan to deal with this contingency, however, by the time Nasser had seized the canal.

Even before nationalization the increasing likelihood of Nasser seizing the Canal or otherwise obstructing the passage

of oil to Britain indicated the shared interest of Britain and Israel in enforcing a regime of free transit in the canal and auxiliary waterways. Yet Britain's commitment to devising an Arab-Israeli settlement and containing the Egyptian threat by strengthening the Baghdad Pact prevented Anglo-Israeli cooperation. In early January 1956 Gaitskell, now Leader of the Opposition, accompanied by Younger and Shadow Foreign Secretary Alfred Robens, visited Eden, Lloyd, who had replaced Macmillan as Foreign Secretary, and Walter Monckton, Minister of Defence. Eden and his Ministers argued against arming Israel to counter the Czech arms Nasser had purchased; "because of the danger of the situation, they admitted they wanted to get a settlement, and that, rather surprisingly, this was because on the one side the Israelis would realize the danger and make a concession, and on the other the Egyptians would also be frightened in case the Israelis supported a preventive war".<sup>50</sup>

In a March debate on Middle East policy, Anthony Nutting, a junior Minister at the Foreign Office, rejected Labour's calls for a guarantee of Israel's frontiers by warning of the dangers of "permanent recognition of a frontier which is not agreed...a frontier which results from an armistice and not from a peace treaty, a frontier which is bitterly opposed by all the Arab States". Yet, as Labour's R.T. Paget noted, "our Jordan Treaty guarantees this very line from one side. Why should we not also guarantee it from the other"? When asked

if the government would consider arming Israel, Nutting replied that "the safety and security of Israel does not lie in entering upon an arms race in the Middle East" but upon "establishing normal relations with her neighbours".<sup>51</sup> On 1 August, after Nasser had announced nationalization, Robert Boothby asked if the government would reconsider its policy on selling arms to Israel. Replying for the Foreign Office, Lord John Hope insisted the Arab-Israeli conflict and the dispute over the Suez Canal were entirely separate issues. Shinwell claimed that if Britain had been more willing to arm Israel "we might have been able to avoid the present impasse" while Sidney Silverman suggested that if the government had "taken a firm attitude when the Suez Canal was first closed to Israeli shipping, they would be in a very much stronger position to handle their difficulties today".<sup>52</sup>

The thrust of the British policy was clear; in order to prevent the Baghdad Pact from being undermined by anti-Western sentiment in the Arab world, the British dispute with Egypt and the Arab-Israeli conflict would be treated in isolation from each other. Britain would not form a tacit alliance with Israel to deal with the Egyptian threat. The Anglo-French-Israeli collusion that finally took place was the result of the failure of previous efforts to deal with Egypt. A 22-power conference in London proposed an international board to run the canal. Nasser rejected the proposal on 9 September. Eden then accepted Dulles's plan for a Canal

Users' Association, with the payment of dues into an independent fund rather than to Nasser. On 12 September he introduced the measure in Parliament, only to discover that it would prove impotent; Dulles was not prepared to make the proposal effective by backing it with economic sanctions against Nasser if he denied access to the Canal.<sup>53</sup>

Israel had viewed recent events with alarm. After the conclusion of the Baghdad Pact Nasser had moved to counter the emerging axis by creating one of his own. On 19 October 1955 an Egyptian-Syrian joint command was created, joined by Jordan a year later. Israel "found herself hemmed in on three sides...by Arab armies subordinate to a single Command".<sup>54</sup> In September, when he heard rumours of Anglo-French plans to open the canal by force, Dayan reflected that "Britain will be engaged in a military conflict with Egypt over interests which serve us too".<sup>55</sup> Yet Ben-Gurion worried that "Britain may wish to demonstrate her friendship for the Arabs by employing her forces against us in going to the help of Jordan"<sup>56</sup> at a time when Israeli-Jordanian border clashes were becoming more frequent. Such concerns were not exactly groundless. As early as April Lloyd had urged Eden to supply immediate aid to Jordan in the event of an Israeli invasion (which might have been Britain's view of a sufficiently large-scale reprisal raid).<sup>57</sup> Soon after Nasser's seizure of the canal, Britain encouraged the movement of Iraqi troops into Jordan, in part to strengthen pro-British elements in forthcoming elections,

in part to ensure stability along the border with Israel. In a 7 October interview with The Times Iraq's Nuri Sa'id proposed a regional settlement in which Israel would be confined to the borders defined by the 1947 partition resolution, a suggestion the Foreign Office News Department publicly welcomed.<sup>58</sup> After Israel responded to the murder of two archaeologists at Ramat Rachel with a reprisal raid against the Jordanian police fort at Husan, the British charge in Tel Aviv told the head of the U.N. truce supervisors "that one more Israeli reprisal action would bring into action the Anglo-Jordan Defence Treaty".<sup>59</sup> "This iciness", Dayan wrote, "has been a feature of Britain's relations with Israel for some time, but now, with the intrusion of the Iraqi plan, it has reached a peak".<sup>60</sup>

Matters would soon change. The October elections in Jordan led to a government that opposed an alliance with the pro-British Nuri and membership in the Baghdad Pact, preferring good relations with Nasser instead. "There goes another of the Foreign Office's schemes", Dayan observed, "and with it another heavy boulder from our path"!<sup>61</sup> Not only was the Iraqi plan out of the way, but Israel was soon to be offered a de facto alliance with Britain. On a 14 October visit to Chequers France's Acting Foreign Minister, Albert Gazier, and General Maurice Challe presented a plan to keep the canal open at the cost of committing Britain and France to collusion with Israel; Israel would attack Egypt, and Britain

and France would intervene to "separate the combatants" and occupy the canal in order to "protect" it. In Anglo-French-Israeli meetings at Sèvres later that month, the details were worked out and Israeli agreement was secured. Ben-Gurion was reluctant to see Israel cast as the aggressor in the proposed charade. Yet the others could attack and defeat Egypt without Israeli help. It was the pretext which Israel alone could provide. On October 24 the Sèvres Protocol was signed. Israel was to send forces into the Sinai and seize the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and the islands at the entrance to the Straits of Tiran. The Israeli government undertook not to attack Jordan, but if Jordan attacked Israel the Anglo-Jordanian treaty would be inoperative.<sup>62</sup>

On 29 October the operation began with an Israeli paratroop drop inside the Sinai. The next day Eden announced an Anglo-French ultimatum, asking both sides to withdraw 10 miles from the canal. "It is clearly not genuinely impartial", Shuckburgh concluded, "since the Israelis are nowhere near the canal".<sup>63</sup> Gaitskell made the same point in his 4 November broadcast, arguing "you don't separate two armies by bombing airfields and landing troops a hundred miles behind one side only".<sup>64</sup> When Gaitskell asked him if Israel's actions should not be taken as a violation of the Tripartite Declaration, Eden responded that Egypt's attitude to the Declaration "has been, to say the very least of it, equivocal". He added, belatedly indeed, "there is nothing in

the Tripartite Declaration or in the Charter which abrogates the right of a Government to take such steps as are essential to protect the lives of their citizens and vital rights such as here at stake".<sup>65</sup>

It was the British government's failure to correctly anticipate the American reaction that proved fatal. Christian Pineau, the French Foreign Minister, revealed the planned deception to Douglas Dillon, the U.S. Ambassador to France. Eisenhower was outraged by Britain's deceit, by Eden's willingness to precipitate an international crisis so close to the 1956 Presidential election and at the same time as the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising and by the exercise of the British veto over an American proposal for a cease-fire, presented to the U.N. Security Council on 30 October. This did not prevent the U.S. from bringing the matter before an emergency session of the General Assembly or from encouraging a potentially catastrophic run on the pound. In the face of rumoured oil sanctions, Eden accepted a cease-fire on 6 November. The rupture in Anglo-American relations brought Eden himself down.<sup>66</sup> The solidarity of the Western alliance only reasserted itself when Bulganin threatened Britain, France and Israel with steps to "crush the aggressors by the use of force and to restore peace in the East", and Eisenhower explicitly extended America's nuclear umbrella to Britain and France (but not Israel).<sup>67</sup>

While Israeli forces were forced to withdraw from the

positions which they had secured Israel did achieve several important objectives in the negotiations that lasted from November 1956 into March 1957. Nasser acquiesced in the stationing of a U.N. force on Egyptian soil, a force which would prevent fedayeen raids and ultimately provide a decade of peace and stability on the Egyptian-Israeli border. During these years Israel would absorb its immigrants and forge a close relationship with the U.S., a relationship that would prove invaluable after 1967. On March 1 1957, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir read before the General Assembly a statement, drafted by Eban and American officials, which committed Israel to withdrawal from Sinai on the assumption that raids from Egypt would end and the Straits of Tiran would be reopened. Interference with Israeli ships in the Gulf of Aqaba or the Straits of Tiran would be regarded as an attack against which Israel would exercise its right of self-defence. Israel had emerged from its threatening diplomatic isolation and gained a new international legitimacy.<sup>68</sup>



## NOTES

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3. H. of C. Debs., 29 July 1954, col. 740.
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21. Lucas, op. cit., p. 44, Kyle, op. cit., p. 112.
22. See, e.g., Shuckburgh's "Notes on Arab-Israeli Dispute", 15 December 1954, FO 371/111095, and Foreign Office to Washington, 7 September 1955, PREM 11/945.
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24. Oren, op. cit., p. 359.
25. Dulles's Speech to the Council on Foreign Relations 26 August 1955, Documents, 1955, 1958, pp. 361-64.
26. Oren, op. cit., pp. 359-60.
27. Shuckburgh, op. cit., p. 247, entry for 27 January 1955.
28. Oren, op. cit., p. 359.
29. Dayan, op. cit., p. 12.
30. Idem.
31. O'Brien, op. cit., p. 385.
32. "Memorandum of a Conversation, New York, September 26, 1955, 9:45 p.m.", FRUS, 1955-1957, 1989, Volume 14, pp. 516-19.
33. Dayan to Ben-Gurion, 5 December 1955, reprinted in Dayan, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
34. H. of C. Debs., 30 November 1955, col. 2288.
35. Oren, op. cit., p. 360.
36. Extracts from Eden's Guildhall Speech, 9 November 1955,

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38. Ben-Gurion's Statement in the Knesset, 15 November 1955,  
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52. Ibid, 1 August 1956, cols. 1375-77.
53. Skidelsky, op. cit., pp. 176-78.
54. Dayan, op cit., pp. 12-13.
55. Ibid, p. 26, diary entry for 1 September 1956.
56. Ibid, p. 33, diary entry for 27 September 1956.
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58. Kyle, op. cit., pp. 293-95.
59. Dayan, op. cit., p. 54, diary entry for 15 October 1956.
60. Idem.
61. Ibid, p. 62, diary entry for 21 October 1956.
62. "The Protocol of Sevres", Appendix A, Kyle, op. cit., pp.565-67.
63. Shuckburgh, p. 362, entry for 1 November 1956.
64. Williams, ed., op. cit., pp. 620-21. The text of Gaitskell's broadcast appears as an appendix on pp. 619-22.
65. H. of C. Debs., 30 October 1956, col. 1277.
66. O'Brien, op. cit., pp. 385-87.
67. Ibid, pp. 393-94, Kyle, op. cit., pp. 456-58.
68. O'Brien, op. cit., pp. 393-97.

### CONCLUSION

The 1946 decision to withdraw from Egypt without a right of reoccupation was fateful. Once Palestine was lost and efforts to redraw the map of the Middle East had failed, Britain had to choose between losing its position in Egypt and retracting its 1946 undertaking. Until 1954 the British government remained committed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to the conclusion of an agreement which no conceivable Egyptian government could have granted. There is something to be said for the conventional wisdom that Britain underestimated the intensity of Egyptian nationalist sentiment, even if this point is often over-stated.<sup>1</sup>

Among British statesmen, Morrison and Eden showed some awareness of Egypt's desire to be rid of the British presence. Yet Morrison retained enough of a belief in the possibility of an acceptable agreement to largely avoid facing up to the need to either settle for less or create a new foundation for Britain's position in the region. Eden had a stronger grasp of the need for retrenchment but was the captive of Churchill's, and to a lesser extent his own, reluctance to accept any arrangement that diminished British prestige.

The notion of a multilateral defence pact was crucial; such a pact would provide political camouflage for an agreement with Egypt and a framework within which both Israel and the Arab States could contribute to regional defence. Clearly it was the ideal arrangement. Yet the pursuit of the

ideal, when chances of success are slim, can be less satisfactory than, and indeed severely hamper, the pursuit of the merely satisfactory. That the ideal was likely to be out of reach should have been clear by the time Morrison recommended that Britain continue negotiating with Egypt without making any further concessions.

As Bevin explicitly formulated British policy, the conclusion of a new agreement with Egypt had to precede any serious approach to Israel. Not only was cooperation with Israel postponed until a deal with Egypt was reached, but the desire to retain Egyptian goodwill prevented Britain from enforcing free transit through the Suez Canal. This principle, in which Britain had a considerable stake, did not have the central place it merited in policy considerations as long as the conclusion of an agreement with Egypt remained the top priority for British policymakers.

The British government's unwillingness to seriously consider redeployment from the Canal Zone left the British position more dependent on Egyptian cooperation, while its reluctance to use its financial leverage over Egypt to induce compliance weakened Britain's negotiating position.

The emphasis on a multilateral pact was problematic. Pursuing bilateral ties with several states in the region would also have allowed Britain to avoid choosing between Israel and the Arab States, but by seeking agreement with both simultaneously rather than sequentially. British policy would

have gained considerable flexibility had this route, which Egypt seemed willing to consider at one point, been explored. Had efforts to achieve an acceptable deal with Egypt continued to be unsuccessful, it would have been easier to seek closer ties with Israel.

The 1951 MEC proposal was made largely to preempt Egyptian treaty repudiation, avert a rupture in Anglo-Egyptian relations and ensure that Egypt bore the blame for any breakdown in negotiations. Egyptian intransigence, which should have been taken as indicating the unlikelihood of agreement, became the spur for redoubled efforts to obtain it. While the offer was successful in terms of crisis avoidance, it achieved nothing positive. Indeed it left Britain's prestige more deeply dependent upon the conclusion of an agreement with Egypt. The rejection of the proposal cast the British government as Micawber, waiting for something to turn up and save Britain's position in the region. During the 1951 election campaign, the Conservatives lambasted Labour's policy of "scuttle" on the Middle East. When they formed a government Britain was in even less of a position to pursue any policy that could be cast as the acceptance of defeat. As a result, British policy changed relatively little; the new government continued to seek an agreement and, to avoid alienating Egypt and the other Arab States, declined to enforce transit rights in the canal. In addition, solicitude for Arab opinion and economic constraints prevented economic

cooperation with Israel, most disastrously in the construction of an Eilat-Haifa pipeline. The possibility against which this was an effective precaution, the deliberate closing of the canal, was not a sufficiently prominent consideration in the minds of those who assessed the proposal. Ironically, after Nasser nationalized the canal, the Observer called for the construction of such a pipeline to ensure the flow of Gulf oil pending a diplomatic resolution of the dispute.<sup>2</sup>

The 1954 decision for withdrawal was not taken entirely on its strategic merits, on the basis of the repercussions of the development of the H-bomb. In part it was the product of a desire to cut defence spending, for which there was little public support, and which, along with wage inflation, high social spending and an overly strong pound, was one of the causes of Britain's difficulties in achieving higher productivity and industrial competitiveness. It was also an extrication of British forces from a costly position on terms that were not overtly humiliating. Withdrawal has been praised as a triumph for British diplomacy<sup>3</sup> and criticized for creating a dangerous regional vacuum.<sup>4</sup> Withdrawing from the base, however, was neither inherently wise nor inherently foolish. It was the accompanying recasting of British strategy that mattered.

With British troops due to leave the base and the problems of Cold War regional defence largely solved by reliance on the H-bomb, Eden had the opportunity to



fundamentally reshape British strategy in the region. One possibility was close cooperation with Israel, including a base at Haifa, in conjunction with stronger bilateral cooperation with Arab States other than Egypt. A base at Haifa would have provided both a possible deterrent to actions such as Nasser's seizure of the canal, and a position from which a rapid military response could be launched. Israel feared the loss of the British buffer in the Canal Zone, and the Bat-Galim episode and the "Lavon affair" can most credibly be seen as efforts to dramatize the shared interest of Britain and Israel in free transit in the canal.

Eden had other concerns. For one thing, Egyptian restrictions on commerce in the canal did not pose a serious threat at the time as far as British interests were concerned. It seems not to have occurred to him that the Egyptian government, still headed by the more moderate Neguib rather than Nasser, would do something as reckless and potentially self-destructive economically as impose serious restrictions on the use of the canal, other than those applied to Israel. In part, this was underestimation of the role of anti-Western nationalism in Egyptian politics, in part an assumption that the blockade of Israel was a function of the Arab-Israeli conflict, a conflict whose centrality to regional instability Eden overestimated. From this flowed one element of the new policy, project Alpha. No feasible concessions were likely to win genuine friendship in the Arab world, given the intensity

of anti-Israel sentiment.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, imposing a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict would not have stabilized the region. In the absence of conflict with Israel, the Arab states have, in recent decades, only intensified their struggles among themselves.<sup>6</sup> Such a solution would have merely replaced one kind of instability with another.

The other major element of Eden's new policy, the attempt to construct a cohesive Baghdad Pact, was equally problematic, largely because it also reflected an underestimation of the fissiparous tendencies within the Arab world. As Dulles warned, the attempt to build a regional defence structure around the Hashemites inevitably aroused Egyptian resentment and thrust Britain into the struggle for leadership of the Arab world. The Baghdad Pact also worked, by encouraging Nasser's turn to the East for arms and his increasingly anti-Western stance (resentment of the West being the common coin of intra-Arab political contest), to defeat its own proclaimed purpose; Soviet influence was enhanced, not excluded, and the centre of political gravity in the region was tilting away from the West.<sup>7</sup>

Such developments were particularly alarming in light of the military aftermath of withdrawal from Egypt. Despite the claims by government spokesmen that withdrawal would permit the development of a strategic reserve and redeployment to alternative facilities, no reserve had been built up and the remaining base at Cyprus was inadequate; the harbour at

Famagusta had not been expanded, so when Nasser nationalized the canal Britain was left with no large naval base nearer than Malta, 1,000 miles and 6 days from Egypt. There wasn't even a contingency plan to reoccupy the Canal Zone. The manpower savings created by withdrawal had been used to help Britain meet its NATO commitments in Europe. It wasn't withdrawal itself but the combination of withdrawal and the failure to build up an alternative strongpoint in the region that left Britain with no means of defending its interests in the Middle East against a strictly local threat.<sup>8</sup> Eden's call for fewer commitments abroad made sense in the abstract and particularly within the context of the Cold War and the need to focus primarily on the Soviet threat. In this case, it had left Britain perilously dependent on local goodwill that had yet to materialize.

It was not until a few months before Nasser's seizure of the canal that British policymakers gave any serious thought to that possibility. When it materialized and Eden responded by insisting on the sanctity of free international waterways Crossman could not resist noting the government's failure to make the same point when Israel was the victim. Ministers were now "sitting on their high horse" and defending a principle which in past debates "they have sedulously avoided mentioning".<sup>9</sup>

The government had avoided defending the principle because its violation had not been seen as a direct threat to

British interests. Because the appearance of such a threat was relatively unexpected and Britain lacked the capacity for a rapid liberation of the canal, the military response was delayed and lacked the element of surprise. Because it involved deception and the defence of a principle the government had previously and conspicuously failed to defend, it looked self-serving and hypocritical.

William Hayter of the Moscow Embassy complained "I believed that we were strongly opposed to the use of force to obtain national ends", concluding "the Russian change of front in Hungary was largely because they saw us take the law into our own hands in Suez".<sup>10</sup> Pierson Dixon, Britain's representative at the U.N., informed Eden "I do not see how we can carry much conviction in our protests against the Russian bombing of Budapest if we are ourselves bombing Cairo".<sup>11</sup> Junior ministers Anthony Nutting and Edward Boyle resigned, as did several Foreign Service officials outraged by the government's deception and use of force without U.N. authorization.<sup>12</sup>

The Lord Chancellor, Kilmuir, had drafted a memorandum which asserted "the Charter of the United Nations leaves untouched the general principle of self-defence under customary law", and implied that the defence of free commerce and property rights took priority over the claims of national sovereignty in some circumstances. This might have formed a powerful and popular justification for British action, had

Britain been militarily prepared and politically willing to take control of the canal immediately after its seizure on the grounds that the canal was necessary to international commerce, and could not be unilaterally taken into the hands of one state. Instead Britain stuck to the rhetoric of disinterested internationalism while pursuing a more self-interested policy; the gap between rhetoric and practice left the government vulnerable to the attacks of those who had the consistency to follow its proclaimed principles to the impotence which was their logical conclusion. In his 3 November broadcast Eden could only repeat the sodden banalities of U.N.-speak, saying "all my life I have been a man of peace...I have been a League of Nations man and a United Nations man, and I am still the same man".<sup>13</sup> His government went along with French and American statements that a return to the status quo for the Suez Canal Company was unacceptable. Since most of the company's shares were still held by private shareholders, this entailed acquiescence in the dubious principle of confiscation. By failing to make the case that Egypt had violated property rights, Britain helped to legitimize such banditry and blunted the cutting edge of a potentially popular justification for an assertive policy.<sup>14</sup>

This allowed the terms of debate to be set by those who wished to depict the intervention at Suez and Soviet actions in Hungary as equally objectionable legally and morally; with Suez, the baneful doctrine of the moral equivalence of East

and West gained greater acceptance among much of the liberal intelligentsia, in part for the lack of an intellectually coherent alternative.

Skidelsky observes that "imperialism and internationalism are, in British experience, very largely interchangeable", given Britain's role in shaping the 19th-Century world order of the free movement of goods and economic interdependence, a world order that suited British interests as well as British principles. It was an open question as to whether both could be served in a postwar world order in which economic interdependence was giving way to rabid nationalism, national self-determination was sacrosanct and empire was seen as obsolete. Yet much of Britain's policymaking establishment assumed formal decolonization, and commitment to international amity as regulated by the U.N., would be compatible with the maintenance of Britain's traditional position. This lay behind, for example, Bevin's programme of non-intervention and economic development in the Middle East.

This assumption was accompanied by an essentially realist approach to Middle Eastern power politics on the part of British governments. Both Labour and Conservative governments were concerned with maintaining the desired balance between Israel and the Arab states, in order to contain the Arab-Israeli conflict. This trend culminated in that preeminently realist undertaking, project Alpha. The domestic structure and ideological composition of the governments of states in

the region rarely counted for much in British calculations; ideology intruded only when the Cold War conflict became the principal consideration. By neglecting the role of ideology, Fukuyama notes, realists, paradoxically, "are also the most likely to seek accommodation with powerful enemies".<sup>15</sup> This helps to explain British efforts to secure Arab goodwill, and the decision for withdrawal from the Canal Zone.

Withdrawal without the creation of a new strongpoint was dangerous precisely because of the ideological content of Middle Eastern politics. Israel was resented by many Arabs because it was seen as a political and cultural outpost of the West (it was, which does not detract from its legitimacy as a state), by the same token Western sponsorship of Israel exacerbated Arab antipathy to the West. Israel was also committed to the free passage of commerce through the canal. In Egypt as in much of the rest of the Arab world, capturing and retaining power required the exploitation of anti-Western sentiment and the dramatization of Egypt's reassertion of its honour against the former colonial masters. Israel and the canal were the two most vulnerable Western salients in the region; it was inevitable that Nasser would ultimately use both as targets. Britain's efforts to prevent the Arab-Israeli conflict from impinging on the Anglo-Egyptian dispute were obeisance to a political fiction. In fact, the two phenomena were aspects of the same larger ideological battle.

What would a successful British policy have looked like? It would certainly have required close cooperation with Israel, whose ideological affinity with the West and shared stake in the free passage of goods made it a more reliable ally than any of the Arab regimes could ever have been. One aspect of such cooperation would have been a consistent defence of transit rights in the canal. It would also have entailed loose bilateral ties with oil-producing Arab States. This would have asked less from such states than would membership in multilateral, Western-dominated organizations, which carried political risks. It would only have required that they cooperate in the retention of their own independence and sell oil to the West. The concerns entertained by many British policymakers that the preservation of access to Arab oil was incompatible with close ties to Israel had little basis in fact. As O'Brien notes, the hatred of Arab princes for Israel "is sincere, but their devotion to their own economic interests is no less sincere and takes precedence".<sup>16</sup>

One can of course argue that Israel was unlikely to have agreed to such a relationship, pointing to signs of anti-British sentiment well into the 1950s. Yet this underestimates the beleaguered state's willingness to brush aside sentiment in order to find new allies. Moreover, after Egypt's rejection of the MEC Israel did make several significant overtures in the direction of bilateral cooperation, to which Britain failed to respond adequately.



Certainly Israeli actions in the wake of the withdrawal agreement show a concern regarding Egypt that would almost certainly have overruled political objections to, e.g., a British base at Haifa.

Such a policy entailed writing off much of what remained of Britain's old imperial position in the Arab world. It would have included early abandonment of the the Canal Zone base as an irrelevance, but a clear commitment to keeping the canal itself open, a reversal of the priorities the British government actually pursued well into the 1950s. This would have required political courage since it would appear to constitute a sacrifice in terms of prestige. Yet prestige, vaguely defined, conferred few concrete benefits for Britain in the region. The model of decolonisation implicitly accepted by key British policymakers entailed relinquishing the forms of domination in exchange for the substance of cooperation. The model rested on a dangerous underestimation of the depth of hostility to the West, hostility which severely limited the possibilities of cooperation.

Withdrawal to a position built around Israel would have required the loss of imperial prestige but it would have created a more stable position, certainly preferable to that with which Britain was actually left. Nobody in British politics, regrettably, was making this argument. Those on the right who doubted Arab goodwill offered instead a stronger grip on the remnants of empire. Those on the left who argued

for cooperation with Israel were among the critics of Labour's postwar anticommunist foreign policy, and could rightly be suspected in many cases of lacking concern for or understanding of the requirements of Britain's strategic position. Few of them, at any rate, favoured an aggressively ideological crusade in the Middle East.

The Suez crisis and the later collapse of the Baghdad Pact did not spell the end of Britain's ability to intervene militarily in the region, as the interventions in Jordan (1958) and Kuwait (1961) demonstrated.<sup>17</sup> Suez did, however, shatter the lingering spell of empire. Subsequent British policy became altogether less ambitious and more prudent. Ironically, Suez made possible the kind of policy that might have averted the crisis in the first place. From 1957 on, British policy was concerned with Britain's core interest, the supply of Gulf oil. Britain's share in the oil assets in the Gulf was over 30%, and British Petroleum had a controlling interest in Kuwait Oil. Kuwait alone supplied roughly 50% of Britain's oil from 1957-61, with the other Gulf states supplying most of the remainder.<sup>18</sup> Britain's policy would revolve around the preservation of the political independence of the Gulf states. East of Suez Britain strengthened its position as a military power by substantial military expenditure and cooperation with stable local allies.<sup>19</sup>

After Suez, however, Britain ceased to be the main outside power in the Middle East. The United States assumed

that role in stages, promulgating the Eisenhower Doctrine in early 1957 and gradually forging a close partnership with Israel, which was to flower particularly after 1967. The Eisenhower Doctrine defined Western interests in the region in terms of the Cold War and the need to exclude Soviet influence. Military and economic aid would be available to regimes willing to resist Soviet expansionism. This approach was to produce more regional stability than previous efforts. Approaching the region entirely as a theatre of the East-West ideological struggle left Israel firmly in the Western camp, and several Arab states willing to do what was necessary to receive U.S. aid and retain their independence. The Doctrine offered no programme for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, which was best seen as a tension to be lived with rather than a problem to be solved. This should be seen as a healthy adaptation to reality rather than as the Doctrine's "worst omission".<sup>20</sup> In light of Israel's pro-Western orientation, the earlier policy of "evenhandedness" looked less like commendable impartiality than an obstinate refusal to distinguish friend from potential foe.

Britain's intervention at Suez was a departure from an over-ambitious, insufficiently ideological policy, and a somewhat inept precursor to the Eisenhower Doctrine. According to Eden, "it closed the chapter of complacency about the situation in the Middle East. It led to the Eisenhower Doctrine and from that to Anglo-American intervention in the

following summer in Jordan and the Lebanon. It helped to show that the West was not prepared to leave the area wide open for infiltration and subversion by others".<sup>21</sup>

Whether this was compensation for the destruction of Britain's illusions and the humiliating end of his own political aspirations, he does not say.

## NOTES

1. See e.g. Hahn, op. cit., passim.
2. Kyle, op. cit., p.161.
3. Devereux, op. cit., p. 141.
4. Carlton, op. cit., pp. 370ff.
5. David Pryce-Jones, The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs, London: Paladin, 1989, pp. 222-56 and passim.
6. Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, New York: The Free Press, 1992, p. 264.
7. O'Brien, op. cit., pp. 384-85
8. Skidelsky, op. cit., pp. 184-85, Devereux, op. cit., pp. 119-20.
9. H. of C. Debs, 12 September 1956, col. 93.
10. Anthony Adamthwaite, "Suez Revisited", in Dockrill and Young, ed., p. 236.
11. Idem.
12. Ibid, pp. 232-33. See also Evan Luard's letter of resignation from the Foreign Service, which appears as an appendix in Kyle, op. cit., pp. 568-69.
13. Cited by Leon Epstein, "Partisanship in the Suez Crisis", in Richard Rose, ed., Studies in British Politics, London: Macmillan 1966, p. 272.
14. Elie Kedourie, "Suez Revisited", in his Islam in the Modern World and Other Studies, London: Mansell, 1980, pp. 176-77.

15. Fukuyama, op. cit., p. 250.
16. O'Brien, op. cit., p. 378.
17. Adamthwaite, op. cit., p.225.
18. Phillip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968, London: Oxford University Press/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1973, pp. 153-54.
19. Ibid, pp. 155-56 and passim.
20. Kyle, op. cit., p. 528.
21. Anthony Eden, Full Circle, London: Cassel, 1960, p. 577.

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