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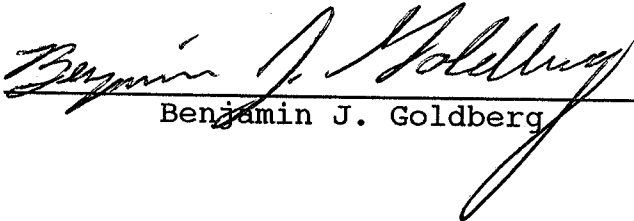
by

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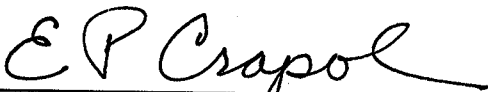
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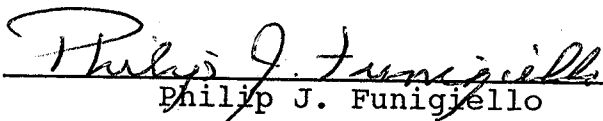
This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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Approved, May 1993


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DEDICATION

This work is for my Grandfather, Julian Schultz.
He always insisted that his grandchildren obtain
as much education as they could. Here I am.

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Motivations Behind the Suez Crisis

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the respective reactions of the leading governments involved in the Suez Crisis. The thesis seeks to discover what motivated the Eisenhower administration to react against its allies, when they attacked Egypt. The impetus behind the aggression of England, France, and Israel is explored as well. Finally, Gamal Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal and subsequent actions are also discussed and analyzed.

The study suggests that President Eisenhower believed he had no choice but to condemn the aggression committed by England, France, and Israel. He felt he was forced to support the Egyptian cause because the allies' attack was unjustified. Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal, but had in no way inhibited passage through the canal. Eisenhower believed that England, France, and Israel had injured the cause of the western world by invading Egypt; he therefore sought to end the assault as quickly as possible.

Motivations Behind the Suez Crisis

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction To A Crisis

Dwight D. Eisenhower was President of the United States during a critical period in American foreign relations. Between 1953 and 1961, the Eisenhower administration dealt with the perceived Soviet threat, using the Cold War ideology of the United States to determine policy. The ideology defined American interests as antithetical to Soviet interests. It set East against West, Democracy against Communism, and American against Russian. During this period the President threatened to use nuclear force at least twice and repeatedly authorized aerial espionage in his efforts to contain expansion of Soviet influence.

In many ways these years formed the core of Cold War doctrine. Containment and the Domino Theory found their place in each foreign policy decision. A regular feature of Eisenhower's foreign policy was the vying for superiority that came to characterize American/Russian relations during the following three decades. In military power, technological advancements, and international influence the United States worked to gain the upper hand. An obsession with Soviet

advances, real and imagined, was the hallmark of the administration. Wherever Russian intrusion was perceived, America was sure to react. As with any obsession, this ideology pitting US interests against those of the USSR often went so far as to ignore principal factors. Unnoticed went the desires of smaller countries that became entangled in Russian and American foreign policies. The countries in which Soviet advances were detected by the Eisenhower administration came to be viewed and treated as pawns on a Cold War chessboard to be moved by either the United States or the Soviet Union. They were not empowered to act as individual states, only as representatives of one or the other superpower.

Because of the obsession with counteracting Soviet advances, the Eisenhower administration had more than its share of foreign crises. The majority of these critical situations took on a military nature. After all, the superpowers vied for control of the world and the most basic means of control was the threat and actual use of brute force. During crises, when extremes became the norm, negotiations were reduced to threats of force and counter-force.

Princeton Professor Fred I. Greenstein explained in The Hidden Hand Presidency, Eisenhower as Leader that because of Eisenhower's military experience around the world, the President maintained a keen interest in foreign policy. Greenstein noted that Secretary of State John Foster Dulles "was the publicly visible actor" in foreign affairs while,

behind the scenes, Eisenhower actually had control over all policy decisions. From within the administration, the President's participation during these crises was evident, but frequently it was not seen from the outside. In day to day diplomacy it was Dulles who appeared to direct most American foreign policy. Eisenhower carefully concealed his own involvement to avoid being the target of any criticism resulting from unpopular policies. Yet, given Greenstein's proof, and the large amount of substantiating evidence that has been declassified since his book was published, there is no doubt that Eisenhower managed American foreign policy during his administration. Dulles frequently may have acted as his collaborator, but it was the President who was primarily responsible for the final decisions.¹

As Eisenhower entered office in 1953, he helped force an armistice between North and South Korea, putting an end to the three year war there. Both 1954 and 1958 saw Communist Chinese attacks on the Nationalist held islands of Quemoy and Matsu. The President dealt with these incursions by threatening nuclear repercussions if Mao Tse Tung continued his aggression. The Peoples Republic of China halted its attacks. In the minds of American officials all of these events were Soviet instigated.

To avoid surprise attacks and help anticipate any moves made by the Communists, it was requisite to keep an eye on Russia. In 1955

Eisenhower approved U-2 flights over the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries to protect against surprise attack. The launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957 prompted the Eisenhower administration to begin work on a satellite with photographic capabilities. Aerial reconnaissance came into its own during Eisenhower's second term.

During this period the President also made less malignant attempts at gaining influence and/or control in the far reaches of the globe - to protect the world from the Soviet Union. By means of foreign aid and alliance the State Department sought to improve relations, protect against enemy intrusions, and increase US influence around the world. In parts of the Middle East, South East Asia, and the Pacific, America's claim was staked.

The situation in the Middle East was particularly precarious. Between protection of Israel and an interest in good relations with the Arabs, Eisenhower had to maintain a careful balancing act. Israel represented America's most definite ally in the Middle East. It was a bastion of Democracy and a foe of Communism. The Arab countries were appealing because of the vast source of potential energy under their territory. The problem was the mutual hostility between Israel and the Arabs. Eisenhower tried to walk a fine line and remain friendly with both areas.

Although most of the Arab states had an anti-western bent, the

Eisenhower administration made all attempts to keep on amiable terms with the oil rich Arabs. Eisenhower neither wished to displease those controlling the oil nor wanted to see such an energy source drift into Communist hands. Simultaneously, he tried to support and protect Israel from Arab aggressions.

Keeping the peace became a top priority for the administration. By avoiding hostilities the problem of allying with Israel against the Arabs or vice versa vanished. Also, peaceful relations lessened the opportunity for the Soviet Union to infiltrate the area and gain influence. Soviet campaigns to discredit the United States included offering the USSR as a more benevolent and less controlling option than America. If, however, there was no dissatisfaction with the United States from either of the disputants - Arabs or Israelis - the USSR had little chance of usurping America's position.

Notwithstanding Eisenhower's efforts to please all the people all the time, some were always disappointed. To the Arabs, Israel was an abhorred neighbor that was unquestionably allied to the United States. No doubt Arab resentment and distrust of the US formed around this point. By spouting standard anti-American propoganda, the Soviet Union appeared to sympathize with the Arabs and thus gained a foothold in the Middle East.

To protect against the spread of further Soviet influence,

Eisenhower's administration worked to align Middle Eastern states with America. The Baghdad Pact represented one such effort, but only some of the Arab countries had signed that treaty. Clear of any arrangement was Egypt, perhaps the most powerful non-aligned state in the area and a country led by one of the preeminent twentieth century Arab leaders, Colonel Gamal Abd'ul Nasser.

Nasser stood at the forefront of a nationalistic wave that began following World War Two. 1946 had seen a rising degree of national fervor directly opposed to the superpowers' tendency toward manipulation of third world countries for first world purposes. After the Second World War numerous colonies fought for and won their independence, reasserting their own cultures and customs. Other people around the world experienced a renewed sense of shared ancestry, ignored prior to the war. Out of this atmosphere was born Nasser's vision.

The Egyptian leader wished to unite Middle Eastern Arabs by invoking their common traditions and beliefs. Coming to power during the early 1950s, Nasser defied Cold War conventions and sought the attentions of both the Soviet Union and the United States. Attempting to manipulate the manipulators, he negotiated with both superpowers, to the displeasure of each. As America and Russia vied for increased influence in Egypt, Nasser retained his independence by remaining non-

committal. For his efforts he gained acclaim in the Arab world and among other nationalistically inclined third world countries, but little approval from the superpowers.

By playing on the US/USSR rivalry, Nasser managed to obtain several objectives he sought. With help from either America or the Soviet Union he was able to rid Egypt of foreign occupational forces, obtain loans and grants, buy weapons, and sell wheat. From an American perspective, the assistance provided was a means of inviting Egypt to become an ally of the West. The Soviet Union had approximately the same objective.

Nasser's tactic worked for only as long as both superpowers were willing to tolerate it. By 1956, the patience of Eisenhower and his advisors was wearing thin. Nasser could not continue to sit on the fence. He was getting the best of both worlds free of charge and the United States was not benefiting from it. Officials were clear that something would have to change. Nasser's all expense paid trip was about to end.

In July 1956, Eisenhower sent President Nasser the message that his riding the fence would no longer be allowed by cancelling an aid package to help build the massive Aswan dam on the Nile river. In retaliation Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a waterway depended upon by much of the free world as a passage for oil and other precious

goods. Nasser's action marked the beginning of the Suez Canal Crisis.

Instead of pitting East against West, the Suez conflict brought the West to face itself. The Eisenhower administration and its World War Two allies took diametrically opposed positions. The President rejected all efforts to forcefully secure the canal from Egyptian control, while Great Britain and France saw no choice but to reclaim the Suez using any means.

The United Kingdom and France were primary among the nations affected by Nasser's seizure. Both had had a major hand in running the canal before its nationalization. Both stood to lose large investments. And, loss of control over the canal would negate British and French influence in the Suez just as Nasser desired. Considering these prospects, England and France saw no option but to resort to an aggressive attack on Egypt - negotiation would not sway Nasser. Joining the Anglo-French forces were Israeli troops, whose leaders had defensive reasons of their own for attacking.

President Eisenhower did not allow for violence as an option. He repudiated the military action of his Western allies. In doing so, America appeared to side with the Soviet Union. Here was the only time in the Eisenhower presidency when the United States was at odds with its allies and in seeming accord with its enemies. The allies' confidence that such an illusion would never be accepted by American officials coaxed

Britain and France into believing Eisenhower would support their aggression despite his contrary statements. Such was not the case.

Numerous volumes have discussed varying aspects of the Suez Crisis. The basic events of the conflict can be found in any good encyclopedia. They are not obscure. The influences acting upon and motivations behind decisions made by the principal players have not been made as lucid. Through examination of the words of Eisenhower, Dulles, and many of the other officials caught up in the crisis of 1956, I will retell the history of the Suez Crisis in an effort to reveal the motives behind the actions of those involved. From private conversations, government communications, public statements, memoirs, and diaries their thoughts and rationale can be derived and examined. The vital considerations that guided Eisenhower in his anti-aggression stance must be explained in order to truly understand what happened in the second half of 1956. Likewise it is necessary to investigate those influences that resulted in Egyptian nationalization of the Suez and British, French, and Israeli insistence upon the use of force.

ENDNOTES

1. Fred I. Greenstein, The Hidden Hand Presidency, Eisenhower as Leader, (New York: Basic Books, 1982): 87-92.

CHAPTER TWO

Leading Up To The Crisis

During the final days of July 1956, Gamal Nasser, President of Egypt, announced to the world his intention to nationalize the Suez Canal. The action startled and infuriated Britain, France, and Israel, all of whom depended on passage through the canal for vital commodities, especially oil. These countries shortly devised and executed a plan of military attack to reverse Nasser's decision. Ultimately, largely because Eisenhower refused to sanction military seizure of the Suez and instead directed the matter to the United Nations, a less violent solution was reached through UN negotiation. In November Soviet threats of sending volunteers to defend Egypt against the invaders appeared to bring pressure for peaceful solution, but had the President not insisted on United Nations participation from the beginning of hostilities it was improbable that a cease fire would have been achieved without much higher casualties.¹ U.N. involvement meant world opinion and diplomatic pressure could be brought to bear on the belligerent forces.

Nasser's nationalization move was justified as a reaction to

America's withdrawal on July 19 of an offer to aid in the construction of the High Aswan Dam on the Nile River.² Washington's original willingness to assist in the project was a reaction to an anticipated threat of Soviet influence in Egypt. The threat had arisen solely through America's refusal to sell weaponry to Egypt, a strategy intended to maintain an arms balance in the Middle East. That balance was between the Arab countries and Israel, which was clearly pro-American. The decisions that resulted in these actions were based on perceptions of Soviet involvement, domestic pressure, rationalizations, and emotional reactions. To understand how the Suez Crisis developed one must investigate the events that led to Nasser's seizure of the canal.

The events leading toward the Suez Crisis had begun in February 1955. At this time Gamal Nasser requested military aid from the United States. Nasser asked that America sell 27 million dollars worth of arms to Egypt. In response the United States agreed, but added the stipulation that Nasser make full payment upon delivery. Aware Nasser could not do so, the Eisenhower administration had agreed to the deal expecting Nasser to reject their terms. Since Nasser dropped the subject after the American requirements were presented, the American guess was correct.³

The effective rejection of Nasser's proposal by America had its consequences. Nasser's failure to obtain arms from the United States

was probably his prime motivation behind approaching America's rival. In September of 1955 it was revealed by Egyptian officials that a weapons deal had been made between Russia and Egypt.⁴ The weapons were to be transported through Czechoslovakia. Estimates that Egypt would receive between 90 and 200 million dollars in arms from the Soviets alarmed American policy makers. Because this amount drastically exceeded the previously considered 27 million dollars in arms from the United States, the Eisenhower administration felt it had to respond in order to counteract possible Communist influence.⁵

In his State of the Union Address in the first week of January 1956, Eisenhower made reference to the arms deal, noting that "In the Middle East recent Soviet moves are hardly compatible with the reductions of international tension."⁶ The comment hinted at the administration's concern with the December contact between Nasser and the Soviet Union. It was a quiet warning to the Soviets that selling arms to Nasser was bound to provoke American retaliation.

In his memoir, Waging Peace, Eisenhower commented that "The first evidence of serious Communist penetration occurred in the fall of 1955...in what has since been called the notorious Nasser 'arms deal.'"⁷ Eisenhower continued, noting that "when the Soviet Union threatened to become actively involved [in the Middle East], the United States could no longer remain a silent partner. We had to step in to counter the weight