

by the USSR. Yet, throughout the conflict, Russian objectives went unfulfilled. Nasser, like Cointet theorized about the French, desired most of all to maintain his independence of action - to avoid the influences of either super power. He achieved his goal. Communism was not a motivating factor for Nasser, nationalism served that purpose.

The fear of Soviet influence in Egypt was not unique to the French. In the United States the USSR was always the primary concern. From America's perspective the Soviet Union was the Cold War - remove it and the problems ended, subdue Communist influence and the free world was safe. One can be positive then that the Cold War, in some way, influenced Eisenhower in his reaction to the Suez Canal Crisis. Up to this point, however, America's involvement in the crisis only has been touched upon. The United States was against the Anglo-French military initiative and harshly criticized the actions of France, England, and Israel. But, to discover what motivated and guided Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles one must examine their actions more closely.

ENDNOTES

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48. Troen, "Ben-Gurion Diary": 302.
49. Shemesh, "Abd al-Latif al-Bughdadi's Memoirs": 336.
50. FRUS XVI: 835 and Ambrose: 357.
51. Cointet: 135.
52. Dwight D. Eisenhower, The White House Years, Waging Peace, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1965): 77 and Ambrose: 359.

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54. Ibid.: 361.

55. Shemesh, "Abd al-Latif al-Bughdadi's Memoirs": 338. It occurs to me that Nasser's reasoning here was more similar to the paranoiac responses of Joseph Stalin than the reactions of Hitler. But perhaps one dictator was as good as another.

56. Ambrose: 362.

57. Ibid.: 367.

58. Ibid.: 369.

59. Blanche Wiesen Cook, The Declassified Eisenhower A Divided Legacy, (Garden City, New York: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1981): 190.

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61. This is not quite true. Israel was able to obtain a pledge from Egypt that its shipping would no longer be denied access to the Straights of Tiran. This had been one of Ben-Gurion's primary war aims. Peres: 145.

62. Shemesh, "Egypt: From Military Defeat to Political Victory": 159.

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CHAPTER FOUR

S t a n d i n g A g a i n s t T h e A l l i e s

To the surprise of the world and perhaps most of all to the British and the French the Eisenhower Administration reacted caustically to Israel's October 29 assault against Egypt and the following Anglo-French ultimatum. Bringing the matter before the United Nations Security Council and, failing in that attempt, the General Assembly, the United States succeeded in passing a resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire of all forces in the Middle East. Had Eisenhower betrayed his NATO allies? During the three months prior to the British-French-Israeli attack the President continuously warned that the United States government would not support a military solution to the Suez Crisis. The President was true to his word. As Nasser had lashed out when denied his objective, so too Eisenhower now used all his resources to obtain a cease-fire, even against the wishes of Great Britain and France.

President Eisenhower's reaction to the nationalization of the Suez Canal was nearly instantaneous. From July 27 and through the entire crisis, Eisenhower insisted that military force could be justified only after

all other options had been attempted without success. As negotiations failed, the President's desire for a peaceful solution became more adamant. Perhaps he was obsessed with avoiding war. Perhaps he realized that each failed negotiation brought war closer to the Middle East. Whatever the case, when the crisis culminated in violence, Eisenhower's wrath was unleashed. Although varying explanations for his reaction have been offered, it appears that the President was motivated primarily by a pair of factors - the Cold War and remaining true to the principles he had lived by throughout his military and political careers.

In the past, Americans have claimed that responsibility for the US stance lay with Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. There have also been charges made that Eisenhower and Dulles reacted harshly because of the crisis' close proximity to the 1956 election or that the pair was angry because they had not been consulted or informed of the Anglo-French plan. When the events and facts are examined, however, one can see that none of these theories provide an accurate representation or explanation of the Suez Crisis.

A misconception held before the historical reconstruction of Dwight D. Eisenhower in the early 1980s was that John Foster Dulles made foreign policy decisions and the President simply rubber stamped Dulles' ideas. As Eisenhower's intricacies have been revealed and

evaluated this interpretation of events largely has been dismissed. Prior to the reconstruction of Eisenhower's image, many people attributed America's peaceful stance during the Suez situation to the Secretary of State. In fact, it was Eisenhower, with Dulles' agreement, who insisted on peaceful negotiations. And it was Eisenhower who exploded when this course was abandoned by the allies.

The allies-turned-adversaries of the Suez Crisis have never contested that it was the President who was responsible for America's reaction to hostilities and that his reaction was one of fury. Michael Guhin, author of John Foster Dulles A Statesman and his Times, included convincing evidence taken from crisis participants that discounts the belief that Dulles was behind America's reaction and affirms the idea that Eisenhower was incredibly angry.¹ He noted that the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Selwyn Lloyd "and Abba Eben, Israel's Ambassador to Washington, viewed Dulles as a possible 'agent for some salvage operation,' while Eisenhower 'was in a mood of someone betrayed.'" There was a great difference in the Eben-Lloyd descriptions of these two statesmen. Dulles was trying to rescue the situation, ease tensions between the allies, find a solution that would not result in Western Europe's humiliation. Eisenhower on the other hand, was someone betrayed, and more inclined to seek vengeance and retribution than a resolution favorable to the aggressors.

In addition, Guhin reminded his readers that Secretary Dulles checked into a hospital the day after he addressed the United Nations General Assembly.² Dulles entered Walter Reed hospital on November 3 with the first signs of the stomach cancer destined to take his life in 1959. Secretary Dulles was out of the direct decision making process before America forced acceptance of the cease-fire. He could not have been its source.

The above discussion is not meant to imply that Eisenhower did not consult with Dulles or agree with much of the advice Dulles offered him. The two men were frequently of the same mind. In the goal of finding a peaceful solution, Dulles and the President worked as one, until Dulles' illness put him out of commission. But, whether or not Dulles was present, Eisenhower would have been in charge.

From the beginning, the US government was aware of the Anglo-French interest in a military solution. On July 27, Prime Minister Eden sent a telegram to Eisenhower in which he insisted military force remain an option.³ The same day White House officials received a similar report about the French stance from the American Ambassador in Paris, Douglas Dillon.⁴ Neither the President nor the Secretary of State condoned an aggressive response.

Given their agreement, Dulles and Eisenhower worked toward the mutual goal of keeping the peace on both sides. A Special National

Intelligence Estimate prepared in September concluded that the UK and France would try to keep their military options open, but probably would not take that course unless Nasser provided a "violent provocation" - an attack on nationals or property. Authors of the intelligence estimate believed Nasser was cognizant of this and reasoned he would avoid all possible provocations.⁵ Hence, Dulles and Eisenhower were not concerned with the Egyptians, but with their allies.

As if in mocking clairvoyance, the estimate added that conceivably "other situations of friction in the area might develop in such a way as to furnish an occasion for the UK-French military intervention against Nasser."⁶ This guess proved correct. Yet, those writing the estimate had not foreseen that the situation guessed at would be a construct of Anglo-French conspirators designed to provide the excuse for an attack.

The concern about Britain and France was well-founded. On August second, Dulles reported that Great Britain and France's determination to use force had not abated. Dulles stated that he was attempting to convince them to lobby in favor of international control of the Canal - the Users' Association - instead of attacking Egypt to gain Anglo-French control.⁷ World opinion might support the former, but surely would reject the latter.

During an evening conversation with Dulles on September 8, Eisenhower expressed doubts as to whether the Users' Association could

succeed. As the exchange continued, it demonstrated both Eisenhower's and Dulles' interest in keeping the peace. Honestly, Dulles responded to the Commander in Chief's insecurity: "I was not sure either but...I felt we had to keep the initiative and keep probing along lines, particularly since there was no chance of getting the British and the French not to use force unless they had some alternatives that seemed to have in them some strength of purpose and some initiative." To this, according to Dulles, "The President expressed again his deep concern that military measures should not be taken."⁸ Their objectives were clearly the same: negotiation and peace.

One month later at an NSC meeting, Eisenhower commented he and Dulles agreed in essence "that if the United States could just keep the lid on a little longer, some kind of compromise plan could be worked out for a settlement of the Suez problem."⁹ The User's Association had been one means of keeping the lid on. By this time, however, Eisenhower recognized that he could not be certain of whether or not the US would have the time to work out a compromise. If an attack occurred, the efforts made by Dulles and the plans made by Eisenhower would go to waste.

Unbeknownst to the President, his time had already expired. Within three days the British and French began their information blackout, during which they planned, with Israel, to reclaim the Suez

Canal. Despite Eisenhower's best efforts, England and France were bent on force.

It is obvious that Eisenhower and Dulles supported a peaceful conclusion for the Suez conflict as the best solution. Publicly both Dulles and Eisenhower announced that America would not accept a military attack unless it was the absolute last resort. On September 5, Eisenhower stated in a news conference that he sought a negotiated resolution - "one that will insure to all nations the free use of the canal for the shipping of the world, whether in peace or in war, as contemplated by the 1888 convention."¹⁰

Two weeks later Dulles declared: "We shall be unremitting in our efforts to seek by peaceful means a just solution giving due recognition to the rights of all concerned, including Egypt."¹¹ These were not isolated statements for either official. What is not made clear by them, however, is why this pair was against military action. What compelled President Eisenhower - hero general of World War Two - to insist that Great Britain and France avoid hostilities and that Israel desist in its aggression? The answer is primarily twofold - what might be termed moral and ethical indignation and Cold War considerations. The former motivation behind Eisenhower's reaction has several incarnations: Egyptian sovereignty, standing by one's principles, and world opinion. The second refers to Eisenhower's continuing quest to stem and reverse

the spreading Soviet influence throughout the world. Together these factors combined to shape America's response to the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt during the Suez Crisis.

On October 11, President Eisenhower held a news conference during which he reviewed several guiding principles for dealing with the Suez Canal affair. The list began with "respect... Egyptian sovereignty;" and was followed by "insist[ence]...upon ...efficient operation of the Canal;"¹² In Eisenhower's mind these two concerns ranked high. Sovereignty was a philosophical concept, while efficiency dealt with the practical side of the situation.

Respect for Egyptian sovereignty was important because of America's heritage. The sanctity of a country's territory had been ingrained in United States history. It had been won when the US fought for its freedom in American Revolution. And, America still claimed to defend freedom throughout the world. All independent nations had certain rights because they were free. As much as a country's freedom had to be protected, so did its rights, for without those the country's liberty would be abridged. Thus, Egypt had certain guaranteed rights because it was free.

Clearly one of those was protection against unwarranted invasion. Any attack on Egypt without good cause - Eisenhower did not deem nationalization of the canal a rationale in itself - constituted a disregard

of Nasser's dominion and an immoral act. In addition, Eisenhower wrote "The inherent right of any sovereign nation to exercise the power of eminent domain within its own territory could scarcely be doubted...."¹³ Nasser's nationalization was legitimate in the President's eyes, therefore, he did not find any grounds for the allies' attack.

Time magazine reported on August 13 that the Secretary of State had voiced this concept publicly. "Dulles took the position that Egypt as a sovereign nation had a legal right to nationalize the Canal Company - an Egyptian entity which he likened to a public utility with a government charter - so long as Egypt paid due compensation."¹⁴ Since Nasser promised to compensate stock holders, his position became more tenable, in light of Dulles' announcement. Although the Secretary of State also remarked that taking control of the canal represented a violation of the 1888 Convention, this was in reference to limiting access to the canal. If Nasser allowed all parties open access to the canal, nationalization could not be contested.

Herein lay the second tenet of Eisenhower's guiding list: efficiency. For nearly 70 years, while the British and French controlled the Suez, canal traffic had sailed along smoothly, without long term delays or problems. Now Nasser was in charge. Eisenhower believed that if Nasser could maintain the same level of productivity, there existed no rationale to reclaim the canal. He commented on August 1 that the most

important concern "is to make certain of the continued efficiency of this great waterway...."¹⁵ As long as ships could sail through freely and quickly, Nasser's action did not obstruct commerce. The guarantee of passage for all ships, found in the 1888 Convention was satisfied. An efficiently run canal disputed allied claims that Egyptians were too incompetent to maintain the Suez. Their excuse for aggression disintegrated.

Pondering this idea as August opened, Eisenhower suggested that allowing Nasser to maintain the canal was the best way to ensure he would not retain it. The President told Dulles that "If we are right that that fellow can't run the Canal, there is bound to be a breakdown in the Canal or he (Nasser) will commit aggression." Then the allies would have an excuse to reassert control over the Canal. If Great Britain and her comrades could not wait for such a pretext, but insisted upon outright aggression, Eisenhower "was convinced that not only would they consolidate Arab force...[they also] would weaken and probably destroy the UN."¹⁶

It was no wonder the Eisenhower administration objected to a military solution. The anticipated consequences were anathema to America's global objectives. Attack would strengthen Nasser's position as a leader in the Middle East by increasing his prestige and respect among Arabs. In addition, if the Western nations were to disregard a UN

mandate, the door was opened to any other nation to do the same. The global clout of the United Nations would be stripped away.

By November 1 the President's confidence in Nasser's ability to run the Canal had increased. During an NSC meeting on that day he reminded his advisor Governor Stassen that "transit through the Canal has increased rather than decreased since the Egyptian take-over."¹⁷ Nasser met and, to the chagrin of the British and the French, actually surpassed the efficiency criteria set by the United States. In his biography of Eisenhower, Stephen Ambrose noted that after September 15, when the British pilots abandoned their posts, Egyptian and Greek captains piloted a record 254 ships through the canal in one week.¹⁸ Egypt's accomplishment could not easily be ignored. And, in Eisenhower's eyes, the basis on which one could question nationalization was further reduced. Nasser's position was becoming increasingly solid.

Egyptian sovereignty and Nasser's ability to keep the Suez Canal running smoothly were two of the factors which led Eisenhower to conclude that hostile action was not justified. These two factors, however, were not the only guides followed by the President. Eisenhower revealed another when he recited the third and "central principle" of those mentioned during his October news conference. It was probably with many countries in mind that the President announced the principle that "the Canal could not be operated for the political purposes of any

single country."¹⁹ Eisenhower's statement harkened back to the Security Council resolution passed just before England and France began their information blackout. Its origin most likely came from the Convention of 1888.

Article 12 of the Convention declared that the signatories applied "to the principle of equality as regards the free use of the canal....[and] agree that none of them shall endeavour to obtain with respect to the canal territorial or commercial advantage or privilege in any international arrangements...."²⁰ Although only commercial and territorial advantage specifically were prohibited, when either is gained, the result is invariably political power.

Eisenhower's statement could apply to most of the countries involved in the Suez Crisis. In one interpretation Eisenhower's central principle could refer to Egypt. Nasser's nationalization of the canal potentially increased his ability to use the Suez Canal for his own advantage, commercially, territorially, and politically. Denying his enemies, primarily Israel, passage through the canal and increasing toll charges enlarged both Nasser's profits and prestige in the Arab world. Such actions, if taken solely for Nasser's own political power, violated the rules laid out in 1888. Eisenhower's statement implied that the United States would not allow Nasser to use the canal purely for his own purposes.

The President's declaration of the third principle also bore directly on the British and French. When Great Britain and France attempted to regain control of the Suez, an immediate alarm about colonialism went off in the highest levels of government. Officials worried that the Anglo-French invasion was a 1956 version of colonialism.²¹

On November 1, 1956 Dulles analyzed the problem. During a morning NSC meeting Dulles presented the case that "basically we had almost reached the point of deciding today whether we think the future lies with a policy of reasserting by force colonial control over the less developed nations, or whether we will oppose such a course of action by every appropriate means."²² Opposition was the direction pursued by the administration.

Although some historians support the idea that concern for colonialism was a primary factor in the American government's decision to resist a forceful solution, this is improbable. There exists in government records only scant mention of the fear of colonial aspirations, suggesting colonialism was not actually a major influence on Eisenhower. Still it is likely that the contemplation of colonialism had some place in the administration's position that the canal remain free from one country's political purposes.

If colonial rule was reasserted over the Suez no one could guarantee that the British and/or French would not use that position for

political gain. In practice a colonial ruler subjugates its subordinate's desires to its own. Had the canal been dominated again by the British - which was probable if Nasser had been defeated - a single power could control the Suez for its own political purposes.

Perhaps least apparent in Eisenhower's statement was the way in which it could apply to the Soviet Union. Pre-eminent among Eisenhower's concerns in the Middle East was Soviet influence and control in the area. During the fighting in Egypt the unknown intentions of Russia constantly troubled top administration officials. The President and his advisors believed that if Russia managed to improve its standing with Nasser, Egypt would become a satellite of Communism. That, from the administration's perspective, might make the Suez susceptible to the control of the single power of Communist Russia. This was not only against Eisenhower's Cold War beliefs, it also ran counter to the convictions of most Americans.

The guiding precepts that Eisenhower publicly announced paralleled American beliefs and traditions. Sovereignty, efficiency, and an open door to the Suez all were practical US values translated into international terms. The philosophical background from whence these ideas were born was as old as the country itself. Also coming from the same origins as these standard American traditions was a belief in the

importance of standing by one's principles. This concept played an important role in Eisenhower's reaction to the crisis.

Strong in the President's anti-aggression stance was his consideration of principles, particularly remaining true to one's promise. In 1950 America had signed the Tripartite Declaration, an agreement that forbid military aggression in the Middle East. Eisenhower felt duty bound to uphold the agreement. He was concerned with keeping the word of the US in order to maintain American credibility around the globe. A government's credibility is dependent largely upon respecting internationally accepted morals and not breaking written agreements. At stake for the United States was maintaining its reputation by remaining faithful to the declaration.

In regard to this, the President was concerned with international and domestic opinion of America's reactions to unwarranted war in the Middle East. He knew that an attack on Egypt was immoral because there was no justification for it. To support an attack was to ignore right and wrong in the eyes of the whole world, as well as to disregard the United States' proclaimed position. Nationally and globally, people did not accept force as a solution. Nasser had legal claims to the canal, there were no equivalent claims for a military solution.

As important was a second factor: remaining loyal to his own personal beliefs. Eisenhower accepted war as a solution only when he