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8 April 1966

MILITARY INTERVENTION: A CASE STUDY OF BRITAIN'S USE OF FORCE IN THE 1956 SUEZ CRISIS

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SUMMARY

Great Britain's management of the 1956 Suez crisis has been universally condemned by world opinion; it seriously strained US-European ties and has raised fundamental questions concerning the application of force in the nuclear age. Suez has also been described as a successful Soviet effort to expand Communist power or orchestrating sub-threshold conflict techniques together with accelerating nationalist revolutions in developing areas. It is the purpose of this thesis first to examine Britain's legal, politico-military, and moral justification for the employment of force with the view toward crystalizing the implications of military intervention in the nuclear age and, second, to assess Soviet Russia's role in the crisis in an effort to establish a relationship between this role and the utilization of military force.

A review of the history of the Suez Canal from the perspective of British-Egyptian relationships confirms that fever-pitched nationalism had chartered Egypt on a collision course with traditional English economic and power interests in the Middle East as early as 1950. The review also suggests that Britain's liberal, albeit reluctant, abandonment of colonial roots might have permitted peaceful adjustments to Egypt's demands but for the conflict catalysts contributed by ambivalent Soviet intervention, the legalistic failure of the United States to view Suez in the context of the East-West confrontation, and Britain's own inability to adopt appropriate counters to these catalysts.

Analysis of the military factors influencing the Suez crisis indicates that US and British preoccupation with the theory of massive retaliation resulted in a distortion of vital strategic planning factors such as the requirement for forward base areas and the protection of vital geographic communications links. Concomitantly, the supporting structure required to conduct efficient conventional operations was no longer maintained. Finally, the military analysis indicates that both practical and psychological concern for escalation requires that military intervention, when undertaken, be swift in tempo and decisive in scope. In the nuclear era increased attention must also be given to the maintenance of popular support and a clear enumeration of the relationship of the action taken to the vital national interests of the initiating power.

The thesis concludes that Britain when judged by traditional Western standards was legally, politically, and morally culpable in its adoption of force as a response to Egypt's provocations. However, when viewed in the context of the Cold War, Suez confirms

the successful distortion of accepted Western values by a Socialist camp which can employ provocation and such forces as imperialism, rising expectations, and the nationalistic ambitions of selected proxies as a technique of aggression. Conversely, the West has continued to view the whole in terms of its parts; and provocation remains provocation; nationalism, nationalism, rather than the tools of protracted Communist aggression. The Suez case does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude whether our future security rests with abandonment of traditional Western standards of international conduct. It does confirm that, regardless of the standards adopted, they must be universally applied to the Western and Eastern camps alike. Under such a formula or until Communism demonstratively accepts Western standards, force as the ultimate safeguard of national security can not be abandoned despite the fearful implications of its total application in the nuclear age.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Dean Acheson has singled out the Suez incident of 1956 as the "lowest point" in American diplomacy.¹ Although this contention might encounter considerable opposition within our own shores, there is little doubt that a similar indictment would receive less opposition if directed towards Britain's role in the affair. Never in history has England's traditional dexterity in the international field reaped such universal condemnation. This condemnation has not been restricted to sources in natural opposition to Britain's national interests, but has included her most intimate allies and a great majority of the Commonwealth and domestic support as well.

In terms of popular reaction, Britain's employment of force as a technique of foreign policy following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and the subsequent Israeli-Sinai invasion was a dismal failure. The final dividends from this transaction can hardly be declared even a decade later. However, a detached retrospective analysis of Britain's legal, politico-military, and moral justification for the employment of this technique becomes an urgent task for the student of national security affairs.

¹Dean G. Acheson, "The Premises of American Policy," in American Strategy for the Nuclear Age, ed. Walter F. Hahn and John C. Neff, p. 413.

The rebuff to Great Britain's honorable history as the standard-bearer of Western morality provides adequate incentive, but still more pressing is an analysis of the implications of military intervention and indeed the use of force per se as a foreign policy technique in the nuclear age. Finally, an assessment of Soviet Russia's background role in an affair in which Great Britain and Egypt were the pivotal powers is of overriding significance. W. W. Rostow has described the 1956 Suez crisis as a watershed marking the second great phase in East-West conflict and offers two phenomena to support his thesis. First, Suez represented one of Moscow's early attempts to elicit limited diplomatic concessions from the West in the shadow of the threat of mutual annihilation; and, second, it was the first major Soviet effort to expand Communist power by orchestrating sub-threshold conflict techniques together with accelerating nationalist revolutions in developing areas.²

A fair appraisal of the preceding issues must include a clinical analysis of events as they occurred. The rash of emotional apologia which have appeared since 1956 complicates the task immeasurably. While every effort has been made to isolate Britain's and Russia's roles, additional national interests and decisions have been included where they crucially influenced the course of events.

²Walt W. Rostow, "The Third Round," Foreign Affairs, Oct. 1963, p. 5.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

The Suez crisis began with Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal, moved through a series of abortive negotiations which preceded Anglo-French invasion, and culminated in the final stages of a permanent settlement. The factors preceding the nationalization of the Canal which triggered these events of primary concern should be rapidly reviewed to ensure that the legal, politico-military, and moral precedents are understood.

HISTORY OF THE CANAL

Authority to form a company and to construct and operate the Suez Canal was provided in 1856 by Mohamed Said, Viceroy of Egypt, to the Frenchman Ferdinand de Lesseps. From this concession and De Lesseps' persistent and tireless efforts, the Suez Canal Company and the Canal itself came into being. The company was formed as the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime, a joint stock company under an Egyptian charter.¹ It was given a ninety-nine year lease from the date of opening, which occurred on November 17, 1869, after numerous technical, financial, and political problems.²

¹Sir John A. Marriott, The Eastern Question, The company was founded by initially issuing 400,000 shares of stock, which raised a capital of some 8 million pounds.

²Ibid., p. 22.

On November 25, 1875, Benjamin Disraeli, Prime Minister of Great Britain, purchased all of Egypt's shares, totaling some 44 percent, from Khedive Ismail. This gave Britain effective control of the Canal company, since little of the remaining stock was held by governments but rather by individuals and corporations.³ In 1882, Britain, on the grounds that it was concerned about the defense of the Canal, occupied Egypt, then part of the Ottoman Empire. This occupation lasted seventy-five years, ending in 1956.⁴ The Canal's international status was settled by the Constantinople Convention of October 29, 1888,⁵ the signatories of which were Great Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, and Turkey. Its main provisions were:

To establish that the Suez Canal should be free and open, in time of war, as in time of peace, to vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag; to provide that no warlike act should take place in the Canal or within three miles of its ports of access; to allow the signatory powers to station up to two warships in the ports of access; to provide that the Egyptian Government,

³The Suez Canal, Facts and Documents, selected studies presented by the Selected Studies Committee, p. 12 (hereafter cited as Suez Canal, Facts . . .).

⁴The Suez Canal, Nationalization, Invasion, International Action, Vol. III, No. 30, Feb. 1957, p. 30 (hereafter cited as Suez Canal, Nationalization . . .).

⁵There are several sources available which carry the text of the 1888 Convention, including: Donald C. Watt, Britain and the Suez Canal, p. 29; Suez Canal, Nationalization . . ., loc. cit., p. 38; and Suez Canal, Facts . . ., loc. cit., p. 220.

and if this were too weak, the Turkish Government, although not a signatory, should take the necessary measures to execute the treaty; to ensure that these arrangements were permanent and did not come to an end with the expiry of the Suez Canal Company's concession.⁶

Despite the provisions concerning wartime access of the Canal to all flags, during World War I Great Britain effectively prevented the Axis powers from utilizing it.

In 1922 Egypt was granted national sovereignty with the proviso that Britain would have complete responsibility for the security of Egypt until the formal conclusions of an agreement on such matters. The Treaty of August 26, 1936, called for mutual defense and the stationing of British troops in specified areas in the vicinity of the Canal.⁷ During this same period, the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian Government arrived at an agreement whereby the company paid an annual royalty of 300,000 Egyptian pounds to Egypt.⁸

⁶Watt, op. cit., p. 1.

⁷"The Suez Canal Base and Middle East Defense," British Information Services, 1D-1174 (hereafter cited as Suez Canal Base . . .). Prior to 1922, the use by British forces of the desert areas in the immediate vicinity of the Canal for base installations and training areas was a corollary of occupation. Under the 1936 treaty, "the presence of these forces shall not constitute in any manner an occupation and will in no way prejudice the sovereign rights of Egypt." Provisions were made for revision to treaty terms after twenty years.

⁸The company also agreed to place two Egyptians on the company board of directors and to increase the Egyptian quota of employees from 2.5% to 33%. Suez Canal Nationalization . . ., loc. cit., p. 2.

The period between the two wars saw the advent of most Middle Eastern countries to full independence. Extreme nationalist parties came into power and influenced the masses by inciting them against anything foreign. The Canal Status and the Canal company did not escape this trend. The Canal itself became a symbol of foreign domination, and the company an agent of its enforcement.⁹ This nationalism was frothing in Egypt long before Nasser's assumption of power, and when the 1939-45 war ended, England's Socialist foreign secretary "dickered" with the idea of ending British occupation of the Suez Canal Base under pressures from the Egyptian government.¹⁰

On July 8, 1947, Egypt asked the Security Council to order the total and immediate evacuation of British troops and to end the British administration of the Sudan. Finally, in October of 1950, the Wafd government unilaterally proclaimed the abrogation

⁹Benno Avram, The Evolution of the Suez Canal Status from 1869 to 1956, p. 152.

¹⁰Frank Verity, The Guilty Men of Suez, p. 5. During World War II Britain had again closed the Canal to enemy shipping. Egypt's role during the conflict was controversial, with many pro-Axis elements consorting with Rommel's forces during the North African campaign. Most British sources insist that Egyptian nationalists favored Nazi and Fascist methodology, while Egyptian authors claim their role in the defeat of the Axis was considerable. There are no records available to confirm the actual participation of Egyptian troops against German or Italian forces except in an auxiliary role. One of Colonel Nasser's lieutenants, in describing nationalist activities during the war, states: "I still think that if ill luck had not so dogged our enterprise, we might have struck a quick blow at the British, joined forces with the Axis, and changed the course of events." Anwar El Sadat, Revolt on the Nile, p. 42.

of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Alliance and demanded the withdrawal of British troops.¹¹ On July 23, 1952, the army coup deposed Farouk, initially installing General Naguib as the first President of the Republic, but replacing him with Colonel Nasser in 1954. After Nasser's rise to power, continued pressure was exerted against the British, and by 1954 a treaty was negotiated for the withdrawal of British forces from the Canal.¹²

The 1954 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty again reemphasized the provisions of the Convention of 1888:

The two contracting governments recognize that the Suez Maritime Canal, which is an integral part of Egypt, is a waterway economically, commercially, and strategically of international importance and express the determination to uphold the convention guaranteeing the freedom of navigation in the Canal signed at Constantinople on the 27th of October, 1888.¹³

Under its provisions, the last British forces were withdrawn from Egyptian soil on June 13, 1956. During this period Egyptian national policy "took an independent turn which aimed at helping the

¹¹Marriott, op. cit., p. 356; Suez Canal Base . . ., loc. cit., p. I D-1175.

¹²Verity, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

¹³Suez Canal, Facts . . ., loc. cit., p. 79. The factors forcing the withdrawal of British troops were substantial. They included a campaign of terror against British forces in Egypt, the cost of 50 million pounds per year to support the 80,000 man force, and, above all, US pressure to do so. The US feared Egyptian flirtations with the USSR which increased to the degree that it abandoned its own proposal for a Mid-East security system, which was finally formed under the aegis of the British. See Suez Canal, Nationalization . . ., loc. cit., pp. 4-5; also Verity, op. cit., pp. 19-20; Suez Canal Base . . ., loc. cit., p. I D-1174; and John Connell, The Most Important Country, pp. 52-60.

colonized countries realize their liberation and freedom and at the same time followed a policy of peaceful coexistence."¹⁴ The effect of this policy, which foreshadowed a Soviet foothold in the Mid-East and was a direct challenge to remaining Franco-British influence, caused great concern in the Atlantic Community.

Fear of increased Egyptian reliance on the Soviets prompted United States, British, and World Bank financial support for the Aswan Dam project.¹⁵ The project, which visualized a reservoir of 23,000 million cubic meters of water over an area of 739 square miles, was of primary importance to President Nasser's internal program. The United States had offered 56 million and Great Britain 14 million dollars to assist in the project.¹⁶ In addition, the International World Bank had indicated that it would loan 200 million dollars to Egypt for the project.¹⁷ However, on the afternoon of July 19, 1956, Mr. John Foster Dulles called the Egyptian ambassador to the State Department and handed him a note officially notifying the Egyptian Government of the United States' withdrawal of the loan offer. The following day Britain and the World Bank

¹⁴Suez Canal, Facts . . ., loc. cit., p. 79.

¹⁵The original project had been drawn up by a team of British engineers in October of 1955. It was designed to provide 2 million more acres of arable land through resulting irrigation as well as double Egypt's electric supply. Paul Johnson, The Suez War, p. 6.

¹⁶New York Times, 20 Jul. 1958, p. 1.

¹⁷United Nations Press Release 1 B/568, February 16, 1956.

followed suit.¹⁸ The reasons given in the note for the cancellation of the loan by the United States were Egypt's failure to agree to various amendments to the plan for the dam, and doubts as to her ability to provide her share of the cost.¹⁹ Whether the cancellation of the loan offers is considered the end of a casual process or the initiation of a new one is open to speculation. Historically, it was the catalyst which plunged the world into a rapid succession of events which were more critical than any it had experienced since the Second World War.

¹⁸Mr. Hussein, the Egyptian Ambassador, hurried to call Foreign Minister Fawzi in Cairo; however, Mr. Fawzi already knew, since Mr. Dulles, contrary to diplomatic procedure, had notified the press before the country concerned. Johnson, op. cit., p. 20; also Erskine B. Childers, The Road to Suez, p. 144.

¹⁹Johnson, op. cit., p. 20. The author claims the first reason was unfounded inasmuch as a week earlier Egypt had formally agreed to the U.S. amendments. He suggests that the second reason was more cogent, since a week earlier it had been learned that Egypt had mortgaged 200 million dollars in unplanted cotton in return for aircraft and tanks from the Bloc. Military expenditures in Egypt had risen from 18 to 25% of total appropriations. The author also suggests that the U.S. cotton lobby actively opposed the loan for fear of additional competition from an increased cotton crop.

Mr. Watt summarizes Britain's reasons for cancelling the dam loan as follows:

1. Fear of involving Britain in a dispute with the Sudan over the disposal of the dam's water supplies.
2. Limited funds to support the project.
3. Excessive Egyptian anti-British propaganda.
4. The feeling that Egypt was feigning support from the USSR to increase Western support and a desire to confirm the emptiness of Soviet promises. Documents on the Suez Crisis, 26 July to 6 November, 1956, selected and introduced by Donald C. Watt, p. 3.

CHAPTER 3

ENGLAND AND THE CANAL

Before summarizing the rapid succession of events which culminated in Britain's resort to the ultimate technique of foreign policy, an analysis of the significance of the Canal to Great Britain's national interest at the time is called for.¹ The strategic importance of the Canal is manifold. Britain's obligations under the Manila Pact might require the transfer of troops or naval units to the Far East; obligations under the Baghdad Pact and the possibility of renewed trouble in Kenya were of equal importance. The vital role of the Canal as a route for troops and aid from the dominions of Australia and New Zealand under the NATO Pact was and still is highlighted by the ever present possibility of war on the continent. Despite advances in aerial techniques, supplies, ammunition, armor, and heavy artillery still require surface lift.

Britain's economic interests exceeded her strategic interests, since the former were active in peace and war. With respect to the Canal company shares held by Her Majesty's government, a quick assessment is possible. Their value in March of 1956 stood at just under 24 million pounds, with an annual dividend of about 2,800,000

¹Except as otherwise shown, the statistics shown on Canal traffic have been derived from Donald C. Watt, Britain and the Suez Canal, pp. 7-20.

to 2,900,000 pounds.² Britain's gross tonnage passing through the Canal in 1955 totaled 32.8 million out of 115.6 million for all flags. About half of this tonnage consisted of tankers. For petroleum, Britain is the largest Canal user, absorbing 20.5 million tons out of the 66.9 million tons carried on the south-north run in 1955.³ The dry goods traffic was not only so varied but so variable that a detailed description is impossible to present in finite terms.

Both in weight and value, the most important commodity carried is the production of iron, steel, and engineering industries, including armaments.⁴ Total shipping cleared from UK ports for points beyond Suez was as follows for 1955:

²In 1956 Britain held 179,586 ordinary shares and 173,918 actions de jouissance out of a total of 399,134 ordinary shares and 400,866 actions de jouissance, each share having a nominal value of 250 French francs. The price originally paid for Britain's holdings was 4,076,622 pounds. In 1955, 18.8 million dollars was distributed among company stockholders, while 17 million went to Egypt out of a total gross profit of 92.5 million dollars. The Suez Canal, Nationalization, Invasion, International Action, Vol. III, No. 30, Feb. 1957, p. 2.

³Next came France (12.1 million); U.S.A. (8.6 million); Italy and the Netherlands (7.3 million each). Watt, op. cit., p. 17; see also, John Connell, The Most Important Country, p. 98.

⁴Armaments during 1955 were shipped primarily to Pakistan and Iraq. It is interesting to note that Soviet utilization of the Canal in 1955 was just over 1% of the total traffic.

TABLE I

NET TONNAGE FROM U.K. PORTS IN 1955

	Millions
Total to all points	50.1
Trading Area	
East Africa, Persian Gulf, and India	3.2
Eastern Asia and Pacific Islands	1.9
Australia	2.6
Total to all points east of Suez	7.7

Britain's dependence on the Canal for imports other than petroleum was even more variable, since sources were switched for economic, climatic, or political reasons. Subject to these reservations, general sources and commodities were as follows:

TABLE II

SOURCES OF IMPORTS TO GREAT BRITAIN VIA SUEZ CANAL

Commodity	
Ores and metals	Tin from Malaya; chrome and copper from East Africa; zinc from Australia; manganese from India; iron ore from Malaya
Cereals	Wheat from Australia; barley from Iraq
Sugar	From Australia and Mauritius
Rubber	From Malaya
Fibres	Sisal from East Africa; hemp from Philippines and Malaya; jute from Pakistan; cotton from India and Pakistan; wool from Australia

Tea	From India, Ceylon, and China
Vegetable oils and oil seeds	Largely from India and Ceylon

Britain's plans (and Europe's as well) for increased standards of living were directly dependent on increased oil imports.⁵ This oil was to be supplied by the fields of the Middle East. The major part of Latin-American and Caribbean exports are utilized by the United States. Moreover, the Middle East is now known to hold over 70 per cent of the world's proven reserves. This oil had to come either via the Canal or by pipeline to the Mediterranean seaboard if it was not to face the long haul around the Cape.

Great Britain historically mistrusted over-reliance on pipelines. They are vulnerable to seizure and sabotage in time of war and in situations short of war as well. Perhaps more importantly, increased utilization of pipelines made the retention of a larger tanker fleet economically unfeasible at the cost of wartime or emergency flexibility and mobility.

⁵In 1956 a 3% per annum increase was planned for Britain's standard of living. Estimates contemplated 430 millions of tons of coal equivalent required to support this growth by 1985. The bulk of this increase has to be supplied by oil, barring no major breakthrough of commercial nuclear power and in view of the dwindling British coal supply.

In terms of increased mileage, the effect in time and expense of complete reliance on the Cape route is shown below:

TABLE III

MILEAGE COMPARISON BETWEEN CANAL AND CAPE ROUTES

From London to:	Via Suez	Via Cape
Wellington	12,650	13,250
Sydney	11,630	12,450
Bombay	6,260	10,720
Abadan	6,530	11,300
Mombasa	6,014	8,675

NOTE: From America's east coast to the Persian Gulf is 3600 miles longer around the Cape.

The principal conclusion to be drawn from distance alone is that the Canal route will always be preferable to that around the Cape.⁶

Under the management of the Canal Company, the 103 mile length experienced continued technical improvement. Its width was expanded from 117 feet at the surface and 72 feet at the bottom to 500 feet and 197 feet respectively. In 1956 it could handle all but the four largest transoceanic liners, a few battle

⁶Increased costs resulting from utilization of the Cape route have been estimated as ranging between 25 and 30%.

ships and carriers, and the latest super tankers.⁷ The technical problems involved in its operation and maintenance are manifold. The continual problem of blowing sand and eroding banks entails around the clock maintenance.⁸ Ships negotiate the Canal in convoys of eight to ten ships with two northbound and two southbound per twenty-four hour period. Navigation was and still is controlled from a central office in Ismailia to 14 stations along the route by wire and radio. Every ship over 800 tons requires a pilot. Maintaining the required number of qualified pilots was a continuing problem for the company over the years.⁹

⁷In 1956 the U.S. aircraft carrier Valley Forge was the largest ship to have negotiated the Canal.

⁸In one week, over 105 million cubic feet of sand has been blown into the Canal. The wake resulting from passing ships causes pre and post passage wakes which continually buffet the soft banks, resulting in continuous erosion. In many sections of its length the banks have been paved to reduce this process; William F. Longgood, Suez Story, Key to the Middle East, p. 122.

⁹Ibid., p. 123. Company regulations required ten years experience as a ship's officer and three years experience as a master for qualified pilots. The pilot never actually steers the ship, nor does he assume command. He must know thirteen languages sufficiently to issue nautical commands. The most difficult aspect of the pilot's duties involves keeping the vessel within a channel with only twenty-five feet of maneuver room on either side and against a normal north-south current of 3 1/2 knots. See Michael Adams, Suez and After, p. 27, for additional excellent discussion of the Canal's technical problems.

Despite the foregoing, the reader should take note of an ambivalence in British and, more importantly, in United States strategic thinking as it pertained to their respective views on the importance of the Suez Canal as the nexus of a vital global system of communications. Western preoccupation with the significance of strategic nuclear weapons and the belief that future conflicts would be restricted to massive nuclear exchanges eroded the significance of strategically important control points or conventional staging bases in Western politico-military thought and inflated the importance of nuclear capable air bases around the periphery of the Soviet Union. Thus, United States and, to a lesser extent, British foreign policy gave precedence to ensuring the availability of strategic air bases in the Middle East even above the requirement of providing for the physical control of or access rights to what were formerly considered vital strategic areas. In discussing this problem with President Eisenhower in 1954, Churchill had suggested that the Canal and Egypt were of "enormously reduced" strategic importance due to the modern developments of war.¹⁰ Similar strategic conceptions were the underlying rationale for the Baghdad Pact which was to provide a close-in or peripheral plate glass defense along the upper tier of the Middle East. The scheme of this mutual defense

¹⁰Connell, op. cit., p. 51, See also Erskine B. Childers, The Road to Suez, p. 116.

arrangement was an instantaneous nuclear response should the plate glass be shattered by Soviet advance. Strategic depth or traditional base considerations were no longer applicable.

CHAPTER 4

NATIONALIZATION AND WAR

Three days following cancellation of the Aswan financing commitment by the International Bank, Egypt announced nationalization of the Suez Canal and seized full control, turning the Canal over to a special board attached to the Egyptian Ministry of Commerce. The seizure was proclaimed during a speech by President Nasser delivered in Alexandria on July 27, 1956, and was officially promulgated through a formal nationalization law which contained the following provisions:¹

1. Transferred to the Egyptian government all the assets of the company, promising compensation to the shareholders after this had been effected. (Art. I)
2. Set up a statutory organization with an independent budget to manage the Canal. (Art. II)
3. Froze all Suez Company assets in Egypt and elsewhere. (Art. III)
4. Transferred all the employees and officials of the Company to the new Egyptian organization and forbade them to abandon their employment "in whatever manner and for whatever reason" on pain of imprisonment and forfeiture of all rights of gratuity, pension, or compensation. (Art. IV)

¹Documents on the Suez Crisis, 26 July to 6 November, 1956, selected and introduced by Donald C. Watt, p. 44 (hereafter cited as Documents on Suez Crisis . . .); the New York Times of 27 Jul. 1956, carried the complete text of President Nasser's Alexandria speech.

BRITAIN'S REACTION TO SEIZURE

Britain's reaction to President Nasser's seizure order was prompt. As an economic measure she blocked all Egyptian accounts in the United Kingdom, including those of the Canal Company, and the Egyptian banks, firms, and individuals.² In addition, Great Britain and France refused to pay Canal tolls to the new Egyptian company and instead paid the officers of the Suez Canal Company in London and Paris. Both Britain and France readied military reserves and commenced the assembly of forces on the island of Cyprus.³ On July 31 Sir Anthony Eden asserted Britain was unwilling to accept "unfettered control" of the Canal under a single power. On July 28 Mr. Robert Murphy had arrived in London from the United States to confer with Mr. Eden and M. Pineau, of France, on the crisis. They were joined on July 31 by Mr. Dulles and jointly decided to convene a meeting in London of the countries "largely concerned."⁴ On August 2 the British government inspired

²The Suez Canal, Nationalization, Invasion, International Action, Vol. III, No. 30, Feb. 1957, p. 7 (hereafter cited as Suez Canal, Nationalization . . .).

³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., p. 4. Most British sources are highly critical of the United States' position taken early in the crisis. It is maintained that on July 27 Sir Anthony experienced great difficulty in getting any responsible American official on the phone. When Mr. Dulles finally joined the Anglo-French discussions: "In general, Dulles gave Eden and Pineau an impression of confusion and irresolution." In one matter he was clear--not to submit the crisis to the United Nations due to the sympathies of its growing neutral membership. Paul Johnson, The Suez War, p. 53.

press reports of their determination to use force if peaceful means failed to persuade President Nasser to accept international control of the Canal.⁵ As a result of the tripartite conference, a joint statement was issued:

This company was organized in Egypt in 1856 under a franchise to build the Suez Canal and operate it until 1968. . . . In 1888 all the great powers . . . joined in the Treaty and convention of Constantinople. This provided for the benefit of all the world that the international character of the Canal would be perpetuate for all time, irrespective of the expiration of the concession of the Universal Suez Canal Company. . . . They do not question the right of Egypt to enjoy and exercise all the powers of a full and sovereign nation. . . . The present action involved far more than a simple act of nationalization. It involves the arbitrary seizure by one nation of an international agency. . . .⁶

On August 5, 1956, Britain issued invitations to Australia, Ceylon, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, West Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, USSR, and the United States. Egypt refused to attend the conference and proposed a conference of all 45 nations whose ships use the Canal. The London Conference was held between the 16th and 24th of August

⁵Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., p. 6. Mr. Dulles, on the other hand, in a radio broadcast of 3 August denied any intention of meeting violence with violence, confirming a fundamental split with his ally as to the limits of means feasible for employment in the crisis. See also "The Suez Canal Problem," Department of State Publication 6392, p. 4.

⁶The Suez Canal Conference, Selected Documents 2-24 August 1956, p. 3.

without Egypt.⁷ Eighteen of the 22 powers present agreed to ask Egypt to negotiate a convention under which a new Suez Canal Board would be set up with the responsibility for operating, maintaining, and developing the Canal. This formula provided for Egyptian membership and would have given Western user nations a strong voice in Canal policy, though no part in ownership of the Canal. India, with Soviet support, offered a compromise solution which left exclusive operation of the Canal with Egypt. The Indian proposal was not adopted.

The majority plan was presented to the Egyptian government in Cairo on September 3, 1956, by a five-nation committee headed by Prime Minister Robert G. Menzies, of Australia. Egypt rejected the proposal, offering instead the establishment of a special international negotiating body, representing the users of the Canal, to review the Constantinople Convention of 1888 and to guarantee freedom of navigation through the Canal.⁸

Following rejection of the 18-nation proposal by Egypt, Great Britain and France proceeded with the United States to create a

⁷Greece also refused to attend. By the convening of the meeting, President Nasser's original position had softened somewhat. He promised freedom of navigation, played down the use of Canal funds for the Aswan Dam, and promised to develop the Canal. He also agreed to meet representatives of the London Conference in Cairo. There was, however, no compromise on the basic point of Egyptian ownership or operation of the Canal. Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., p. 7.

⁸Suez Canal, Nationalization . . ., loc. cit., p. 9; Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., p. 13; The Suez Canal, Facts and Documents, selected studies presented by the Selected Studies Committee, p. 53.

"Suez Canal Users Association"--an idea originating with Secretary of State Dulles. This proposal was put before a second London Conference, which met from 19-21 September 1956.⁹

All of the preceding actions has been taken outside of the UN framework. It was only after these negotiations failed that the issue of the Suez Canal was brought to the United Nations. On September 23, 1956, Great Britain and France complained to the Security Council regarding the "situation created by the unilateral action of the Egyptian government bringing to an end the system of

⁹The second London conference set up the association, though leaving its functions indefinite. The Users' Association was regarded at best as an interim solution. Mr. Johnson, in his book The Suez War, contends Britain and France were already to seize the Canal by force after the failure of the Menzies mission, but were held up by the strange behavior of Mr. Dulles. The Franco-British plan was to withdraw their pilots, wait till Canal traffic slowed, submit the question to the United Nations in anticipation of a Russian veto, and then to occupy the Canal under the provisions of the 1888 Convention. A telephone call from Mr. Dulles held up the plan. This call offered the Users' Association solution. Originally, Mr. Eden understood that Mr. Dulles had offered a solution which would permit direct pressure against Nasser, and, if need be, would support efforts of the Association to "shoot" its way through the Canal. On September 11 Eden announced the Users' Plan to Commons. When the report reached Washington, the State Department was in a furor over what Mr. Dulles had promised. President Eisenhower got on the phone to Mr. Eden and "there was no ambiguity this time." Eden now found himself saddled with an impossible Users' Association Plan, which instead of providing a direct pressure device, could now only be used as an imperfect negotiating body. Johnson, op. cit., pp. 66-70; Michael Adams, Suez and After, p. 53; and Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., p. 17, support the same version in less detail.

international operation of the Suez Canal Convention of 1888."¹⁰

As the Security Council meetings proceeded, private meetings among the foreign ministers of Britain, France, and Egypt took place.

Out of these meetings an agreement emerged which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council on October 13, 1956. It provided that the settlement of the Suez dispute, if and when accomplished, would be made in accordance with six principles:

1. There should be free and open transit through the Canal without discrimination, overt or covert--this covers both political and technical aspects.
2. The sovereignty of Egypt should be respected.
3. The operation of the Canal should be isolated from the politics of any country.
4. The manner of fixing tolls and charges should be decided by an agreement between Egypt and the users.
5. A fair proportion of the dues should be allotted to development.

¹⁰Letter dated September 23, 1956, from Representatives of France and United Kingdom to President of Security Council; "24 September 1956, UN Document S/3654. Mr. Johnson maintains the Franco-British action was a result of the anger generated by the User Association 'misunderstanding'." Johnson, op. cit., p. 80. Egyptian success in keeping the Canal operating actually frustrated any hopes for the Users' Association. Russia had sent 15 pilots and Yugoslavia 4. Adams, op. cit., p. 62. The worldwide appeal for pilots by Egypt received 233 replies, including 16 Americans. Salaries offered ranged up to \$1,417.00 per month. William F. Longgood, Suez Story, Key to the Middle East, p. 149.

6. In case of disputes, unresolved affairs between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian government should be settled by arbitration, with suitable terms of reference and suitable provisions for the payment of sums found to be due.¹¹

In conjunction with direct talks sponsored by the United Nations, India unilaterally but in close liaison with Egypt developed an additional proposal which India published on October 24; however, events overtook its possible consideration. On October 28, "partial" mobilization of Israel forces was announced, and President Eisenhower sent President Ben Gurian a message warning him not to start hostilities.¹² At 8:30 p.m. on the 29th, the British ambassador at Tel Aviv was advised of the Israeli invasion of the Sinai Peninsula. On October 29th Mr. Dulles announced he would submit Israel's breach of the peace to the Security Council on the 30th. At 4:15 p.m. on the 30th the Israeli and Egyptian diplomatic representatives were summoned to the British foreign

¹¹Suez Canal, Nationalization . . ., loc. cit., p. 11. Following the submission of the question to the United Nations, Mr. Dulles had announced that his country would play a "somewhat independent role" on the problem of colonialism and spoke of differences with Britain and France on fundamental things. These remarks were greatly resented in France and Britain and further confirm the breakdown of diplomatic communication between the Western powers. Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., p. 19.

¹²Documents on Suez Crisis . . ., loc. cit., pp. 21-23. As a result of continued border raids and tension, Israel had during September and October stepped up strong local attacks against Jordan. On 10 October a more serious raid had been made against the Jordanian outpost at Qalgilya. Britain had supported Jordan throughout this tension in conformance with an Anglo-Jordan treaty. As late as Oct. 24 Britain had warned Israel that an attack on Jordan might become a "causus foederis" under the alliance.

Office in London, and a joint Anglo-French ultimatum was delivered to them. The 12-hour ultimatum "called upon both sides to stop all warlike action by land, sea, and air forthwith and to withdraw their military forces to a distance of ten miles from the Canal."¹³

The United States immediately asked the Security Council to meet to stop hostilities, but action was blocked by French and British vetoes.¹⁴ On the 31st of October, before a specially convened emergency meeting of the General Assembly had taken action, British and French bombers attacked Egypt. The Canal was subsequently blocked when Egypt sank ships throughout its length. The emergency assembly on November 2nd asked that steps be taken to reopen the Canal and for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of troops.¹⁵ Although France and Britain as well as Israel and Egypt had unconditionally accepted the ceasefire on November 5th, British and French forces landed at Port Said on the following day.¹⁶

¹³Suez Canal, Nationalization . . . , loc. cit., p. 16.

¹⁴The U.S. resolution supported by Russia did not name Britain and France, but instead called upon Israel to withdraw its troops and for other nations not to use force in the area. Documents on Suez Crisis . . . , loc. cit., p. 27.

¹⁵Documents on Suez Crisis . . . , loc. cit., p. 27. General Assembly action was accomplished by procedural action under the Uniting for Peace Resolution.

¹⁶Suez Canal, Nationalization . . . , loc. cit., pp. 16-17. By November 4 the Israeli forces had driven Egyptian units from Sinai and the Islands at the mouth of the Gulf of Acaba. Most sources confirm complete French knowledge and even support of the Israeli invasion. Assertions have been made by many authors and the opposition party in Britain that Eden also was aware of Israeli plans.

Anglo-French landings met Egyptian resistance, and fighting continued until midnight on the 6th when a lasting ceasefire was established. During the entire period worldwide opposition to the Anglo-French invasion mounted and included Russian threats to intervene with volunteer units in support of Egypt.¹⁷ Following the ceasefire, UN forces were dispatched to Egypt, and French and British forces began withdrawal on the 21st of November. Since the cessation of hostilities, the Canal has been cleared, shipping resumed, settlement arrived at by Egypt with the Canal Company and France and Britain, and the Egyptian-Israeli armed truce re-established.¹⁸

Casualties in the brief 40-hour war totaled 21 British killed and 112 wounded.¹⁹ The French suffered 12 dead and 43 wounded.²⁰

¹⁷The effect of Soviet threats on British restraint has been the subject of substantial controversy. Most authors maintain US pressure was decisive. Press reports at the time carried direct threats of nuclear rocket attacks on Paris and London; however, a closer examination of the official Soviet note to Britain confirms that Soviet threats were far more guarded than is generally believed. See Johnson, op. cit., p. 115, for text of Soviet note.

¹⁸The most complete presentation of postwar developments is presented in Suez Canal Developments, 1957, ed. by A. G. Mezerick, Vol. III, No. 32, April 1957. Funds for clearing the Canal were prorated by the United Nations and totaled 11 million dollars. The Canal was reopened in April of 1957 under Egyptian control and generally in conformance with the six UN principles and the 1888 Convention. A formal agreement between the U.A.R. and Britain was signed on Feb. 28, 1959, as a result of which all normal relations were restored and mutual compensations agreed upon. See also Lester B. Pearson, The Crisis in the Middle East, Oct--Dec 56 and Jan--Mar 57, pp. 1-15.

¹⁹John Connell, The Most Important Country, p. 224.

²⁰Merry and Serge Bromberger, Secrets of Suez, p. 130.

Egyptian casualties have remained obscure but have been estimated as 650 killed and 2,000 wounded, including civilians.²¹

MILITARY OPERATIONS

British military operations prior to and during the intervention are clear in basic pattern, but many details are still missing. It is in fact questionable whether anyone will be able to put together a precise and fully documented history of events as they occurred. This is especially true of military planning and operations which were secretive, complex, and continually modified due to the ebb and flow of political considerations. For the purposes of this study, there is little value in considering the conduct of operations beyond the conceptual plan and its broad implementation. Military preparations had actually begun soon after nationalization and long before the Israeli attack was revealed.²² Actual planning was conducted by a combined British French staff in a military shelter below the Thames under the code name "Terrapin." Some 30 British and French officers developed the plans otherwise known only to the Prime Minister and the Queen.²³ By early September these plans were well advanced and a combined operational headquarters had been established on the island of Cyprus. French units had arrived on the island from Algeria to

²¹Sir Edwin Herbert, Report on Damage and Casualties in Port Said, p. 12.

²²Bromberger, op. cit., p. 13.

²³Ibid., p. 14.

join British reinforcements who had been assembling since early August. Two possible lines of action were proposed. The first plan called for landings at the Mediterranean port of Alexandria and an advance up the Nile Delta to seize Cairo, with the simple aim of removing Nasser from power. The second plan was aimed directly at the Suez Canal--paratroop drops at Port Said and Port Fuad on either side of the mouth of the Canal, to be followed by infantry and tank landings, and then an infantry and armored advance up the length of the waterway.²⁴ Both plans represented compromises of weakness due to the lack of British air and sea lift required to mount a more decisive operation.²⁵

Concurrently with their coordinated planning with the British, the French, without initial British knowledge, commenced combined planning with the government of Israel in early August.²⁶ There is

²⁴Don Cook, Floodtide in Europe, pp. 202-203. Connell, op. cit., p. 174, states that over eleven operational plans were actually ordered by Lt Gen Sir Charles Keightley, the overall commander in chief, but that a shortage of British forces and transport resulted in the adoption of the two concepts cited above. French troops were staged from Marseilles and Algiers; British from Malta. French forces totaled some 30,000, including four regiments of paratroops and the bulk of a mechanized division; British forces totaled some 45,000 troops, including airborne forces, two Royal Commando groups, and reinforcing tanks, ships, and aircraft.

²⁵Ibid., p. 203.

²⁶Two sources are available which cover in detail the planning and conduct of Israeli operations on the Sinai Peninsula: Robert Henriques, A Hundred Hours to Suez, and Edgar O'Ballance, The Sinai Campaign 1956. The former is emotionally slanted from the Israeli viewpoint; the latter a more detailed and objective account of the Sinai campaign.

evidence to suggest that the Israelis moved into Sinai three days prior to the date which had been coordinated a priori with the French and perhaps the British.²⁷ Thus, Israeli operations began on Monday, October 29th, and British and French air operations against Egyptian military targets did not commence until the evening of October 31st, and it was not until Sunday morning, November 5th, that the British-French paradrops were executed. In the early hours of November 6, the first Royal Marine commandos arrived with supporting tanks from Malta. They had moved only 23 miles along the waterway when Britain bowed to the United Nations ceasefire order and called a halt at midnight on the 6th.²⁸

Thus, Israeli operations which began on October 29th were successfully completed on October 31st and included complete seizure of the Sinai Peninsula and the routing of some 40,000 Egyptian troops. By contrast, French and British operations started on the 29th and had resulted in a mere 23 mile advance along the Canal by midnight on November 6th.

THE SOVIET ROLE

Throughout the succession of events leading up to the British-French intervention, Soviet activity was extensive and persistent. Communist ideology had made some inroads in the Middle East as

²⁷Cook, op. cit., p. 213.

²⁸Ibid., p. 22.

early as 1920 when Party nuclei began to form in Egypt and neighboring states. After modest penetrations into nascent trade unions, the Party was banned in Egypt from 1922 until 1952. Egypt did not open diplomatic relations with Moscow until the 1940's, since there was no real appeal to the Marxist ideology until nationalist momentum reached its fever pitch in 1950.²⁹ At this point, the USSR began to put out its first feelers towards what subsequently was to become a large scale and effective incursion into the region. In late 1950 Moscow advised Cairo that it would be foolish to rely on Britain to defend the Canal because of Britain's worldwide commitments; the United States couldn't do so either, as evidenced by her failure to preserve the viability of South Korea. If Cairo were to assume neutrality, the USSR would be willing to help Egypt train and equip an army of two million men, and East German advisors and Skoda armaments could be arranged.³⁰ However, at this juncture the reactionary oligarchy was still in control of Egypt's destiny, and the Soviet offer was rejected. However, by 1953, when the British troop withdrawal agreement was being negotiated, former President Eisenhower commented: "Egyptian distrust of the British . . . seemed to override any fear they might have of the Soviets,"³¹ and by July 1955, the Soviets were able to increase heavily the size of their

²⁹Erskine B. Childers, The Road to Suez, p. 86.

³⁰Connell, op. cit., p. 23.

³¹Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, p. 156.

diplomatic representation in Egypt. Shipilov visited Cairo that month and made substantial offers of direct and indirect aid. By October Egypt signed the previously cited arms purchase agreement with Czechoslovakia and deliveries were made with alarming promptness. Egypt received 50 heavy tanks (Stalin III); 150 medium tanks (T-34); 200 armored troop carriers; 100 self-propelled guns; 120 MIG-15 fighters; 50 twin engine jet bombers (IL 28); 20 transport aircraft (IL 14); two Skory class destroyers; 15 minesweepers; two submarines; 200 57 mm. anti-tank guns; 50 122 mm. guns; 150 general trucks; 400 scout cars; a consignment of radar equipment with 85 mm. guns; 1,000 recoilless rifles; and many thousands of Russian and Czech automatic rifles and land mines.³²

Following nationalization and during the Suez crisis, Soviet activity intensified enormously. In all, arms shipments totaled between 200 and 300 million dollars in value with Soviet vessels being unloaded at the rate of one per week over the period.³³ In the last months of the crisis, Russia sent over 1,000 technicians and air crews to help operate the equipment furnished. During the fighting these personnel reportedly vanished through the Sudan.³⁴ Concurrently, diplomatic support for Egypt in all Western capitals was coupled with an unrestrained propaganda campaign against

³²Connell, op. cit., p. 78; Henriques, op. cit., p. 27.

³³Connell, op. cit., p. 132.

³⁴"The Suez Crisis," a collection of editorials printed by The Canadian Globe and Mail, p. 13.

"imperialism."³⁵ On August 28th Khrushchev sent a message to the British and French Ambassadors in Moscow which read: "The British and French should be careful. If Egypt is attacked, it will be a just war for the Arabs, and there will be volunteers."³⁶ The Soviet offensive achieved considerable success in Cairo where, during the first ten days of the crisis, Nasser met for lengthy periods with the Soviet ambassador a total of five times.³⁷ On October 11th, Radio Cairo broadcast the following report: "US democracy leaves the capitalists free to rule the country while the masses chase dollars and watch baseball. The USSR is the true democracy, with rulers taken from the people through the Communist Party."³⁸ In September the Egyptian publishing house of Dar Al Fikr was diverted to the full time publication of Communist classics.³⁹

The foregoing is not offered to suggest that Nasser was at the time a Communist, nor was he under complete Soviet domination. It does emphasize the nature of the Soviet participation and their influence on events as they occurred. It also confirms that the Soviets had successfully breached the upper tier defenses which had been developed by the West; not by a conventional thrust across established borders, but by leapfrogging the nuclear tripwire through ambivalent psycho-political and military action.

³⁵Connell, op. cit., p. 115.

³⁶Ibid., p. 132.

³⁷Adams, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁸Walter A. Languer, Nasser's Egypt, p. 25.

³⁹Ibid., p. 29.

CHAPTER 5

FORCE AND SUEZ

The remainder of this study analyzes Great Britain's employment of force as a foreign policy technique in the Suez affair. In accomplishing this task, consideration of the additional techniques employed and the reasons for their failure is included. This will be accomplished by moving successively through the legal, politico-military, and moral aspects of Britain's conduct.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

In a legal sense it is apparent that neither Britain nor Egypt could be viewed as operating completely in the area of right. From the first days of the crisis both sides had been guilty of breaches of international law; however, the overriding breach was the employment of force by Britain, which by comparison furnished Nasser's conduct with a cloak of respectability, and, as a result, "America and Russia oddly associated in the United Nations stifled the invasion of Egypt at birth. England, accustomed to losing all the battles but the last, on this occasion lost the last one too."¹

From the outset Britain rested its legal position on the provisions of the 1888 Convention. Through the years she had

¹Merry and Serge Bromberger, Secrets of Suez, p. 130.

carefully preserved the portions of the 1888 Convention which guaranteed that the Canal would be kept open to the ships of all nations in peace and war. At the same time, it should be noted that the Convention made a clear distinction between ownership and obstruction to shipping. "The engagements resulting from the present treaty shall not be limited by the duration of the articles of concession of the Universal Suez Company."² Thus, Nasser's seizure of the Canal Company, which must be considered the immediate casual action of the crisis, was not a breach of the 1888 Convention, nor did it affect the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1954.

From the outset Britain rested its case on the overriding necessity for ensuring continued unhampered use of the Canal for all nations. She did not challenge the legality of nationalization directly. Instead, together with selected users, she attempted to endow the Canal Company itself with an international character,

²Paul Johnson, The Suez War, p. 46. In other words, change of ownership was not a breach of the Convention, provided the freedom of shipping was maintained. The 1954 Canal Zone Agreement pledged adherence to the provisions of the 1888 Convention concerning availability of the Canal to the ships of all nations in peace and war. This 1954 agreement was the overriding legal guide for Anglo-Egyptian mutual obligations, being the most current.

and finally, together with France, assume the role of protector of its integrity without endorsement from even a majority of its assumed owners.³

The British position was questionable from several legal viewpoints. First, as has been shown, Britain herself violated, with some justification, the provisions of the 1888 Convention during both World Wars. More important, the Arab-Israeli war provided Egypt an opportunity for imposing restrictions on navigation to such an extent that passage through the Canal was no longer a correct interpretation of the 1888 Convention but became a matter of fact which could be allowed for or denied by the Egyptian authorities at their own discretion. Any ship could be blacklisted. This canceled out the value of the Constantinople Convention as early as 1951.⁴ Thus, Egypt's failure to adhere to this portion of the treaty over an extended period furnished legal basis for its cancellation.

³England was justified in challenging the intent of Egypt to ensure "unhampered" access of the Canal facilities to all nations in peace and war. Egypt had even during the period of Canal Company operation barred the Canal to the shipping of Israel. This action was continued in the face of a 1951 UN Security Council Declaration prohibiting it. It is interesting to note that Egyptian interference has continued despite alleged acceptance of the six United Nations principles. Three haphazard detentions and seizures were registered in 1959 alone. See Egypt and the Suez Canal, 1948-1959, p. 4. Egyptian seizures and restrictions against Israel were different from Britain's activities during the World Wars. Egypt's war with Israel was material, not formal. Continued violation after the 1951 UN resolution was violation of the UN Charter. Neither the Security Council nor the UN membership recognized any state of war between Israel and Egypt. Benno Avram, The Evolution of the Suez Canal Status from 1869 to 1956, p. 153.

⁴Ibid., p. 152.

Britain's legal position on internationalization was further weakened by its inconsistency. In the period following World War II, a similar question concerning access to the Dardanelles found Britain following an exactly opposite course. In this case, she had violently opposed internationalization of this waterway, and instead favored complete Turkish control.⁵

British sources supporting the use of force refer to the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Article 8 of this treaty permitted British troops at Suez "for the purpose of collaborating with the Egyptian troops in the defense of the Canal. These troops are not to be considered in any case as an occupational army, nor do they violate Egypt's sovereignty one iota."⁶ However, the more current Anglo-Egyptian Treaty signed in 1954 specifically excluded an Arab-Israeli conflict from the clause which allowed British occupation of Suez in the event of war.⁷

⁵The Suez Canal, Facts and Documents, selected studies presented by the Selected Studies Committee, p. 114, (hereafter cited as Suez Canal Facts . . .). Egypt greatly resented this obvious affront to their competency. The basis for Britain's insistence in the Dardanelles case involved efforts to prevent Soviet influence from penetrating this vital exit to the Mediterranean Sea. Turkish sovereignty over the straits had been acquired in 1936 by the Montreux Treaty. The Soviets during postwar settlements were anxious to internationalize this waterway, or, as a minimum, share in its control and defense. Britain successfully supported Turkish control, however.

⁶Ibid., p. 75. It is interesting to note that the 1936 Treaty is also in effect a violation of the 1888, since the presence of British troops in the Canal Zone actually prevented the passage of Italian, German, and Japanese ships during World War II.

⁷Johnson, op. cit., p. 92. In any event, Egypt and any objective observer would hardly consider the Franco-British ultimatum as a joint Anglo-Egyptian military venture designed to protect the Canal.

An additional legal contention of the British in support of their use of force was their fear that Egypt would divert the Canal's proceeds to finance the Aswan project. This point is also deprived of legal basis since President Nasser had publically backed down from this initial threat and had accepted this provision of the United Nation's six principles.⁸

President Nasser's seizure of the company with armed guards definitely represented an unfriendly act of provocation on the part of Egypt. As a response to the Aswan provocation, it seemed to violate the international legal principle of proportionality since the Aswan cancellation was primarily a United States action. The Suez seizure most certainly was directed at Britain. Hence Aswan itself can be viewed as merely a pretext. The principle of reciprocity therefore justified sanctions by Britain. The economic measures employed have already been discussed and were in proportion to the provocation; however, these measures proved less effective than the British had hoped. President Nasser was receiving considerable help from abroad, which unquestionably discouraged Britain's

⁸Donald C. Watt, Britain and the Suez Canal, pp. 20-25. In this regard, the legal position of the Suez Canal Company was itself subject to challenge. In its original agreement of 1856, the Company committed itself to "transform Timsah Lake into an inland port fit to harbour the largest ships." Further, in 1902 the Company formally agreed to enlarge Port Said at its own expense. Neither of these obligations had been fulfilled at the time of seizure. In addition, Egyptian sources maintain that Company records seized at the time of nationalization confirmed that the Company had no intention of carrying out any improvements on the Canal which would have lasting effect after 1968. Suez Canal, Facts . . ., loc. cit., p. 89.

continued reliance on economic devices.⁹ Initially this situation forced Britain to turn to the United Nations in the hope that the United States would support their position. But with US support in the United Nations, the Suez issue would follow the normal Cold War pattern, which has long confirmed the ineffectiveness of the world body. Despite the realities of UN limitations, the later British decision to ignore the world body and utilize force as a technique was legally unjustified. It was clearly a violation of the United Nations Charter and was further aggravated by the subsequent British refusal to accept the Security Council's resolution for the cessation of hostilities.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that after some delay, the rare community of interest displayed by the United States and the USSR proved effective in culminating the brief war. This confirms the value of the organization as an instrument for ensuring peace among the lesser powers when the two super powers reach a consensus. However, events have long demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the United Nations Charter as an instrument of peace in the Cold War, and, in this sense:

⁹Johnson, op. cit., p. 60. Egypt was enjoying deferred payments on Russian imports. In addition, Saudi Arabia, Syria, India, Japan, and West Germany offered easy credit, being anxious to enter a previous British monopoly area.

¹⁰By acceptance of the UN Charter, Britain and all member states have legally abandoned unilateral resort to force in favor of collective action and pacific settlement. On this basis, one might argue "that the validity of war even as a legal institution has now vanished. . . . But this conclusion seems . . . too rapid." See John C. Murray, S. J., "Theology and the Modern War," Morality and Modern Warfare, ed. by William J. Nagle, p. 70.

The new United Nations is a child of the Cold War, born of the conflict between East and West. The United Nations of the Charter is a ruin, rent asunder by the conflict between East and West. Like the conflict between Great Britain and France within the League of Nations, so the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union within the United Nations resolves itself into diametrically opposing standards of judgement which virtually incapacitate the international organization to act at all in political matters.¹¹

For these reasons Britain could make a clear decision. If she felt (as she apparently did) that Soviet interests were opposed to hers, then a solution through the United Nations would rest completely upon the will and power of the United States to represent her cause.¹² As has been shown, in this instance, the United States' and Britain's views did not coincide either. For this reason, Britain decided to ignore the world body; when the pretext afforded by the Israeli invasion presented itself, she chose to master her own destiny rather than leave it in the hands of Russia and the United States, neither of whom showed willingness to support her interests. That this decision was without legal justification can not be contested. On the other hand, final judgment, must be reserved pending a more detailed view of London's politico-military and moral position.

On balance, Britain's employment of force in the Suez affair was contrary to currently accepted legal mores regarding the use of

¹¹Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p. 498.

¹²The United Nations "is basically a power organization. And its decisions, . . . are natively apt to sanction injustice as well as justice." Murray, loc. cit., p. 71.

force. At the same time, it should be noted that peaceful alternative means, including economic and political sanctions, arbitration, mediation, and the UN action had proven unsatisfactory or in Britain's judgment promised to prove so.¹³

POLITICO-MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS

At the outset of the analysis of the politico-military justification for Britain's use of force, it is necessary to fix the part that the Israeli-Sinai invasion played. The Israeli attack can not be considered the underlying cause for the British decision to intervene, but merely a pretext. Since the seizure of the Canal in July, London had continually proclaimed its right to call in force if negotiation failed to shake President Nasser's hold on the waterway. Military preparations had begun soon after nationalization and long before the Israeli attack was revealed. It is reasonable to assume that, but for the restraining influence of the United States, the British would have acted prior to the Israeli invasion, when their forces were readied for the operation.

It is also evident that the Franco-British intervention was not motivated, as claimed, to preserve the Canal from the dangers

¹³Many authorities insist the negotiations inspired by the United Nations would have provided a workable peaceful solution, and indeed they have post facto, but at the time Britain felt such a solution would only strengthen Nasser's hand.

resulting from the Israeli invasion. "It is obvious that Anglo-French intervention was primarily directed against Nasser."¹⁴ To the British government the nationalization of the Canal heralded, if indeed it did not constitute, a direct attack on their position and prestige in the Middle East, and imperilled the growth, if not the basis of existence, of their national economies. It could be answered only by a clear defeat of the Egyptian government, diplomatically if possible; if not, by any other means available, not excluding force.¹⁵ The insistence of Mr. Eden that Britain's role was that of a policeman with preference toward neither side was a grave error which further increased worldwide condemnation of the act and distrust of British motives. The British ultimatum greatly favored Israel. If it had been accepted, the Israelis would have gained 80 miles of territory while the Egyptians lost 100 miles plus all the forces engaging the Israelis.

Actually, the politico-military implications of the Suez crisis were far more serious and pressing than a local friction consisting of President Nasser's nationalization of the Canal and the continuing war between Egypt and Israel. The real danger was

¹⁴Johnson, op. cit., p. 110. Psychological warfare leaflets utilized by the British during the invasion made no mention of British action to protect the Canal. They were simple anti-Nasser devices designed to support a British invasion. These, like the British war plan, were prepared prior to any knowledge of the Israeli attack.

¹⁵Documents on the Suez Crisis, 26 July to 6 November 1956, selected and introduced by Donald C. Watt, p. 5 (hereafter cited as Documents on Suez Crisis . . .).

that if Egypt had been allowed to progress unchecked, the free world might have been faced by a coalition of Arab, Muslim, Asiatic, and anti-Western states--led nominally by Egypt but manipulated by Russia.

To Britain, at the time unable to arouse essential United States support for unified Atlantic Community action, the challenge was to her national survival. Unfortunately, reaction was directed primarily at Egypt, the tool rather than the manipulator itself. Confirmation of this threat is shown in the words of a Cairo press release of April 25, 1956:

Our struggle against British imperialism has not ceased with the evacuation of British troops from Egypt; it will not cease with the disappearance of the British from Asia and Africa; it will continue until the final destruction of British political and economic influence.¹⁶

Whether the political analyst accepts the validity of Britain's conclusions on the grievous threat to their survival is a question beyond the scope of our review. The intent here is to confirm that Britain, correctly or not, resorted to the use of force in an issue which she deemed to be a threat to her national survival. It is on the basis of vital national interest that the politico-military implications of Britain's use of force must be viewed. Nevertheless, even from this standpoint, force as an instrument

¹⁶"Action in Egypt," symposium of editorial views and public statements published by the Conservative Party of Great Britain, p. 25.

proved to be a catastrophe for British policy. From the outset Britain had two choices; she could have sought President Nasser's friendship on his terms, or she could have sought to destroy him. In fact, Britain accomplished neither; she made an enemy of him, and she made him a hero in his own country and in most of Asia and Africa. It is thus pertinent to mention the specific politico-military errors involved.

The most obvious error was Britain's failure to let the Israelis complete the job they started. As has been previously pointed out, they would have smashed the Egyptian army and destroyed Nasser's prestige in the Arab world if left to their own devices. When the Anglo-French forces intervened, Nasser could and did claim that he was facing the overwhelming power of Britain and France. As a result, his defeat at the hands of the Israelis was tremendously tempered in both psychological and practical terms.

A Second error was the pedantic nature of the military operations. Military action could have been effective only if it had been quick and ruthless. Evidence the almost simultaneous Soviet intervention in Hungary which became a fait accompli before free world political reaction would successfully resist. Five days were allowed to elapse between the ultimatum and the landings, three of which were utilized by offensive air action alone. The extended air attacks together with the accompanying delay in ground operations were sufficient to unleash worldwide denunciation, in the face of which the British abandoned pursuit of their

initial objectives. In the current nuclear environment the practical and psychological concern for escalation to ultimate weaponry suggests that conventional operations, if conducted, should provide for swift and decisive action. A concomitant of this requirement is the maintenance of adequate and immediately deployable conventional forces and the continuing attention of strategic planners to forward deployments and base and access rights in areas of vital interest. Suez confirms that the substance of conventional military intervention has not changed, but rather its tempo.

A third error was Britain's failure to inform the United States government of her intentions beforehand. British resentment towards Mr. Dulles' lukewarm support, while understandable, was all the more reason for withholding military action until United States support could be assured.¹⁷ Its timing was particularly bad in the light of the United States election campaign.

Perhaps the most serious political error was Britain's obvious belief that preoccupations in Eastern Europe would keep

¹⁷In this regard, the United States reaction was equally questionable. In this instance, the United States insisted on legal and moral conduct by her ally at the obvious expense of political gain. The United States' double standard regarding its reaction to the Hungarian situation is noteworthy. In this instance, political implications overrode moral and legal ones.

the Soviet government out of Middle Eastern affairs.¹⁸ Actually, the Soviets reacted violently and successfully at both points. On the one hand, they successfully crushed the Hungarian revolt, teaching a cruel lesson to future rebels. On the other, by leading the campaign of denunciation of the Anglo-French action, "Russia successfully imposed a 'double standard' at the United Nations, the standard according to which aggression is aggression only when committed by a Western power."¹⁹

The remaining implications for the observer rest primarily in the area of morality. The question which remains unanswered is whether, in the nuclear age, a nation may morally make the decision to employ force unilaterally; and, in the case of Suez, were the conditions such that force was morally defensible?

¹⁸The Soviets had intervened in November of 1956 in the Hungarian revolt with 200,000 troops and 5,000 tanks. They refused to permit UN observers to enter Hungary and, ignoring free world protests, cruelly and effectively reestablished loyal Party rule under Janos Kadar, eliminating an independent "nationalist Communist revolt." Melvin C. Wren, The Course of Russian History, p. 706.

¹⁹Hugh Seton-Watson, Neither War Nor Peace, p. 373.

CHAPTER 6

THE MORALITY OF FORCE IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

AND CONCLUSIONS

It is contended in this report that the British leadership corrected or incorrectly viewed the Suez Canal nationalization and its accompanying implications as a serious threat to her national survival. On this basis, the Israeli-Sinai invasion afforded Britain the pretext to employ force with the underlying objective of checking the rising Egyptian (and Soviet) influence in the area.

In the final analysis, the condemnation and failure of the Anglo-French employment of force can not be primarily traced to either its legal or politico-military character. The employment of force failed to accomplish its immediate objective due to the worldwide moral indignation which it incurred. The reasons for this indignation are manifested not only in the nature of the act itself but also in its timing and the manner in which it was justified before world opinion.

In the latter case, those who favored a strong position against Nasser and Soviet influence felt the timing of the British action actually worked against their purposes. The unexpected success of the Israeli military action and the uncovering of the inherent weakness of President Nasser's Communist built military machine as previously noted in the politico-military analysis, if

permitted to run its natural course, would have ended in Nasser's downfall. It would have provided irrefutable evidence of the true nature of Soviet support to the balance of the Arab world.¹ In addition, many believed British action was accomplished in collusion with the Israelis, or that their ultimatum on the cease fire was concerted with the Israeli government.²

A second and perhaps more serious aspect of Britain's use of force was her attempt to misrepresent her intentions in the affair. As has been shown, in lieu of developing their concern in terms of vital national interest, Britain attempted from the beginning to assume the role of "protector" of the Canal. In the eyes of the world, the problem was focussed directly on the Canal. The issue was seldom officially presented in terms of Nasser's Soviet--supported pan-Islamic threat to the Middle East.³

This moral dilemma between British survival and British imperialism was managed no better on the domestic scene. In the

¹The reader might question the wisdom of including this aspect of the analysis under the moral category. It is again expressed here because those who favored the destruction of Nasser's military machine did so on moral as well as politico-military grounds.

²Documents on the Suez Crisis, 26 July to 6 November 1956, selected and introduced by Donald C. Watt, p. 30.

³This was particularly true in the United States, where popular opinion actually favored "little" Egypt in the struggle with the British lion. U.S. statesmen, including the President himself, were more concerned about the danger of imperialism than for the threat of Soviet influence in the area. This was confirmed as early as the United States' withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact. It also was the case within Britain and the Commonwealth.

critical period immediately following the British invasion, British Laborite opposition mounted to unprecedented heights in Great Britain.⁴ It was an overriding factor in Britain's decision to withdraw from Suez.

Perhaps the most serious aspect of the Suez affair is the resulting popular impression that force as a foreign policy technique in the nuclear age is morally wrong. This impression has been reinforced in the Suez case because, as we have seen, force was justified not in terms of vital national interest but rather in terms of the shadow of collective action. Because the issue of national survival was neglected, such emotional factors as prestige, national honor, and unilaterally applied justice seemed to be in command of Britain's conduct of the affair. Had the issues been clearly defined at the outset, it seems very likely that Britain would have accepted alternative means. Certainly it would have hardened the implications of the threat to its security to the degree that essential popular support, national and international, would have been forthcoming, and the invasion would have been delayed until this moral endorsement had jelled. Failure to keep the Egyptian-Soviet threat in its proper perspective resulted in exaggerating secondary incentives such as

⁴In this sense, an essential feature of the employment of force in the nuclear age is highlighted. The totality of force and the dangers inherent in its modern day employment make firm and unshaking popular support a must for its successful utilization.

affronts to national honor and prestige, which amounted to provocations only.

In the nuclear age the totality of the threat of war implies popular support in both a moral and a practical sense.⁵ At the same time, popular support is more difficult to rally against provocations to honor and prestige in view of the terrible consequences of nuclear war. Recognition of this fact has long characterized conflict management within the Soviet bloc. Invariably they have operated at a level below the threshold required to harness popular support in opposition to their conduct. As yet the Western world has been unable to devise techniques to adequately counter these sub-threshold tactics.

Suez, like so many incidents before and after exemplified the Soviet technique: feints, maneuvers, diplomatic turnabouts, economic forays, social penetrations, psychological manipulations, nuclear blackmail, the use of proxies--all of which fall below the threshold which justifies force as a counteracting device.

This is the overriding lesson of Suez. It confirms that traditional techniques of foreign policy, including force itself, will seldom serve our purposes in the struggle with Communism. In the case of Suez, Britain erred by responding too violently

⁵Quincy Wright in his thorough study on war notes that democratic states have been hampered in the conduct of foreign policy (and war) by an "active and independent" public opinion. He viewed this limitation within the balance of power system. This phenomena has become all the more magnified in the nuclear world. Quincy Wright, Study of War, p. 265.

and without essential popular support both at home and abroad. In other instances, the free world's response has been of the opposite nature.

To devise foreign policy techniques to adequately combat the Marxist-Leninist threat is the challenge of modern times. Adherence to traditional methods has proven fruitless. The minimum ingredients of revised free world conflict management demand an understanding of the forces it must combat and the unified harnessing of free world power to do so. Suez exemplified the West's inability to perceive even the basic ingredients necessary to accomplish the task.

By far the most serious outcome of Suez for Britain and the Free World has been the resulting moral decay which it has engendered. In Britain those forces most ardently dedicated to combatting Communist imperialism and preserving Western civilization suffered an ignominious defeat. Their influence in an essentially coalition and nominally conservative government was substantially reduced. The already alarming tendency in Britain to accept Communist inroads as an alternative to forceful resistance gained frightening momentum. Since Suez, the influence of pacifism has continued to grow in Britain and has affected unified free world efforts in every area of the conflict. In effect, it has raised the threshold required to justify forceful Western resistance and threatens to eliminate it entirely.

Soviet foreign policy aims are achieved against the diplomatic and military defenses thrown up by the free world to contain them. They have advanced by employing a spectrum which is not confined to traditional diplomatic or military hardware, but includes all possible relationships--political, military, economic, psychological, cultural, and technological--between states and social groups. Its devices include propoganda, trade agreements, negotiations, cultural exchanges, sociological "wedge-driving," and especially the utilization of nationalistic drives within nascent states and underdeveloped areas. They have been able to carry their struggle forward through a variety of proxies and auxiliaries: satellite governments; conspiratorial parties; and neutralist, nationalist, pacifist, and anti-colonialist movements. It is in these areas that the Free World must work to stem the tide. To do so successfully, our attention must remain focussed on the true threat--Communist expansionism.

The Suez incident should provide the student of national security with a further insight into the Communist techniques. It should confirm that regardless of individual interests, Free World survival must be based on cooperative and unified policies. Above all, it should emphasize that strict adherence to the letter of the law sometimes compromises its spirit.

CONCLUSIONS

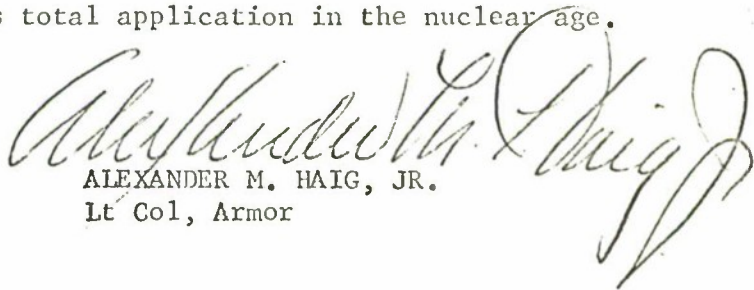
The preceding review of the events of the 1956 Suez crisis and the analysis of Britain's conduct of the affair form a mosaic of crucial concern to Western society. The analysis has confirmed that Britain, when judged by traditional Western standards, particularly those embodied within the framework of the United Nations Charter, was legally, politically, and morally culpable in its adoption of force as a response to Egypt's provocations. However, when viewed in its broader context, Suez, like so many incidents in the Cold War, confirms that traditional legal, political, and moral standards of international conduct are incompatible with the realities of Communist historical determinism as they apply in the nuclear age. That Western statesmen have remained confused and befuddled by the Soviet dialectic in foreign affairs is evidenced by the disastrous futility of Britain's management of the Suez debacle. Lacking the essential base of popular support required to sustain a forceful response, Britain hesitatingly proceeded, only to discover that the distortion of traditional strategic principles pertaining to the application of force stripped the military operation of the tempo, scope, and precision required to achieve decisive local success. Thus Britain found itself in double jeopardy--condemned in the first instance for having resorted to force, and indicated in the second for its inability to do so successfully.

In immediate perspective, the West has continued to view crises such as Suez as a series of isolated issues. They are far more than this. They are integral parts of the larger crisis of modern times--the continuing, albeit modified march of communism towards a Marxist world state which can be achieved only through the destruction of Western society itself. Within this overall crisis our traditional legalistic view of international conduct has witnessed the skillful distortion of accepted values by a Socialist camp which can employ provocation and such forces as imperialism, rising expectations, and the nationalistic ambitions of selected proxies as a technique of direct or indirect aggression. More seriously, our failure to view each crisis in terms of the whole has resulted in frustration and its more serious consequence, irrationality. To a society which has known only direct aggression and the most serious provocation as the basis for forceful resistance, the future is ominous indeed. This fact is even more alarming at a time when nuclear weapons have greatly dulled any sensitivity to provocation per se.

Whether salvation rests with the abandonment of traditional standards and a return to the Hobbesian jungle looms as the major area of inquiry for the student of national strategy. The results of this inquiry notwithstanding, two fundamental prerequisites are clear. First, the conduct of day to day international affairs must be in context to the whole. This whole is the protracted struggle with international communism. Secondly, regardless of

the standards which are adopted, they must be universally applied to the Western and the Eastern camps alike.

In this regard, it has become increasingly apparent that traditional Western standards can seldom be effective against an opponent which accepts these standards only to the degree that they can assist in the achievement of ultimate objectives. Because this is true today, as it was in the case of Suez, force as the ultimate safeguard of security can not be abandoned despite the fearful implications of its total application in the nuclear age.



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