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POINTS OF SIMILARITY AND DIVERGENCE IN THE
1882 AND 1956 BRITISH INTERVENTIONS IN EGYPT

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**POINTS OF SIMILARITY AND DIVERGENCE IN
THE 1882 AND 1956 BRITISH INTERVENTIONS IN EGYPT**

By

Lindsay Frederick Braun

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

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By

Lindsay Frederick Braun

In 1882 and again in 1956, British military forces invaded Egyptian territory. The first invasion inaugurated the British protectorate over the country, while the second affirmed the end of Britain's role as power broker in the region and, perhaps, the end of Britain as an imperial power. While contemporary events are often studied with respect to one or the other of these intervention incidents, they are rarely considered together, as a "repeat engagement" between two political entities. This study posits that while the perceptions and mental schemas of the historical actors, primarily the British, determined whether intervention would occur, it was the quality of Egyptian political unity that determined success or failure.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the result of over two years of often tedious reading and absorption, so the number of people who have provided support to me in this venture are many. However, my greatest debt in working out the ideas here, and in maintaining the confidence that this project would one day be completed, is to my thesis director, Professor Gordon Stewart, whose untiring support and confidence in my ability has been critical to keeping up resolve that sometimes flagged. Professor Harold Marcus was also instrumental in ensuring the coherence of my writing and keeping me on my toes as I produced this final draft. The third member of my committee, Professor Richard Laurence, availed me of his time and many observations on the text I would have otherwise missed. I also owe a debt of confidence to my colleagues at *The Historian*, where I served as an editorial assistant for two of my three years in the program, Professor Linda Cooke Johnson and the indefatigable Carol Cole; they kept me in good humor during some very stressful times in my life.

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cannot forget my small yet supportive family, who suffered me my occasional moments of verbose enlightenment about some minor detail in this thesis, and always expressed a faith in me that was incredible. Without all of them, this project would have been far more difficult or perhaps impossible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER 1	
THE URABI REVOLT AND THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION, 1882.....	7
CHAPTER 2	
CRISIS, COLLUSION, AND WAR, 1956.....	21
CHAPTER 3	
PERSONALITIES AND INTERACTIONS.....	45
CHAPTER 4	
EGYPT AS KEYSTONE: EGYPTIANS IN THE CRISES.....	56
CHAPTER 5	
VERTICAL TRENDS AND POINTS OF DIVERGENCE.....	65
CONCLUSIONS.....	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	75

PREFACE

This paper is a two-case study in empire and intervention. Its subjects, the 1882 and 1956 crises in Egypt, touch upon many contemporary issues in the historiography of empire. It was the possibility of juxtaposing two similar episodes, so widely separated in time, that attracted my attention, in the hopes that I might be able to locate a pattern, some set of rules, that influenced the outcomes. Egypt is not unique in having two outwardly similar episodes in its past, but I found it interesting that authors rarely looked upon these together as more than passing milestones in the grand sweep of history, and set out to look at them as a conceptual pair. This study is the result of that effort.

This investigation is divided into three major components. The first, the 1882 narrative, establishes the baseline, as an example of a “successful” (from the British standpoint, of course) intervention. The second is the 1956 narrative, counterpoised to 1882 as an example of intervention’s failure (or, alternately, Egypt’s success). The third section is the analysis, where we can take stock of the individuals and events that shaped each of the crises, and determine the reasons why intervention was possible in both instances, why it succeeded in 1882, yet failed in 1956. I have chosen to precede these sections with a brief introduction, to better place this study in the larger historiography of empire. Once the case is complete, readers may take away their own ideas about success

and failure in Empire as well as those I have tried to express here, and perhaps be inspired to write their own analysis of intervention incidents.

A brief note on Arabic names: I have chosen, for convenience's sake, to use certain transliterations over others in this study. For example, the name of the 1881-82 Nationalist leader is transliterated in Juan R I Cole's *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East* and Alexander Schölch's *Egypt for the Egyptians* as "Urabi", but I have simply used "Urabi", despite the phonetic accuracy of addressing the first letter. Unless in a direct quotation, I have avoided completely the older forms "Arabi," "Arábi," and "Orabi." Quandaries involving Tewfik/Tawfiq, Nasser/Nasr, Heikal/Heykal, and Abd el-Hamid/Abdulhamid have been handled in a like manner. The responsibility for any inconsistency or error is entirely mine.

INTRODUCTION

The historian's craft sometimes calls on its practitioners to make comparisons between disparate places, times, people, and events. This method can confer greater knowledge of an obscure subject, and making comparisons helps to chart trends and determine the range of factors that mold any particular historical event. It is the latter approach that concerns us here, in the comparison of two episodes of British intervention in the affairs of Egypt, one in 1882 and the other in 1956. In 1882, a young Egyptian colonel named Ahmad Urabi sought to change the existing order, and in the process drew the ire of the existing hierarchy in Constantinople, London, Paris, and Cairo, creating an unstable situation that W. E. Gladstone's Liberal ministry in London was drawn into. In 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in reprisal for Anglo-American efforts to bend him to their will in the Cold War, initiating a chain of events that led to the decision of Anthony Eden's government to collude with France and Israel and retake the canal by force.

This study is an exploration of these two events in the history of British imperialism. While both are well-known in the context of British or Egyptian history, they have rarely been considered together, as a repeat engagement between Britain and Egypt. For example, Peter Cain and A. G. Hopkins describe the 1882 invasion an act to protect "Britain's substantial economic interests" in the country from unpredictable Nationalist

forces, while the 1956 Suez war marked the end of upholding both sterling and empire, in favor of the former.¹ Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, on the other hand, sees Urabi's defeat as the defining mark between two eras in Egyptian history, the change in suzerainty from Turkey to Britain, and he sees the 1956 intervention in terms of Nasser's prestige in Egypt and the Arab world.² The passages are connected only by the grander arc of history that passes through them. The comparative approach itself has been used for studies of temporally close events (e.g., Hungary and Suez in 1956, Suez and the Falklands war of 1982) but rarely for two cases separated by more than twenty or thirty years.³ Similarly, an unwritten condition of making such comparisons has hitherto been that international power relations have remained basically the same between the two events, something certainly not in evidence between 1882 and 1956. The two interventions are presented here together as a way of raising certain conceptual issues surrounding British imperialism and power in the Near East, Africa, and Asia.

First, this study seeks to delineate the mental schemas and conditions in which the individual actors on both sides operated, and how these made intervention possible. Each Briton or Egyptian displayed reasonings and preconceptions that led to particular responses in each phase of each crisis, and determined both British actions and Egyptian

¹ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism* vol. 1 (London: Longman, 1993): 364-69; 2:289-90.

² Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt* 4th ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 392-93; 405.

³ Daniel F. Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez: An Exploration of Who Makes History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991); Louise Richardson, *When Allies Differ: Anglo-American Relations during the Suez and Falklands Crises* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996),

resistance. These schemas included not only the grand predilection of British and other European leaders to make simplistic assessments of Near Eastern and Asian countries and their populations, which Edward Said has termed Orientalism, but also the British mindset regarding Britain's place in the world and status as a great power, Nasser's self-image as a pan-Arab leader existing outside the world of East-West bloc politics, and the tension between the British idea of Egypt and the Egyptian vision of self.⁴ Looking at schemas will explain why one intervention was successful and the other not.

Success or failure was also determined by the dynamic interaction between Britain and Egypt, by the operation of each within a larger international context, and by the activities of individuals inside each country. The approach of this paper is to show how the inability of Egypt's divided nationalists to raise an effective protest, combined with the inability of other nations to protest Britain's invasion, allowed for British victory in 1882, while the increased vulnerability and division of Britain and unity of Egypt helped Nasser to repel the Anglo-French invasion of 1956. The world situation in 1956 further allowed Nasser to organize an effective political defense against Anglo-French aggression, and the ensuing isolation of Britain and France in the international community achieved what Egypt's military was unable to in 1882 and 1956. Such an approach brings out the extent to which power is always relative in the international arena.

The main focus is, however, on the "zone of interaction" between Britain and Egypt, and will only peripherally consider the French and, in 1956, the Israelis, Americans,

⁴ See Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (New York: Cambridge, 1988). Mitchell creates a vivid picture of Egypt as an exhibition, somehow surreal but dilapidated, in the eyes of Europeans (22).

and Soviets. The primary reason for this, aside from brevity, is because the British and Egyptians were most directly affected by the events of 1882 and 1956, in spite of the key roles played by the US, USSR, and Israel in encouraging and then terminating the 1956 operations. These two moments are symbolic of the rise and fall of Britain's informal empire and must be studied in that context; as Edward Said has said, the incorporation of Egypt into the European world, not just economically but culturally, "led ineluctably to the invasion of 1882, and, just as ineluctably, to the eventual reclamation of the Suez Canal by Gamal Abdel Nasser in July 1956."⁵ However, it was not so certain at the time.

⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 126.

THE URABI REVOLT AND THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION, 1882

Following the Egyptian debt crisis of 1876 and the disastrous Ethiopian war of 1875-76, a financially ruined Egypt defaulted on its foreign loans, and the country's finances came under direct Anglo-French control (the Dual Control). When the ruler of Egypt, the Khedive Ismail, proved uncooperative, European interests dictated his removal in favor of his son Tawfiq. This engineered succession, carried out in 1879 through pressure on Egypt's Ottoman masters in Constantinople, found a ruler more tractable to European control of the Egyptian foreign debt. However, the deposition of Ismail carried with it the destruction of khedival authority and the erosion of the Egyptian status quo through laws designed to lower the nation's expenses to better service the foreign debt.⁶

Included with these actions were moves to decrease the size of the army, from 124,000 in 1874 to 83,000 in 1876 (at the end of the Ethiopian war), 57,000 in 1878, and finally to aim for a 12,000-soldier Egyptian Army in the summer of 1879. The downsizing prompted a crisis in the officer corps. Along with major cuts in officers' pay that took it below the cost of living, the reductions made it far more difficult for soldiers to rise in the ranks. There was some rioting in 1879 arising from the financial difficulties of unemployed officers. However, it was in 1880, after Tawfiq and his minister of war, Osman Rifqi, effectively eliminated advancement prospects for native Egyptians (*fellahin*) in the army

and cut pay that disaffected officers began seriously agitating for reform. Protest was made easier by that very reduction of the state security apparatus they had served.⁷

The officers' predicament readily found sympathy with the intellectuals and landholders of the country, both Turco-Circassian and Egyptian, who were unhappy about the ever greater presence of Europeans in the Egyptian bureaucracy. The two complementary groups found common cause in their enmity towards the European privileged who, they maintained, bent the laws of the land in order to circumvent Egyptian taxes and justice. As the Khedive's authority weakened, and he increasingly relied upon European backing to maintain his authority, the restless intelligentsia, religious leaders, and officers became bolder about their grievances. All the ingredients were present to create an explosive situation, one that only required the right incident to set it off.

Into this mix appeared Colonel Ahmad Urabi and his two cohorts, Colonels Abd al Al Hilmi and Ali Fahmi. Urabi, in particular, had served in the Ethiopian war and was one of the officers tried for the 1879 army riots; therefore, his life was directly touched by the practices of the Khedival state.⁸ On 30 January 1881, the three colonels presented a petition to the government asking for the removal of the Circassian Minister of War Osman Rifqi in favor of a Nationalist Egyptian. Their petition touched a much older problem than Egyptian fiscal troubles.

⁶ F. Robert Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives, 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1984), ch. 7 *passim*.

⁷ Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 218-219.

⁸ Translator's foreword to Ahmad Urabi, *The Defense Statement of Ahmad 'Urabi the Egyptian* trans. Trevor le Gassick (Cairo: American University Press, 1982), 9.

Urabi states that “[t]he practice in Egypt was to discriminate by race. And so all the promotions, decorations, and awards went to those of the Circassian race.” With the downsizing of the military, progress made by native Egyptians in the officers’ ranks was nullified, because they were released from service before Circassians.⁹ The petition, “requesting equal treatment for those in government service, the cessation of discrimination by race and the enactment of just laws that would ensure every man his rights,” was based on the belief that having a native Egyptian as Minister of War would open the higher echelons to Egyptians. With this background, Urabi’s came to believe that the presentation of the petition to the government prompted officials to plot the Colonels’ removal “by death in the usual Egyptian manner, that is, secretly.”¹⁰

At the beginning of February 1881, under pretense of wedding arrangements for the Khedive’s sister, the three Colonels were summoned to the Kasr-el-Nil barracks in Cairo where they were arrested and tried for insubordination.¹¹ Such a move had been foreseen, and arrangements had been made for the colonels’ units to effect a rescue.¹² The

⁹ In his notes to the *Defense Statement*, le Gassick notes that in 1903, Urabi recalled to W. S. Blunt, his English correspondent, that the petition was born the same night he and Abd al Al Hilmi learned they were to be removed from their commands in the next round of army reductions, giving a personal urgency to their actions.

¹⁰ Ahmad Urabi, *Defense Statement* 18.

¹¹ P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt, From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak* 4th ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 144; de Freycinet, *Question d’Égypte*, 195, Auckland Colvin, *The Making of Modern Egypt* (London: Seeley & Co., 1906), 10.

¹² Interestingly, no mention of Khedival machinations appears in Colvin’s account, only the straightforward statement “[the Colonels] were summoned to appear, for acts of insubordination, before a court martial.” See Colvin, *Making of Modern Egypt*, 10.

military intercession on the Colonels' behalf led to demonstrations that resulted in the Khedive's dismissal of Osman Rifqi from the government under military pressure.

The success of this effort encouraged the military to push for greater change, aided the discontent felt by notables and intellectuals over the country's financial situation.¹³

Such concessions as the end of Circassian privilege in the officer ranks were granted, and Urabi found himself in the position of a high-profile agitator. Concerned exclusively with the Army's well-being at this time, any real power Urabi wielded went toward maintaining the gains already won. By September 1881, he encountered growing opposition within the Khedival court.

During August 1881, Tawfiq appointed his reactionary Circassian brother-in-law, Daoud Pasha Yakan, to the post of Minister of War. He replaced Mahmud Sami, who had been installed following the military demonstration of February. Yakan was firmly opposed to the *fellahin* officers. The Colonels, faced with unanimous ministerial opposition, redoubled efforts to regain their security:

The least they [Urabi et al.] might expect at his [Daoud Pasha Yakan's] hands would be dismissal from the service, and it was far more likely that they would be arrested and tried for mutiny in connection with their doings in February. It was part, too, of their program to obtain an increase of the Army, and they added to it a demand of the Constitution, which seemed to all the only permanent guarantee against arbitrary government.¹⁴

To present their demands before the Khedive, the officers planned a demonstration at the Abdin barracks in Cairo for September 1881.

¹³ This union of indigenous agents of change with the military movement is a major theme of Cole's *Colonialism and Revolution* and Schölch's *Egypt for the Egyptians*.

¹⁴ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (New York: Knopf, 1907), 112.

Whatever plans were already made would have become undone when Yakan ordered the dispersal of military units to various points in the kingdom. The officers saw this scattering of the army as another attempt to undermine their solidarity and eventually remove them. Urabi urged unit commanders not to comply with this directive, and on 9 September the planned demonstration took place at Abdin. Urabi later recalled that the troops “left their barracks and assembled at Abdin Square, their conduct extremely orderly and well-mannered.”¹⁵ The feeling that prevailed was not insurrectionary, but one of legitimate grievance with the government as reflected in the Urabist demand for the replacement of all government ministers.

Fortunately the ministry, headed by Riaz Pasha, was not popular with influential powers. Prime Minister Riaz was a conservative reactionary, opposed to constitutionalism and foreign control.¹⁶ He was interested in a self-governed Egypt, but did not believe that the government should be run by Egyptians.¹⁷ Riaz was thus at once unpalatable to the Ottoman Sultan, Egyptian reformers, and the Anglo-French Dual Control alike. Eventually, even Tawfiq wanted to be rid of Riaz, and likely thought of ‘using’ the Abdin demonstration as an excuse to sack his troublesome minister.¹⁸

¹⁵ Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 23.

¹⁶ John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations 1800-1956* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 114.

¹⁷ Peter Mansfield, *The British in Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 15-16.

¹⁸ How much weight this carried in Tawfiq’s mind is a contentious matter. Urabi gives the impression that the Khedive had thought through his alternatives, and was not seriously upset over changing ministries. See Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 23; and Blunt, *Secret History*, 114-117. On the other hand, the British Controller, Auckland Colvin, who characterizes the resignation as “wrung from” the Khedive, and the British Consul at Alexandria, Charles Cookson, who relates that Tawfiq had left the Ismailia Palace with an intent to “overcome the insurgents.” See Auckland Colvin, *The Making of Modern Egypt*

Tawfiq indeed bowed to the army's demands, although his language was defiant and he would not negotiate directly with them. The khedive chose to have British officials mediate with Urabi, which did nothing to dispel the image of Tawfiq as a puppet to foreign interests. Urabi appeared determined not to upset the foreign powers directly; he specifically put out notices of the demonstration, and the reasoning behind it, beforehand to the representatives of European governments.¹⁹ The notices were, effectively, a call from Urabi and his compatriots to Tawfiq alone, who in turn chose to hide behind the Dual Control.

Thus, the troubles continued. As a condition of accepting the appointment as Prime Minister, the constitutionalist Sharif Pasha demanded that the military cease interference in political affairs. Between September 1881 and January 1882, the Dual Control again gained command of Egyptian finances, keeping the European presence conspicuous in the country. The Ottoman Sultan, alerted by the events of September, was eager to find a way to exert greater control over the country.²⁰ Finally, the military faction, with Urabi as its spokesman, continued to agitate against the European influence that prevented full realization of the September victory.

The 'Urabists' had hoped to see three demands met. The first, replacement of government ministers, was easily won. The second, the convention of an Assembly, was

(London: Seeley & Co., 1906), 10; and Cookson to Granville, 10 September 1881, in *British and Foreign State Papers* vol. 73 (London: William Ridgway, 1889), 1131-36.

¹⁹ Enclosure 2 by Urabi dated 9 September 1881, from Cookson to Granville 10 September 1881, in *State Papers* vol. 73, 1135-36; see also Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 23.

²⁰ Vatikiotis, *History of Modern Egypt*, 146-7.

fulfilled when Tawfiq opened it on 26 December 1881.²¹ The third, however, concerned the size of the army and pay scales, the original reasoning for army unrest in the first place. An increase in the size of the army was also the most difficult to grant because of the Dual Control's insistence of debt service maintenance before all other budgetary matters.

On 19 December 1881, Urabi discussed finances with Auckland Colvin, the British Controller, with Wilfrid Blunt, a British advocate of Urabi's cause, as intermediary. The khedive had promised an expansion of the army to 18,000 men, the maximum limit allowed Egypt by decree of the Ottoman Sultan. Colvin insisted that the full expansion could not be borne by Egyptian finances, so they finally agreed on an expansion to 15,000.²² Blunt wrote of these negotiations:

It was the time of year when the new Budget was being drafted, and the Nationalist Minister of War, Mahmud Sami, had demanded £600,000 as the amount of the year's estimates for his department . . . [It] was necessitated, Mahmud Sami said, by the Khedive's promise of raising the army to the full number of men allowed by the Firman, 18,000. The Minister had explained his insistence on the plea that a refusal would or might cause a new military demonstration, the bug-bear of those days; and I was asked to find out what sum the army would really be satisfied with for their estimates. Colvin authorized me to go as far as £522,000, and to tell Arabi and the officers that it was financially impossible to give more . . . Arabi's last words to me on this occasion were "*men sabber dhaffer*," "he who has patience, conquers." I sent a note the same day to Colvin informing him of the result, and I was also thanked by [Consul Edward] Malet for having helped them both out of a considerable difficulty.²³

²¹ Ibid., 148.

²² Mansfield, *British in Egypt*, 27.

²³ Blunt, *Secret History*, 135.

The incompleteness of the army's September victory was therefore immediately attributable to European control over the finances.

Europeans were not the only outside players in this drama, for Egypt already had imperial masters. The Ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamid II, saw in the situation an opportunity to gain greater control over semiautonomous Egypt. At the beginning of October 1881, the sultan sent two emissaries to Egypt to assay the situation. This apparently minor action provoked consternation from the Europeans, who did not welcome an additional cook at the cauldron. British Prime Minister Gladstone wrote to his Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville, that "I think we may join with France in opposing strongly, as you say, any interference of the Turkish Emissary with administration, while he should be received with personal respect."²⁴

On the ground, the interest of the Sublime Porte threw plans of action into disarray. Despite Ottoman legitimacy in ruling over Egypt, the British and French were divided over the possibility of appealing for an Ottoman army to invade Egypt and suppress the Urabists. The French had annexed the Ottoman province of Tunisia earlier in 1881, and were not eager to see an Ottoman army next door. Unable to justify an invasion of Egypt by European arms, and unable to agree on appeals to the Ottomans, the Dual Control had to be content to watch and wait.

²⁴ Gladstone to Granville, 2 October 1881, in Agatha Ramm, ed., *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-1886* vol. 1 (London: Oxford Press, 1962), 297. This passage is immediately preceded by the Gladstone's assertion that he "should have felt that we could take very strong ground against any intervention whatever from the Sultan, had it not been for the precedent set by our predecessors who, wrongly I suppose, called in his pretended power as Suzerain to depose late Khedive [Ismail]." (Idem.)

The wait was not long, for the British and French Governments were able to push developments along with the Joint Note of 6 January 1882. The Note was a public affirmation of European support for Tawfiq as the legitimate ruler in Egypt, indicating that they were prepared to intervene to support him. The note upset the assembly and the Urabists, who felt that it also provided the khedive with *carte blanche* to operate as he pleased. Urabi, in particular, saw it as the “language of menace.”²⁵

The timing of the unsolicited note was poor at best. Sharif and the two-week-old Assembly were divided by the note, and the latter driven into league with the military faction.²⁶ The note dashed any hope of compromise with the Control on budgetary issues. The note also brought down Sharif’s government; on 2 February, at the urging of the Assembly, Minister of War Mahmud Sami acceded to the Prime Ministership. Urabi became Minister of War, something he had “certainly never hoped for but there was a complete consensus and unity on [Urabi’s] appointment to this ministry on the part of all shades of opinion in the army and among the members of the Chamber of Deputies.”²⁷

During the spring of 1882, then, popular support was with the army and the Assembly in their defiance of the khedive and the European governments. Sultan Abdulhamid II was unwilling to cast his lot to either side, and continued to make overtures

²⁵ The text of the Joint Note was harsh, the intention of French Prime Minister Léon Gambetta. Gladstone wished to tone down the language, and Granville to send a second note to soften the first, but Gambetta refused to sanction it. Malet and Blunt attempted to smooth over Urabi’s own dismay, without success. See *State Papers*, vol. 74, 367-68, 372; also Mansfield, *British in Egypt*, 30-34; Blunt, *Secret History*, 144.

²⁶ Vatikiotis, *History of Modern Egypt*, 148.

²⁷ Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 24.

to both Urabi and Tawfiq. With the situation so precarious, conspiracies real and imagined appeared around every corner.

Action against ‘conspiracies’ was swift in an Egypt where the army could exercise its prerogatives freely. Some fifty Turco-Circassian officers, including former Minister of War Osman Rifqi, were accused in April 1882 of conspiring to murder Urabi and “all other Egyptian-Arab officers of high rank.”²⁸ The recent promotion of Urabi and five of his fellow officers to the rank of Pasha (General) and many other officer advancements for *fellahin* made the charges more believable.²⁹ The Urabists certainly believed the conspiracy charges, finding forty Circassian officers, including Rifqi, guilty. After a three-week court-martial, the court condemned them to exile in the Sudan. This assertion of power by the army provoked a showdown with the khedive, who refused to countersign the sentences at the urging of the British consul.³⁰ The result was a further deterioration of stability in the country, and the dispatch of British and French warships to Alexandria in mid-May stirred up further agitation. Added to this was another Anglo-French Joint Note, delivered on 25 May, requesting that Urabi and several other prominent officers voluntarily exile themselves, a demand flatly rejected.

²⁸ Ibid., 25.

²⁹ How these promotions came about is unclear. Urabi states that it was his tactful organization that ensured the “deserving were promoted rather than reduced in rank.” He attributes the conferring of Pasha titles to the khedive’s satisfaction with the army’s conduct. Vatikiotis portrays it as Urabi “pushing through mass promotions of Egyptian officers and up-grading their scales of pay.” Mansfield attributes the title of Pasha to the double-dealing of the Porte, while le Gassick attributes the generalships to the khedive’s recommendation to the Sultan on behalf of the Urabists. No dates are given. See Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 25; Vatikiotis, *History of Modern Egypt*, 149; Mansfield, *British in Egypt*, 36; le Gassick, foreword to Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 12-13.

³⁰ Mansfield, *British in Egypt*, 37.

The heightened tension in Alexandria was, therefore, understandable. The situation was explosive enough that a minor incident, a dispute between a Maltese (“an English subject”³¹) and an Egyptian on 11 June 1882 grew into a riot that left hundreds dead. The riot was invariably portrayed either as one instigated by Urabist intrigue against Europeans, else at least one that went unchecked by the army as guarantors of public safety.

The June riot turned opinion in Europe against Urabi and his affiliates, now styled the ‘Nationalist Party’. In London, despite the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs’ assurances that the Egyptian military had “according to all accounts we have received, helped to put the riot down and restore order,” Parliament was dominated by fear that Britain was being shown as impotent.³² Although Urabi was not responsible for the riot, demands in Parliament for his removal or some action to suppress the rebellion were rife.

Along with these demands were questions and observations regarding the building of earthworks around Alexandria. Although they presented little threat to the Anglo-French fleet³³, the British Admiral, Beauchamp Seymour, demanded that work on these fortifications cease. Urabi made the wry observation that “[w]e were amazed how the regular repair work on the forts could be considered a threat while the presence of warships surrounding Egyptian ports was not considered threatening! But then we recall

³¹ Elbert E. Farman, *Egypt and its Betrayal* (New York: Grafton, 1908), 303.

³² *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3d ser., vol. 270 (1882), col. 1130.

³³ Not all of the ships were in the harbor. Some of them, including the British battleships *Superb* and *Inflexible*, were among the newest and largest in the European navies, and drew too much water to enter safely.

that 'Right belongs to the strong!'"³⁴ Work was supposedly stopped on the fortifications, but not to the satisfaction of Seymour, who threatened to shell Alexandria.

The French, unwilling to commit to action, ordered their squadron away. Ships of other nations, including Greece and the United States, stood by as Admiral Seymour bombarded the city on 11 July. The bombardment of Alexandria would later prove to be a sore point in recalling the evolution of the crisis; there is evidence that Gladstone only allowed Seymour to proceed when failing to do so would destroy his Liberal ministry, already weakened by a soft response to recent unrest in Ireland.³⁵ There is evidence too that Seymour acted independently ("exceeding his orders"), and evidence that he acted with specific clearance from Lord Granville.³⁶ In any case, following the bombardment, the operation was solely a British one. European Power conferences, appeals to the Porte, and negotiations with Urabi were for naught. Urabi went about building up his defenses against an expected British invasion; British views included that of an Urabi pretending to Napoleonic grandeur.³⁷

In London, Gladstone was in favor of only those moves needed to protect the Canal and British vessels, but the majority of the Cabinet was in favor of a full-scale invasion to remove Urabi. Finally, Granville and eventually Gladstone himself approved of an invasion, especially when the possibility of French cooperation dwindled and then

³⁴ Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 32.

³⁵ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent, from 1876 to 1912* (New York: Avon, 1991), 133-34.

³⁶ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 112; C. L. Seymour, "The bombardment of Alexandria: A note," *English Historical Review* 87 (1972) 790-94.

³⁷ *Punch*, 15 July 1882, 21.

vanished with the collapse of de Freycinet's government on 31 July over issues related to the Egyptian crisis. The vote in Parliament, on 22 July, recorded a 93% vote in favor of intervention.

Sir Garnet Wolseley led the British army to suppress the Urabists in August 1882. Tawfiq had taken refuge in Alexandria after the bombardment, and the Sultan cast his lot on the side of the khedive when a victory appeared unlikely for Urabi. Forced into a corner and declared a rebel by the khedive, Urabi nevertheless managed to conscript large numbers of *fellahin* soldiers and put up a spirited defense. Urabi also obtained a signed religious dispensation (*fatwa*) declaring Tawfiq a traitor for delivering Egypt into the hands of the infidel, and enticed religious leaders to declare a holy war (*jihad*) against the British invaders.³⁸

Urabi declined to block the Suez Canal, despite the strategic advisability of doing so. The aging designer of the waterway, Ferdinand de Lesseps, had met with Urabi at some point between the bombardment and the British invasion, and persuaded him that the British would respect the neutrality of such an international waterway.³⁹ Wolseley, however, did not observe the neutrality of the canal, and quickly secured both ends on 20 August.⁴⁰ The British army came up on Urabi's flank and, after several running battles, surprised the main body of his forces at Tel-el-Kebir on 13 September and quickly routed them. Urabi himself surrendered to General Drury Lowe in Cairo on 14 September 1882.

³⁸ Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 241.

³⁹ Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *The Life of George Leveson Gower, Second Earl Granville* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), 269.

⁴⁰ Mansfield, *The British in Egypt*, 48-49.

Urabi was imprisoned, and his friend Wilfrid Blunt hired the lawyer/journalist A. M. Broadley to defend him in British court. It was at this time that Urabi produced his handwritten defense statement recently unearthed by Trevor le Gassick and reprinted in its entirety. With this, Broadley was able successfully to organize a defense for his client that could have been very embarrassing for the khedive, who simply wanted to execute Urabi and his cohorts. As a result, Urabi agreed to plead guilty to insurrectionary crimes, and his death sentence would be commuted to life exile in Ceylon (Sri Lanka).⁴¹

Throughout the crisis, Urabi presented the appearance of someone operating in the best immediate interests of the army and the *fellahin*. His failing was not one of character, but of understanding. Thrust into the middle of a tug-of-war he did not fully understand, Urabi became the representative of a nebulous group called 'Nationalists'. However, Urabi did not advocate the overthrow of the khedive until Tawfiq fled to the protection of British arms in Alexandria toward the end of July 1882.

⁴¹ See John S. Galbraith, "The Trial of Arabi Pasha," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 7 no. 3 (1978), 284-85.

CRISIS, COLLUSION, AND WAR, 1956

Just as an Egyptian colonel, four years after a disastrous military campaign waged by his sovereign, challenged the titular head of state 1881-82, so Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser did in 1952. The Free Officers' Movement, led nominally by General Mohammed Naguib, siezed power from the corpulent King Farouk (himself a descendant of Tawfiq's line) on 23 July 1952. Just like Urabi, Nasser found an unexpected wave of popular support behind him; unlike Urabi, the Free Officers were not faced by the specter of immediate European intervention. There was a British military presence, guaranteed by treaty, in the Suez Canal Zone, so there was no basis for asserting that the Revolution placed the Canal in danger. Likewise, Nasser appeared to be more agreeable to the British Government than Farouk had been, for he was willing to rescind Egypt's claim to the Sudan in return for a binding agreement for British withdrawal from that country by 1956. An agreement concluded in the fall of 1954 included a timetable for the removal of the British military presence in Egypt, including the Canal Zone, before the end of 1956. Perhaps prophetically, pressure from the United States was partially responsible for the Anglo-Egyptian agreements' conclusion.⁴² The end result was that Nasser was perceived as a possible ally against a feared Soviet encroachment in the Near East.

⁴² John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 208-9.

Winston Churchill's successor as Prime Minister in April 1955, Anthony Eden, had a long and notable record of service to the British crown. As Foreign Minister, Eden had resigned his post in 1938 to protest Neville Chamberlain's conciliatory policies towards Italy, and had strongly protested the agreement at Munich; he had also served as Churchill's wartime Secretary of State for War and, in Sir Winston's second ministry (1951-1955), had served as Foreign Minister and heir-apparent. Eden was, therefore, a Briton sensitive to national pride and the world's perception of British strength, moral and military; he was a veteran of the First World War and had lost two brothers in that war and a son in the second.⁴³ This came through very clearly at Eden and Nasser's only meeting, in Cairo during February 1955, while Eden was still Churchill's foreign minister. Eden put his Oxford education in Oriental languages to good use during the meeting, greeting Nasser in Arabic and conversing for some time.⁴⁴ Nasser, however, felt that Eden's visit was made to look "as if we were beggars and they were princes."⁴⁵ Eden, on the other hand, remarked on Nasser's apparent disregard for protocol: "As the flashlights went off, he siezed my hand and held it."⁴⁶

⁴³ Sidney Aster, *Anthony Eden* (New York: St. Martin's, 1976), 4-5, 88.

⁴⁴ Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 398. Mohammed Heikal reports that Eden specifically referred to himself as an Orientalist, and made much of his own ability to quote Arabic proverbs. See Mohammed Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (London: André Deutsch, 1986), 61-62.

⁴⁵ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 65. See also David Carlton, *Anthony Eden* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 365.

⁴⁶ Anthony Eden, *Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 245.

While Nasser and his staff felt that Eden might still be someone they could work with, Eden came away with an impression that Nasser's intransigence on certain defense issues, in particular the UK-led Baghdad Pact, stemmed from "jealousy" and "a frustrated desire to lead the Arab world."⁴⁷ Regardless of personal ambitions, Nasser had based his refusal to join, or even to condone, the Pact on the grounds that it was not an internally-led coalition of Arab states. Eden's filter converted Egyptian self-interest into the egotism of one man, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sought to play the role of Oriental despot across the entire Arab world. Subsequent actions, such as the Egyptian radio campaign against the British commander of Jordan's army, General Sir John Glubb, and his subsequent dismissal by King Hussein, led Eden to believe Nasser was personally behind activities opposing the British.⁴⁸

Nasser certainly was aware of Egypt's potential leadership among the growing number of independent African and Asian nations. He felt that the major powers were still attempting to retain control of these new polities through economic and diplomatic leverage, and that this type of strong-arming included regional security organizations (like the Baghdad Pact and the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), a meeting of which was Eden's eventual destination at the time he visited Cairo in 1955) and military "advisors." Moreover, Nasser believed strongly in the potential of these newly emergent nations to become a powerful force in world politics, a view shared by Marshal Tito of

⁴⁷ FO 371/119051, cited in Richard Lamb, *The Failure of the Eden Government* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987), 160.

⁴⁸ Eden, *Full Circle*, 388-89; Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez* (London: Constable, 1967), 29-32.

Yugoslavia and Prime Minister Nehru of India.⁴⁹ This feeling goes a long way toward explaining Nasser's unwillingness to align Egypt with any major bloc; this unwillingness was, however, to infuriate the governments of Great Britain and the United States, and eventually would contribute to the chain reaction leading to the Canal's seizure.

Nasser's policies, then, were geared toward making Egypt the preeminent force in the Arab world, and a leader in the movement of non-aligned nations. Nasser's government pursued an active neutrality, largely ignoring ideology and geopolitics and focusing upon Egypt's particular needs. Egyptian decisions to recognize Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China and to purchase armaments from Czechoslovakia in late 1955 were thus not moves to curry favor with the Soviets nor were they intended to anger the NATO powers, but they were taken as such by officials in the United States and Great Britain.⁵⁰

Articulating American indignation at Egypt's dealings with Communist powers, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles announced, on 19 July 1956, the withdrawal of American financial support for one of Nasser's most ambitious infrastructure improvements: The Aswan High Dam. The dam, intended to end the poverty of the Nile valley, was to be funded jointly by loans from the United States and Great Britain.

⁴⁹ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, "Nasser and the Struggle for Independence," in William R. Louis and Roger Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 33-34.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the Czech arms deal was made because Nasser's stipulations of training for Egyptians outside Egypt (to minimize the number of Warsaw Pact advisors), simultaneous delivery of five years' spare parts and ammunition with each weapons system (to prevent a later cutoff of supplies as political leverage for Moscow), and assistance in the establishment of munitions factories inside Egypt, were conditions Western arms dealers had been unwilling or unable to meet. See Erskine B. Childers, *The Road to Suez* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1962), 137-38.

However, the British ambassador in Cairo had extremely short notice of this unilaterally American policy decision--about one hour--while Eden's government received no warning at all.⁵¹

Without US funding, Britain could not hope to underwrite the dam. Accordingly, British investors explored alternatives, including the possibility of an Anglo-Franco-German financial consortium. Although the British Board of Trade had already drawn up a plan to put this new financing into effect, Eden's own dislike for Egypt's actions resulted in the squelching of the Board of Trade's project--it was never even raised before the Cabinet--and Britain's withdrawal of aid on 20 July.⁵²

Smarting from this seemingly punitive snub, Nasser responded with the 26 July 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal, and announced that Canal revenues would henceforth be used to finance the dam. Accordingly, Nasser appointed an Egyptian Suez Canal Authority to administer the waterway, and prepared for the likely necessity of replacing departing foreign canal workers (ship pilots, maintenance workers, and the like).⁵³ The possibility of Egyptian action against the Suez Canal (and, by association, the Canal Company) had apparently not occurred to Eden, and his feelings toward Nasser precluded any kind of indulgent attitude toward Egypt.⁵⁴ In the 27 July speech announcing

⁵¹ Robert Blake, *The Decline of Power: 1915-1964* (London: Granada, 1985), 363-4.

⁵² Richard Lamb, *Failure of the Eden Government*, 197.

⁵³ Vatikiotis, *History of Modern Egypt*, 392; Amin Hewedy, "Nasser and the Crisis of 1956" in Louis and Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, 166. Nasser also made use of Greek pilots, who, because of Greece's dispute with Britain over Cyprus, were unswayed by Anglo-French declarations; see Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 182.

⁵⁴ Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, 407.

the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, Nasser underscored the legality of his move by agreeing to pay the Canal's bondholders their entitled compensation under the terms of the Constantinople Treaty of 1888, and later by invoking earlier treaties and Egypt's willingness to abide by these.⁵⁵ Still, the blow to British prestige was enormous, and Eden felt pressure to act lest the British public accuse him of appeasement.

However, the remedy to the situation was not to be found in an immediate military operation against Nasser. For one, the British military was unready for any operation, as related by the Chiefs of Staff to a displeased Eden in a report of 1 August 1956, although steps were taken to begin mobilizing forces that might be necessary for an action against Egypt.⁵⁶ Likewise, a violent response to a perfectly legal nationalization would bring the weight of world opinion crashing about Britain, regardless of the Western consensus that, in the words of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, "Nasser must be made to disgorge what he is attempting to swallow."⁵⁷ The only way force could be justified was if all peaceful options had been exhausted and Nasser continued to provoke Europe.

⁵⁵ Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Egypt. *White Paper on the Nationalisation of the Suez Maritime Canal Company* (Cairo: Government Press, 1956), 4; 7ff.

⁵⁶ Lamb, *Failure of the Eden Government*, 199-200. These steps included the removal of commando and airborne units from police duty on Cyprus, for retraining at Malta; the call-up of 20,000 reservists; and the relief of 10 Armoured Division in Libya to allow its use in Egypt. A plan was drawn up, called Musketeer, and modified for the operations. For the greatest detail, see Kyle, *Suez*, 167-174 *passim*.

⁵⁷ Eden, *Full Circle*, 487. Dulles was also concerned about any settlement that would invite comparisons to US control over the Panama Canal; see Russell Braddon, *Suez: Splitting of a Nation* (London: St. James Place, 1973), 54. The legality of the move was later debated, not in itself but by its sudden execution "which, of course, made the whole act, also, internationally illegal." See Joseph A. Obieta, *The International Status of the Suez Canal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 106.

Peaceful options did not exclude those that served British interests, or those that might serve to fill time until a military option could be readied.⁵⁸ British rhetoric against Egypt was couched in the terms of international concern, that an international body should administer the Canal and not Egypt alone, although care was taken to ensure that this body would not be the United Nations.⁵⁹ After some consultation between the United States, Great Britain, and France, British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, and Dulles agreed on a conference in London, set for 16 August 1956, that would bring together 24 nations in an effort to find an international solution to the Suez problem, orchestrated in such a way as to force Nasser to accept its recommendations, or find himself isolated diplomatically.⁶⁰ Perhaps, then, Egypt's declination of the invitation was somewhat heartening for the Prime Minister, although it was predicated on Eden's own anti-Nasser address of 8 August 1956 and composed with

⁵⁸ Kyle, *Suez*, 160.

⁵⁹ If taken to the United Nations, the Soviets might veto any action against the Canal, and Britain's stance might be further compromised by the powerful bloc of emergent nations that might back Nasser, regardless of their interests vis-à-vis the Canal.

⁶⁰ The conference based its legitimacy upon the earlier Suez Canal conference of 1888. Invited were the eight signatories from that original agreement, including the Soviet Union (as the successor to Russia); the eight countries whose citizens owned the most tonnage using the Canal; and eight whose international trade indicated a special dependency on the Canal. Political maneuvering was necessary to justify the exclusion of certain states and the invitation of others. Two governments, Greece and Egypt, declined to participate; Israel was not invited. As to the location of the Conference in London, this was the one place Dulles wished it would *not* be held, but Eden insisted. Kyle, *Suez*, 162-3;

no doubt as to Egypt's suspicion of Britain's intention to control the direction of the proceedings.⁶¹

Eden had further cause to be optimistic, owing to the lauding of the Conference by the House of Commons. Eden supported Britain's commitment to internationalizing the Canal with the statement that some "precautionary measures" had been taken to prepare the military, should Nasser prove intractable. (Labour) Opposition leader Hugh Gaitskell echoed this with even more fiery rhetoric, invoking the specter of Hitler in Nasser's speeches. Perhaps more importantly, Gaitskell played heavily upon the role of prestige in standing up to the Egyptian leader, concluding that if Britain and her allies had simply bowed before Egypt's will, Nasser's ambition would know no bounds--a repeat of the disaster at Munich.⁶² To this end, the preparation of a military alternative met with unanimous approval, even if the analogy did not.⁶³

Likewise, military readiness was seen as a necessary component of protecting British prestige and leadership in the Middle East, and reassuring nervous clients that the power to force a settlement through arms was available. Nuri es-Said, Premier of Iraq, relied on British support for his position and as such did not openly back Nasser. Other clients behaved similarly; perhaps they realized what Evelyn Shuckburgh, recently released

⁶¹ The entire text of Nasser's refusal can be found in Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 140-42. The wording of Nasser's telegram plainly accuses Eden's government of discriminatory practices.

⁶² For a discussion of how Hitler came to be invoked, see Aster, *Anthony Eden*, 147.

⁶³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), House of Commons, 5th ser., vol. 557 (1956), cols. 1602-1721, as evaluated in Kyle, *Suez*, 164-5. See also Braddon, *Suez: Splitting of a Nation*, 56-57, for some discussion of the difficulties of the Hitler analogy.

(20 June 1956) from the Foreign Office as Under-Secretary for Middle Eastern Affairs, noted:

Michael Rose [Ambassador to the Congo] tells us that the Government are taking the Suez business very seriously, and he hints that military measures against Egypt are being prepared. If so, it is good news. The time has come when we must show strength, and Nasser should be overthrown. I only hope we can do it. Michael says the other Arabs (Iraqis and even King Saud) are not backing Nasser. But they will if he gets away with it.⁶⁴

The difficulty apparent was, of course, how to keep Nasser from getting away with it. The obvious solution was to wrest control from Nasser under the guise of an international consortium, however unlikely it was that Nasser would believe in its impartiality.

President Nasser, of course, did not believe in the Conference's impartiality, despite the inclusion of voices (including India's) that were sure to be pro-Egyptian. Dulles and Eisenhower had hoped to convince the Egyptians of the necessity of attending by putting pressure on other powers, particularly the USSR, to "deliver" them, but the Soviets made no effort to persuade Nasser.⁶⁵ The only course of action open to Egypt, in Nasser's mind, was to protest the meeting--held without Egypt and in the capital of the prime interested party, Great Britain--and this he pursued vigorously.⁶⁶

When twenty-two of the twenty-four original invitees met in London on 16 August 1956, two proposals were put before the assembled delegates, one from India and one

⁶⁴ Evelyn Shuckburgh, personal diary, 30 July 1956. Reprinted in Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1986), 360.

⁶⁵ Kyle, *Suez*, 182.

⁶⁶ Braddon, *Suez: Splitting of a Nation*, 62.

from the United States. Selwyn Lloyd had taken the chair, despite suggestions from Dulles that someone less “committed” do so, and grumbling from the Soviets and Indians that this allowed the British an undue amount of influence.⁶⁷ India’s proposal, articulated by Krishna Menon on 20 August, called for a revision of the 1888 agreement, with a committee of user interests what would be adjoined to the Egyptian Canal Corporation, and the transmission of the Corporation’s annual reports to the United Nations.⁶⁸ The American proposal, tabled by Dulles, was closer to the Anglo-French position; that a Convention would be negotiated with Egypt, a Suez Canal Board established with a permanent Egyptian seat, the Canal insulated from international politics, and profits to be paid only to Egypt.⁶⁹ The Soviets, however, clearly defended Egyptian sovereignty, believing that Egypt could not “merely be one of the parties administering her own property.” To this end, they proposed a Preparatory Commission to clear the ground for an assembly of all user nations that would decide the future of the Canal.⁷⁰ In the end, Dulles’s proposal was approved, with only four of the attendees (India, Sri Lanka,

⁶⁷ Keith Kyle believes that Lloyd’s adamance on retaining the chair was based upon his having “a military timetable in mind;” see Kyle, *Suez*, 193; Heikal, *Cutting the Lion’s Tail*, 147.

⁶⁸ Sarvepalli Gopal, “India, the Crisis, and the Non-Aligned Nations,” in Louis and Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, 179-80. Krishna Menon’s proposal satisfied no one, the Egyptians believing it too accomodating to the West, and the British and French believing it too favorable to Nasser.

⁶⁹ Kyle, *Suez*, 194-95. Dulles’s speech had the opposite effect of Krishna Menon’s; its lucid delivery created in the British and French the assumption that the “real” American position was identical to their own, as Dulles had made the statement that “Egyptian sovereignty is and always has been qualified by the treaty of 1888 which makes of the Canal an international--not an Egyptian--waterway.”

⁷⁰ Kyle, *Suez*, 195.

Indonesia, and the USSR) opposing the plan. What remained was to convey the Conference's conclusions to Nasser.

The mission, headed by Prime Minister Robert Menzies of Australia (despite British hopes that Dulles would head it himself), consisted of delegates from five of the eighteen consenting nations.⁷¹ This small deputation arrived in 2 September and met with Nasser on 3 September, despite fears that Nasser would rebuff them entirely. Nasser made it clear, on the morning of 3 September, that he felt Menzies was dictating terms to be either accepted or rejected under the threat of continuing Anglo-French military action.⁷² Mohammed Heikal, however, recalls that Nasser came to believe that Dulles was the foe he was truly up against:

Nasser learned that after Monday's evening session Menzies had been driven round to the American embassy, and stayed there an hour. "He must have been going to get his orders," Nasser commented. This confirmed him in the conviction that the resolution brought by the mission was inspired by Dulles, that Eden would have to do what Dulles wanted, and that therefore the real political duel was between Egypt and Dulles, with Dulles determined to get the canal internationalised. "He wants to get by diplomatic means," Nasser said, "what Eden hasn't been able to get by military means."⁷³

Thus, Nasser appears to have perceived Eden's inability to go ahead without the United States' assent fairly early on. On 5 September 1956, Eisenhower made a public statement

⁷¹ For British efforts to force the US into the Anglo-French camp by sending Dulles, see Kyle, *Suez*, 197; the five nations in question were Australia, Ethiopia, Iran, Sweden, and the United States.

⁷² Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 148-49.

⁷³ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 150.

repudiating the use of force, which took a significant bite out of Menzies' threatening gesticulations.⁷⁴ Without the clearance to negotiate with Nasser, and the solidarity of the mission crumbling underneath him as the other delegates took exception to the threat of force if the Conference's recommendations were not accepted, the Menzies mission ended on 6 September and Menzies himself returned to London for debriefing.

Nasser had handled Menzies carefully, so as not to give the impression that he would concede Egypt's sovereignty in any way. Menzies, characterized as the "elder statesman of Empire," had reacted belligerently and angrily to calm assertions of Egypt's interest and right in controlling the Canal before the members of the Mission, only to be undercut by Eisenhower's declaration and, subsequently, by the other delegates' unwillingness to support his rhetoric. And if the Menzies Mission was intended to buy Eden's government time to prepare a military alternative, Nasser already had realized that the delay between his action and any British reaction was beneficial as international sentiment, even that in Britain, would increasingly side with Egypt.⁷⁵

With Menzies firmly snubbed in Cairo and the London Conference's recommendations rejected by Nasser, the proper course of action was far from clear. The European pilots had left Egypt on 15 September 1956 in violation of the Egyptian law that nationalized the Canal Company, an event many European observers had assumed would

⁷⁴ Blake, *The Decline of Power*, 360.

⁷⁵ There is evidence that Eden took this possibility seriously, especially following the failure of the Menzies mission, when he and Lloyd exerted tremendous pressure in the propagandization of Britain; criticism was already being levelled at the government by this time. See Childers, *The Road to Suez*, 213-14; Tony Shaw, *Eden, Suez, and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion During the Suez Crisis* (London: Tauris, 1996), 62-63.

close the Canal; this proved not to be the case.⁷⁶ In the weeks following Menzies' return, the comparison of Nasser to Hitler was again made, this time in order to ensure that the United States could see Nasser as Eden saw Nasser:

You suggest that this [the use of force] is where we diverge. If that is so I think that the divergence springs from a difference in our assessment of Nasser's plans and intentions. May I set out our view of the position. In the 1930's Hitler established his position by a series of carefully planned movements. These began with the occupation of the Rheinland and were followed by successive acts of aggression against Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the West. His actions were tolerated and excused by the majority of the population of Western Europe. It was argued either that Hitler had committed no act of aggression against anyone or that he was entitled to do what he liked in his own territory or that it was impossible to prove that he had any ulterior designs or that the covenant of the League of Nations did not entitle us to use force and that it would be wiser to wait until he did commit an act of aggression.⁷⁷

Eisenhower's response to this assertion was that he did not differ as to Nasser's "intentions and purposes," but that Eden overestimated Nasser's importance and that a victory could be achieved without injudicious use of force before all possible avenues of peaceful settlement had been exhausted.⁷⁸

Eisenhower's Secretary of State had an idea for implementing the London Conference recommendations in spite of Nasser's refusal, a users' association that would collect canal tolls and hold them pending a settlement--a way of striking at Nasser's bottom line without using force. To engineer this association, Eden orchestrated a second

⁷⁶ Kyle, *Suez*, 249-52; Eden, *Full Circle*, 522-23.

⁷⁷ Childers, *The Road to Suez*, 213-14; Kyle, *Suez*, 224-25; Eden to Eisenhower, 6 September 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XVI, 401.

⁷⁸ Eisenhower to Eden, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XVI, 435-37.

London Conference from 19-21 September, and invited the eighteen nations favorable to the first international proposal. The association, called initially CASU (Co-operative Association of Suez Canal Users) and later SCUA (Suez Canal Users' Association), was envisaged as a sort of Canal-Authority-in-exile, into which dues could be paid and through which financial control of the Canal could be wrested from Nasser.⁷⁹ However, Dulles shattered any pretensions to control the organization may have entertained with the 13 September comment that "we do not intend to shoot our way through."⁸⁰ For the third time in as many months, British efforts to regain control of the Canal, albeit by indirect means, were rendered impotent by the inability to assure American backing for the possible use of force. Nasser had no reason to accept SCUA if legality was on his side, and superior force ruled out as a means of bending Egypt to accept international control.

Dulles hoped to use the United Nations as just such a tool. Earlier in the crisis, the UN had not been invoked to keep true internationalization from occurring; but now, faced with the failure of all international forums the British and French hoped to control, the two powers rushed to the United Nations Security Council with a grievance.⁸¹ The debate, which focused on the nature of the Canal's nationalization, executed without notice or negotiation, and an Anglo-French denial of hostile intent in their continued military preparations, did not convince Mahmoud Fawzi, Egyptian Foreign Minister, that the British and the French were not still working to impose their own order upon Egypt.

⁷⁹ Childers, *The Road to Suez*, 222-23; Kyle, *Suez*, 224-25.

⁸⁰ Blake, *The Decline of Power*, 372-73.

⁸¹ Keith Kyle cites the reasons for taking it to the UN as a desire to pre-empt a Soviet case against Britain and France for continued browbeating with international organizations and the desire to stop appearing to their constituencies as indecisive. See Kyle, *Suez*, 257.

Selwyn Lloyd, in particular, was careful to remain in line with Christian Pineau, both in the Security Council and in later, secret discussions between Lloyd, Pineau, Fawzi, and UN Secretary-General Dag Hammerskjöld.⁸²

Fawzi was fairly receptive, however, to the incorporation of a modified SCUA in a final settlement of the Canal. However, his questions and Lloyd's answers in the private conversations were taken in various ways; the British Government's Egypt committee saw Fawzi's apparent willingness to accept canal dues payment through SCUA for Association-member ships as the granting of a sanction tool for the future, should Egypt prove intractable. Pineau, apparently missing significant portions of the conversation because of an imperfect grasp of English and the absence of an interpreter, was worried that Fawzi's agreeable nature was drawing Lloyd away from France. Lloyd became uncertain that Pineau desired a peaceful solution. Fawzi noted that Pineau appeared to be steering Lloyd away from a compromise. Hammerskjöld feared for Fawzi's ability to commit the Egyptian Government to anything agreed upon.⁸³

Any progress toward a compromise, however, was shattered with Pineau's reversion to demanding an acceptance of the original London Conference's recommendations. The Anglo-French resolution, published on 13 October, claims that the "proposals of the Eighteen Powers [SCUA] correspond to the requirements set out above [vis-à-vis insulating the Canal's operation from politics] and are suitably designed to bring about a settlement of the Suez Canal Question by peaceful means in conformity with justice; . . . *Notes* that the Egyptian Government . . . has not yet formulated specifically

⁸² Kyle, *Suez*, 281

⁸³ Kyle, *Suez*, 282-86.

precise proposals to meet the requirements set out above,” and invited Egypt to discuss proposals on the grounds, of course, that SCUA had legitimacy--something Fawzi was unwilling to concede.⁸⁴ The resolution was put to the Security Council in two parts, the first concerning the principles for a settlement, and the second about specifics (including SCUA and the London Conference recommendations). In this situation, a Soviet veto of the second part was assured, although the first was approved unanimously. The 9-2 vote support of the second portion was seen as a moral approval of the Anglo-French position, and of SCUA as envisioned by them. What remained was a way to bring about a favorable settlement.

Mediation efforts were frustrated after the UN debates. Hammerskjöld, for his part, attempted to correspond with all three parties, with an end to having a conference in Geneva at the end of October. The British and French demanded a complete and whole Egyptian proposal based on the principles of settlement (the first part of the 13 October resolution) and agreeable to the SCUA nations. Fawzi found this suggestion intolerable and refused to predicate an Egyptian plan upon the existence of SCUA.

The apparent impasse favorably inclined Eden's opinion toward a Franco-Israeli plan to justify an invasion of the Canal Zone, first revealed to the Prime Minister on 14 October 1956.⁸⁵ Eden had, from the beginning, considered ways of eliminating Nasser

⁸⁴ “Draft Resolution submitted by Great Britain and France to the Security Council, 13 October 1956,” reprinted in D. C. Watt, ed., *Documents on the Suez Crisis* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957), 76; Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 169; Kyle, *Suez*, 288-89.

⁸⁵ W. Scott Lucas, “Redefining the Suez ‘Collusion’,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 26 no. 1 (1990), 88. The question of using Israel had been raised as early as 2 August, as a possible method of enticing Egyptian armor away from British forces that might invade from Libya, by Macmillan, and again in late September when the French were in contact with the

altogether, for he was certain that Nasser constituted a danger to the whole Middle East, as a sort of Arab imperialist; stopping him with the first seizure, the Suez Canal, would result in his toppling.⁸⁶ With so much time having passed between the nationalization and postulated military action, however, a “detonator” was needed for an Anglo-French invasion of the Canal Zone, something Israel could provide.

The idea, brought up in conversations at Sèvres between 19 and 22 October 1956, was for Israel to invade the Sinai Peninsula as a reprisal for unspecified terrorist acts, at which point the British and French would go through diplomatic motions and end up occupying the Canal Zone. Invading Egypt proper had been discarded--without limiting the offensive to the canal, justifying the invasion as a separation of the combatants would be impossible. To the end of salving Israeli fears about leaving Israel open to attack, the French government provided millions of dollars in war material, and likewise agreed to immobilize the Egyptian air force with airstrikes in the opening hours of their intercession. The French pushed for ever-shorter timetables, both to mollify public opinion and to placate Israeli fears about Egyptian reprisals.⁸⁷

The French and Israelis were quite prepared for the plan; they only needed the British to go along with it. This was more difficult, as there was some suspicion that high-

Israelis, although Eden opted out at that point; see Kyle, *Suez*, 174; W. Scott Lucas, *Britain and Suez: The Lion's Last Roar* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 66-67.

⁸⁶ Eden discusses extensively the Hitlerite pretensions of Nasser, and his equation of the two, in his memoirs. Eden, *Full Circle*, 289; 480-81.

⁸⁷ Extensive discussions at Sèvres about the “aggressor” role in the operation usually hinge on British unwillingness to accept anything but the most honorable mantle. See Kyle, *Suez*, 317-20.

ranking members of Eden's cabinet, especially Lloyd, were looking for compromises and were not receptive to the use of force, for fear that the danger to British citizens and assets would be even greater than that stemming from a Nasser victory.⁸⁸ The worry about world opinion became less when political unrest in Hungary and the presidential election in the United States promised to mask Anglo-Franco-Israeli actions from the disapproving eye of the Soviet Union and possible negative reactions from the United States.⁸⁹

Eden could agree to all of this, provided there was a "real act of war" that provided a clear threat to the canal and that the Anglo-French invasion appeared clearly altruistic, in the interests of separating the combatants.⁹⁰ The landings could be justified in their rapidity (36 hours after the Israeli attack) because they were part of the "same plan that had been intended to deal with Nasser's seizure of the Canal" and as such it "fitted equally well with our new objective."⁹¹ The Israelis were to begin in the evening of 29 October, and the British and French would deliver ultimatums to Israel and Egypt the following morning, destroying Egypt's air force on the ground early in the morning of 31 October, after Nasser's certain rejection of the ultimatum's terms, and following this with

⁸⁸ Kyle, *Suez*, 317; Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956: A Personal Account* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1978), 260.

⁸⁹ Later events in Jordan provided further fuel for Eden's desire to be rid of Nasser; on 22 October, the incoming Prime Minister, Suleiman Nabulsi, made open movements towards Egypt and Syria and denounced foreign and imperial influence. Kyle, *Suez*, 324

⁹⁰ Mordechai Bar-On, "David Ben-Gurion and the Sèvres Collusion," in Louis and Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, 156.

⁹¹ This was Eden's justification in his memoirs; he denied the collusion entirely. Eden, *Full Circle*, 584.

landings in the Canal Zone.⁹² The agreement on these points was embodied in the Protocol of Sèvres, signed on 24 October. The three governments were now linked in the course of intervention and collusion.

The justification for Israel's mobilization and attack on 29 October 1956 turned out to be a new Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian military alliance, arising from a pro-Nasserist victory in the Jordanian elections held earlier in October. The Protocol of Sèvres deactivated a standing Anglo-Jordanian military agreement, so the new alliance was not a considerable threat--but it provided some semblance of cause for the pre-emptive Israeli action.⁹³ Nasser could believe Israel was acting alone at first, finding no reason that Israel would align itself with those colonial powers responsible for backing up the largely-Arab Baghdad Pact.⁹⁴

The Israelis advanced quickly, and without air support--so quickly that the Egyptians were at a loss to determine Israel's objectives. Nasser had expected that any full-scale war would involve an early strike against Egypt's airfields (as Israel would carry out with devastating efficiency in 1967) and move with all possible haste to secure the western bank of the Canal. However, the Israelis were forbidden by the Protocol of Sèvres from taking such action. They awaited the Anglo-French end of the equation, and Israeli hesitation added to the possibility of collusion in the eyes of Eden's opponents.

⁹² Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion objected to the term "ultimatum." in the actual document, the word used is "appeal." The "appeal's" terms applied almost exclusively to Egypt, and was designed to be unacceptable to Nasser's government by forcing him to allow occupation troops in the Canal Zone. See Kyle, *Suez*, 329, and Watt, ed., *Documents*, 86.

⁹³ Kyle, *Suez*, 347.

⁹⁴ Hewedy, "Nasser and the Crisis of 1956," 169.

The ultimatums, delivered on 30 October, set tempers flaring around the world. It appeared as though the only condition the Israelis had to fulfill was to stop fighting and withdraw ten miles from the Canal Zone; the Egyptians were given punishing demands. The United Nations met to discuss the situation in Suez, with Britain and France vetoing any resolution for a cease-fire. In the House of Commons, Opposition Leader Hugh Gaitskell denounced the ultimatums angrily, and accused Eden's government of abandoning the traditional principles governing British foreign policy since the Second World War and failing to consult the Commonwealth members. All the while, Gaitskell said, Britain was acting against the interests of peace by obstructing the United Nations, and pursuing policies smacking of collusion.⁹⁵

When, on 31 October, the British and French began bombing military targets in the vicinity of Suez, matters passed to the United Nations. The British and French, as permanent members of the Security Council, vetoed resolutions for an immediate cease-fire, and invoking the "uniting for peace" resolution, the matter was taken up in the General Assembly. Resolutions passed on 4 November establishing a United Nations force and imposing a ban on moving any further forces into the Suez region fell on British, French and Israeli disapproval. Commonwealth and Arab allies alike abandoned Britain, and only Australia and New Zealand toed the British line. In spite of these signs and the movement of the US Sixth Fleet into the eastern Mediterranean, Britain and France went ahead with landings in defiance of United Nations resolutions.

Against the advice of his military leaders, Nasser believed the British and French would land at Port Said, and organized a psychological defense accordingly. The aim was

⁹⁵ Kyle, *Suez*, 377; Braddon, *Suez: Splitting of a Nation*, 92.

to resist and buy time while underlining the cost for what was being touted as an Anglo-French “police action.” When paratroops descended upon Port Said in the morning of 5 November, they encountered a spirited Egyptian defense. Landings by marines the following day encountered only light resistance; however, Nasser had succeeded in sinking ships in the Canal, thus denying the British and French any chance of repeating General Wolseley’s feat of 1882 and seizing the entire canal in one fell swoop. With this, Nasser was able to convert his forces’ rout into a “strategic retreat” before the imperial powers. With the prospect for quick victory gone, Eden faced growing discontent in Britain and abroad, most notably in his own party; Hugh Gaitskell certainly did not help matters by encouraging a Conservative revolt against the Prime Minister in a BBC radio address on 4 November.⁹⁶

American and Soviet disapproval of Anglo-French activities was critically important. The Soviets had stepped-up their repression in Hungary, and were quieter on the issue of Suez once they had been shown to disregard UN rulings against their Hungarian policy. Eden complained to Eisenhower that “no voice” was being raised in the UN to support intervention in Hungary “at the very moment we are being pilloried as aggressors.”⁹⁷ However, the Soviets still hinted at military support for Egypt and the Arab countries, and this was a serious consideration, despite suggestions that it was merely a

⁹⁶ Gaitskell broadcast on behalf of the Opposition, 4 November 1956, printed in Philip M. Williams, ed., *The Diaries of Hugh Gaitskell 1945-1956* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), 619-22

⁹⁷ Eden to Eisenhower, 5 November 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XVI, 984-86.

ruse to keep attention away from Hungary.⁹⁸ The United States could not condone, or even passively accept, aggression in Suez when it was denouncing a similar episode in Eastern Europe.⁹⁹ The successful raising of a UN force to oversee a cease-fire, oil embargoes from the United Nations, and the ever-present specter of Soviet intervention balanced against the continuation of hostilities.¹⁰⁰ When Harold Macmillan reported that Britain's financial reserves were depleting rapidly and monetary aid from the United States was not forthcoming, in fact ruled out because of a US threat to veto an international loan through the United Nations, the decision was made to cease-fire on 7 November 1956. The French followed suit, unable to continue in isolation.

While hostilities had ceased, the issue of dislodging the British and French military presence was a difficult one. UNEF troops had been pouring into the Canal Zone since the middle of November. However, Lloyd told Hammerskjöld that the British and French troops were the only force strong enough to give Nasser pause, that the UNEF would need to be larger to take its place.¹⁰¹ Even the arrival of a force of acceptable size would not force the occupying powers to leave, as Britain and France still hoped to use the

⁹⁸ Bohlen to Dulles, 5 November 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XVI, 995-96. For the official US opinion that Soviet intervention was unlikely, see Report by the Joint Middle East Planning Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 3 November 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XVI, 968-72.

⁹⁹ See Lucas, *Britain and Suez*, 97; W. Scott Lucas, *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US, and the Suez Crisis* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 276, 281-82; and Memorandum of Discussion at the 303d Meeting of the National Security Council, 8 November 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, XVI, 1070-1086 esp. 1081-85.

¹⁰⁰ Kyle, *Suez*, 465. On Soviet intervention, the British view was more uncertain than the American; see Allied Forces Headquarters, Cyprus, to Air Ministry, London, 6 November 1956, printed in Lucas, *Britain and Suez*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Kyle, *Suez*, 494.

territory they controlled as a bargaining chip. This was undermined by entirely non-military factors.

Eisenhower, with his re-election in hand, took the reins of subsequent events. Britain was in dire need of monetary relief, as the pound was close to collapse; Eisenhower had only to make American support for a loan from the International Monetary Fund contingent on the withdrawal of the troops to convince the British and French to quit Suez. Macmillan, once among the most vehement proponents of military intervention, was now converted to dovish in his efforts to get fiscal relief for Britain.¹⁰² Facing disaster at home, the Anglo-French expedition was withdrawn unconditionally by the end of December.

Subsequent efforts to exercise leverage, in the clearing of the canal, in negotiating for a settlement on how to administer the canal, and in effecting a British boycott of the waterway were frustrated by an Egypt using the expedition's failure as a pretense for further clearing European influence from its institutions. Nasser nationalized credit institutions, banks, and insurance companies on a massive scale in presidential decrees of 15 January 1957, and abrogated existing agreements with Britain on strategic matters and basing rights.¹⁰³ For Egypt, then, the result of the Suez crisis was unprecedented popularity and a position of recognized leadership for Nasser in the Arab world.

For Britain, the result was an end to its role as the pre-eminent power in the Middle East. Into the vacuum stepped the United States, in opposition to Soviet interests

¹⁰² Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990*, 289-90.

¹⁰³ Kirk J. Beattie, *Egypt During the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Society* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 116.

in the region. Eisenhower publicly declared on 5 January 1957, in what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, that the United States would serve as guarantor of the Arab states' freedom from Soviet designs.¹⁰⁴ Those nations, such as Iraq and Jordan, previously under the British aegis began to move into the American camp as British subsidies and entanglements were retracted. And just as Britain's star was in eclipse, so was Eden's. Under advice from doctors, and still under fire from the Suez debacle, he resigned as Prime Minister on 9 January 1957. He was succeeded not by his personal favorite, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of Commons R. A. Butler, but by his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Kyle, *Suez*, 526-28. Eisenhower's declaration made no mention of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and no commitment to limiting it.

¹⁰⁵ Macmillan is not believed to have had an active role in Eden's fall, the possibility that he hastened it along is raised in Lewis Johnman, "Defending the Pound: The Economics of the Suez Crisis, 1956," in Anthony Gorst, Lewis Johnman, and W. Scott Lucas, eds., *Post-war Britain, 1945-64: Themes and Perspectives* (London: Pinter, 1989), 171-179; and Nigel Ashton, "Macmillan and the Middle East," in Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee, eds., *Harold Macmillan and Britain's World Role* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 37.

PERSONALITIES AND INTERACTIONS

In a comparison of two similar events in world history, an investigator must first take stock of the historical actors. The first necessity is an exploration of the places where responsibility for decision-making supposedly lay, and this is best done individual by individual, office by office. The people in the crises of 1882 and 1956 were, of course, different, as were their interactions with one another--but the necessity is in understanding how different people in similar offices could have voted for intervention, and how the response of different Egyptians in nominally similar positions might have affected British resolve in the 1956 crisis where it could not have in 1882. The European personalities, including Americans, were important to show how intervention could have happened in both instances.

The first subjects of this analysis are the most prominent, the two Prime Ministers of Britain, William Ewart Gladstone and Anthony Eden. The two men were patently different in too many ways to be recounted here, except those that shed light on their handling of the crises. Gladstone's ministry in 1882 was not his first, nor his last; Eden's was both his first and his last, and lasted barely more than a year. Similarly significant, Gladstone was a Liberal and Eden a Conservative, affiliations that had powerful effects on the respective rhetorics surrounding intervention. Finally, their psychologies were vastly different, and their personal commitment to each crisis varied in strength.

Gladstone himself had a long-standing interest that affected the amount of time he could devote to Egyptian matters in 1882, that of Ireland. Gladstone had a commitment to settling unrest in Ireland in his first ministry by showing Irish leaders that London's Parliament could represent Irish interests and that any kind of home rule (separate Irish parliament) was unnecessary, through the passage of liberal laws that would remove the teeth of separatist Fenianism. When that failed, Gladstone spent much of his second Government's term of office (1880-1885) looking for a middle road that would grant the Irish faction in Parliament the home rule desired while maintaining its union with Britain.¹⁰⁶ This task, made more difficult by the inability to separate Fenian separatism from home rule meant to defeat it, meant that Gladstone had only limited time to acquaint himself with issues of unfamiliar places like Egypt; he had ministers and consuls to handle those problems.¹⁰⁷

That Gladstone relied upon these other voices, and was uninvolved with the day-by-day evolution of Egyptian policy, may help explain why the Liberal prime minister was eventually converted to intervention. The Prime Minister was also converted very late in the day, seeking any means short of direct military intervention as late as 9 July, as related in his own diaries and his correspondence with Foreign Minister Granville.¹⁰⁸ Gladstone

¹⁰⁶ H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1875-1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 184-85.

¹⁰⁷ See Alexander Schölch, "The 'Men on the Spot' and the British Occupation of Egypt in 1882," *Historical Journal* 19 no. 3 (1976), 781.

¹⁰⁸ See Ramm, ed., *Political Correspondence*, 1:387-90; H. C. G. Matthews, ed., *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 294-95, which shows the beginning of conversion in a 10 July 1882 note to Radical MP John Bright musing that a bombardment of Alexandria might "further the peace."

was averse to outright aggression, even when British officials in London, Alexandria and Cairo suggested that Urabi was a definite threat to the security of British interests and the Canal.¹⁰⁹ Only when the situation had deteriorated to the point where Urabi was considered intractable, after the Alexandria bombardment, did Gladstone resign himself to intervention.

Gladstone would thus accede to his ministers' recommendations only when the evidence of chaos was overwhelming. Despite the multiplicity of arguments on who was truly responsible for bringing Britain into the Egyptian imbroglio, it is clear that Gladstone was not. The observation has been made that "the stereotypes . . . of Gladstone's general ideas, e.g., self-determination dictating favour to the alleged national movement, of Gladstone's legalism indicating support for Turkey and her intervention as the legal ruler, and of his characteristic means of action by the European Concert. . . . proved useless in the [Egyptian] situation," and that it was Urabi and the Nationalist Party who were most expendable.¹¹⁰ While this observation helps to reconcile the events of 1881-82 with Gladstone's principles, it implies that he was given balanced information and made an

¹⁰⁹ Gladstone discounted any possibility that the Canal was in danger before the bombardment; see John S. Galbraith and Afaf Lufti al-Sayyid-Marsot, "The British Occupation of Egypt: Another View," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (1978), 472-73. He also discounted the idea of Urabi blocking the canal afterwards, but not the possibility of reprisals against British ships "which he might suppose to touch England alone." See Gladstone to Granville, 16 July 1882, from Ramm, ed., *Political Correspondence*, 1:397.

¹¹⁰ Agatha Ramm, "Granville," in Keith M. Wilson, ed., *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy from Crimean War to First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 96.

expert's decision to discard the Nationalists. In reality, his expertise on foreign affairs was limited and Ireland, considered a domestic issue, had primacy.¹¹¹

Anthony Eden, on the other hand, had built much of his career in the Foreign Office. Beginning as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1931 and ending as Neville Chamberlain's Foreign Minister in 1938, and again serving as Secretary of State for War and Foreign Minister for Churchill during his two tenures of office, Eden was well-qualified to handle Britain's negotiations with other governments himself. Likewise, Eden's semi-mythical status, which aided his popularity in post-war Britain, stemmed from that experience added to his 20 February 1938 resignation as Foreign Minister in protest of Chamberlain's appeasement of Mussolini and later denunciation of the infamous agreement at Munich.¹¹² Thus, Eden's reputation was built upon being a perceptive navigator for Britain's foreign policy. Evelyn Shuckburgh, Eden's private secretary during his second Foreign Ministry, made the astute observation that "the disaster of Suez in 1956 . . . prevents us seeing clearly Eden's achievements as Foreign Secretary."¹¹³

But it is possible that this familiarity with foreign affairs lent to his determination to exert supremacy over them, even when Britain's position in the world did not allow for this. He clearly took Nasser's actions personally, and set it as his own goal that Nasser had to be removed, regardless of the consequences to Egypt.¹¹⁴ While animosity alone could

¹¹¹ Galbraith and al-Sayyid-Marsot, "The British Occupation of Egypt," 478-79.

¹¹² Shaw, *Eden, Suez, and the Mass Media*, 25.

¹¹³ Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez*, 15.

¹¹⁴ Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, 34-5; Keith Kyle, "Britain and the Crisis, 1955-1956," in Louis and Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, 109; Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez*, 84-5; Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, 405-6.

not have justified action, it certainly changed the calculations and allowed for action to be justified more easily to parties uncertain about intervention. This animosity could have led to British involvement with the Sèvres pact, inexplicable because Eden seemed to know that collusion with Israel would destroy Britain's efforts to mend fences with Nasser, if not the entire British position in the Middle East.¹¹⁵

In any case, it is certain that personal animosity lent itself to and fed off the repeated and well-documented equation of Nasser and Hitler. Eden, who held a degree in Oriental languages from Christ Church, Oxford, felt himself an "orientalist" and this may also have added to his conviction that he could read Nasser.¹¹⁶ The belief that Nasser held imperial ambitions, his apparent willingness to work with such unsavory characters as the Soviets, and the conversion of Nasser's own *Philosophy of the Revolution* into a new *Mein Kampf* all appeared to bend to the characterization of Nasser as a ruthless autocrat and of Eden as the Conservative Prime Minister with a second chance to put things right. Under such pressure, Eden may have been unable, rather than unwilling, to accept Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal--his own personal prestige and that of his country was at stake. Thus Eden became one of the the foremost warmongers in Government, with the largest stake, public and private, in the humiliation and destruction of Nasser.

With this dichotomy in the involvement and role of the two Prime Ministers, it is perhaps ironic how similar their Foreign Ministers, George Leveson Gower (Lord

¹¹⁵ Jacques Georges-Picot, *The Real Suez Crisis: The End of a Great Nineteenth Century Work* trans. W. G. Rogers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 183-84.

¹¹⁶ Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, 13.

Granville) in 1882 and Selwyn Lloyd in 1956, were in outlook. Granville was an aged, even shadowy figure, with much the same passivity as Gladstone, and far more interested in diplomacy with the Concert of Europe over what form occupation might take than negotiating with ragtag Egyptian nationalists. Lloyd was more heavily invested in Eden's Egypt policy but did not share his master's hawkish outlook even after plans had reached an advanced stage, and Eden's own persuasive skills played a part in swaying his Foreign Minister.¹¹⁷ The two men's own motivations and effects upon the crises are hard to divine.

Granville spent most of the 1881-82 period exchanging letters with various heads of state, from Constantinople and Paris to Berlin, trying to set up some kind of international conference between the European Powers for the settling of questions related to Egypt.¹¹⁸ This conference, which met on 25 June 1882 in Constantinople, was of no import, for it failed to settle any questions in a manner that affected the process of events in Egypt.¹¹⁹ Granville acted as an intermediary, and showed very little of his own initiative in the Egyptian matter, carrying out Gladstone's directives as efficiently as possible.

Lloyd similarly facilitated international conferences and worked towards common ground; he believed the Egyptians were reasonable and acted on that assumption until Eden informed him of changed plans. This may be, in part, because Lloyd had only held the Foreign Ministry since December 1955 and thus would have felt junior in experience

¹¹⁷ D. R. Thorpe, *Selwyn Lloyd* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1989), 231-32.

¹¹⁸ Fitzmaurice, *Granville*, 2:261-63.

¹¹⁹ Ramm, "Granville," 96.

to Eden, especially with regards to Egypt.¹²⁰ Lloyd had been shuffled from the junior post of Foreign Secretary to the senior position, and in retrospect did express certain misgivings about rising to such a senior Cabinet position so quickly.¹²¹ The conciliatory mood of understanding evidenced in Lloyd's visits to Cairo and personal discussions about Egypt vanished in hindsight, moving to conform with Eden's vision of Nasser as a second Hitler.¹²²

Perhaps it is most accurate to describe the activities of the Foreign Ministers as inconsequential to the outcome of the crises. While Lloyd and Granville were responsible and capable Foreign Ministers, they either could not or did not exert any control over Egyptian policy, and certainly exerted none over their respective Prime Ministers. While the reasons for their inaction may differ, the fact does not. However, in both crises, hawks descended upon Government and pushed for intervention both in 1882 and 1956.

In 1882, the warmongering is generally placed on the two men who headed Britain's operations in Egypt under the auspices of the Dual Control, Edward Malet and Auckland Colvin. There is a general acceptance that the one initially thought that Urabi was a threat, convinced the other, and then both convinced the Foreign Office that intervention was necessary.¹²³ As Malet's dispatches appear most frequently in official

¹²⁰ The Anglo-Egyptian Friendship Treaty of 1936 was drafted by Eden, who was on amicable terms with the dynasty of the deposed King Farouk.

¹²¹ Lloyd, *Suez 1956*, 33.

¹²² Lloyd, *Suez 1956*, 33-35.

¹²³ The order is in doubt; for opposing views, see Schölch, "The 'Men on the Spot'," 773-785; and Galbraith and al-Sayyid-Marsot, "The British Occupation of Egypt," 471-488. All three authors agree that it was Malet and Colvin who tainted British opinion towards intervention.

documentation, it is likely that his conversion to an anti-Urabi stance was the most important. With pessimism in place in the Foreign Office, events such as the massacre at Alexandria and the town's destruction by fire following Admiral Seymour's bombardment would be filtered through a lens of Urabist culpability.¹²⁴

In 1956, Eden was the prime mover, but was aided by Harold Macmillan, his Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the leading hawk in the Cabinet. Significantly, Macmillan had headed the Foreign Office before the "shuffle" that brought Selwyn Lloyd to the post, and thus had a good deal of rapport with and understanding of Eden, but was also quite independent.¹²⁵ Macmillan's own role is hard to divine, but it appears his was a win/win situation. He could stay on the inside, playing to Eden's desire to act, and if British action proved decisive, he could reap the political benefits. On the other hand, if Eden's course proved disastrous, Eden alone could take the blame--and Lloyd, his foreign secretary, by association¹²⁶. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Macmillan's primary responsibility was the value of sterling, which fell as the mobilized reserves consumed valuable funds--something he would invoke to push Eden along, hopefully with the end of

¹²⁴ See M. E. Chamberlain, "The Alexandria Massacre of 11 June 1882 and the British Occupation of Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1977), 14-39. Chamberlain places the likely blame for the riot upon Tawfiq, precisely because he knew a riot would immediately discredit Urabi.

¹²⁵ Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan* vol 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 404.

¹²⁶ Macmillan had thinly-veiled contempt for Lloyd, whom he proceeded to discredit as a voice of reason after the Sèvres pact was concluded. See Horne, *Macmillan* vol 1, 441-42. Later, upon becoming Prime Minister, Macmillan would need to keep Lloyd as foreign minister to preserve confidence in his government. See Lamb, *Failure of the Eden Government*, 292-93.

destroying Nasser.¹²⁷ Macmillan was careful to warn, however, that a military operation would cause a run on sterling, and that it was preferable only to “perishing by degrees,” in Eden’s words.¹²⁸

The French ministers, de Freycinet, Gambetta, Mollet, and Pineau, were important not because of any specific policy of their own. Rather, they have been accused of dragging Britain into Egypt and leaving them to resolve the matter (1882) or enticing Eden into the unholy alliance at Sèvres (1956). Ministry changes in France during the 1882 crisis created a maddeningly vacillating situation for Gladstone to accommodate, and Léon Gambetta’s inflammatory Joint Note of January 1882 was irreversible once delivered, if he wished to keep his ministry.¹²⁹ Similarly, once Eden had publicly launched personal attacks on Nasser, the alternative to destroying Nasser was to lose credibility himself, and this must have enhanced his reception of the Franco-Israeli plan for intervention. French assistance was necessary to maintain the veneer of unselfish peacekeeping, and if it could save a ministry, so much the better.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Horne, *Macmillan* 1:427-28.

¹²⁸ Lamb, *Failure of the Eden Government*, 205.

¹²⁹ It was Gambetta’s commitment to act in Egypt, in part, that cost him his ministry at the end of January 1882, and de Freycinet’s lack of support from his legislature on the use of force in Egypt that cost him his after the Alexandria bombardment. Gambetta was likewise against any powers but Britain and France imposing themselves on Egypt, a sentiment echoed by Granville despite his organization of the Constantinople Conference later in 1882. See Granville to Dufferin, 26 January 1882, and Granville to Lyons, 30 January 1882, from *State Papers* vol. 74 (1882-1883), 372-74; 377-79.

¹³⁰ In both narratives, France appears as the voice of provocation and Britain the voice of restraint. In 1956, the French would launch recriminations against Eden for calling a halt; see Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, 145; André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition*, 1956 trans. Richard Barry (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 120-22.

This role as peacekeeper was important enough that actions, and inactions, were constrained by the need to maintain this image. The dispatch of the naval squadrons to Alexandria in 1882 was recognized as unable to secure the safety of European subjects in the wake of the Alexandria riots, and in 1956 the loading of transports for the landings at Port Said was delayed until after the expiry of the formal ultimatum to Israel and Egypt at the end of October.¹³¹ Such moves were necessary to ensure the support of constituencies and hostile MPs at home, and preserve coalitions necessary to follow a continuous and consistent Egypt policy. The alternative would be paralysis and uncertainty of the kind that plagued the French in 1882.

Uncertainty did exist for Eden in 1956, but unlike the internal problems of Third Republic France, it was traceable to his trans-Atlantic colleagues in Washington. Eden desperately sought the condonation of the United States for the British use of force, and expected to find it because Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and President Eisenhower both agreed with Eden's assessment of Nasser. However, Dulles continually tore down Anglo-French efforts to find a suitable international solution, including his own brainchild, SCUA, by eliminating the prospect of using force to impose it; in reality, Dulles was buying time.¹³² By the middle of September, there appeared to be no issues that could serve as a *casus belli*, and Eisenhower could keep matters on hold until after the Election.

Much about American and British conduct is attributable to the 1956 presidential election. British policy-makers presumed that election politics would keep the United

¹³¹ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3d ser., vol. 270 (1882), col. 1220; Aster, *Anthony Eden*, 157.

¹³² Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez*, 180, 83-85.

States unconcerned, and the apparent cozying of Nasser to the Soviets would ensure tacit American approval of any military expedition. Dulles talked both sides of the equation, peace and force at once, leading the French to muse that Dulles's real aim was to establish American hegemony in former European colonial areas.¹³³ Regardless, Eden and Lloyd read Dulles's words as a willingness to turn a blind eye to the use of force to impose a favorable settlement at Suez, while Dulles was in fact playing a double game and keeping Eisenhower's options open. Surely, in an election year, freedom of action was vitally important, but it sent mixed messages to London and allowed for an aggressive foreign policy. Once Eisenhower's re-election was assured, he could press against Israel, France, and Britain over Suez without worrying about political repercussions, to keep American even-handedness in stark contrast to Soviet conduct over Hungary.

The decision to act militarily, then, follows a pattern. It began with the sudden upsetting of an established order (Urabi's movement in 1882 and Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956), which led certain parties to believe Britain's vital interests were in jeopardy. From there, those invested in reversing the situation became increasingly vocal about the need to do so, convincing those around them. In 1882, that persuasion came from below, from the periphery, and played on the financial fears of those in London; in 1956, Eden's personal reputation and Britain's relative decline among the world's powers demanded a reaction to Nasser's act. In the end, military intervention was possible in both 1882 and 1956 because there appeared to be no other way for Britain to preserve national prestige, keep confidence in the sitting ministry, and restore a state of affairs favorable to European interests. What differed was the success of that intervention.

¹³³ Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez*, 188.

EGYPT AS KEYSTONE: EGYPTIANS IN THE CRISES

Some of the salesmanship involved placing Egypt in a regional context. It is in this context that British actions are best explained, by comparing Urabi and Nasser. In both instances, there are mentions of Egypt's unique geographical position, and the Egyptian's (be it Urabi's or Nasser's) ability to destroy British influence through certain activities or even the mere perception that Britain was "soft" on a rebellious colonial population. Thus, there is tension between the Egyptian actors as they were, and the Egyptian actors as perceived by Britain.

Ahmad Urabi was an officer with rather narrow grievances against the Khedival state. He did not intend to be a 'Nationalist', beyond furthering the standing of his own social group, the Egyptian *fellahin*, in the army. As the crisis developed, Urabi was thrust ever deeper into a wider political morass than he had intended to confront. Historian P J Vatikiotis writes that "Orabi [was] . . . a simple soldier with ambitions beyond his capabilities, found himself at the head of a military conspiracy against a weak Khedive, misjudged the forces at play, [and] indulged in brinkmanship when confronting superior powers and lost."¹³⁴ However, Urabi's ambitions were debatable, and the question of whether he intended a revolution is still unresolved.

¹³⁴ Vatikiotis, *History of Modern Egypt*, 155.

Whether Urabi's actions represented insurrection or revolution was debated at the time and since. The general movement, as Juan R. I. Cole and Alexander Schölch have both shown, was not a simple insurrection, though on whether it was a revolution, they differ.¹³⁵ Schölch provides an excellent statement concerning the hazards of attributing such terms to complex movements: "A direct transference of terms which denote specific European political ideas and institutions is misleading . . . The task is made more difficult by the fact that the term revolution generally is connected with the notion of success."¹³⁶ Schölch's statement might logically be taken further to disqualify even European 'revolutions' from such analysis, but at least European institutions were generally comparable to one another.

Supporters of Urabi invariably called the uprising a revolution; Wilfrid Blunt and Elbert Farman (the United States' consul in Egypt in 1882) both refer to Urabist activity as such. Auckland Colvin, the British Controller in 1882, wrote in his 1906 book *The Making of Modern Egypt*:

¹³⁵ See Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians*, 306-315 *passim*; Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 285-89.

¹³⁶ Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians*, 5-6.

It may be argued that though the military leaders might fail, they would fail in the cause of liberty, and that in so great a cause men are justified in making, and in expecting their countrymen to make, all sacrifices. On two conditions they are justified; the first, that there is a reasonable possibility that the sacrifice asked for will not be in vain; and secondly, that those who make the call are inspired by true patriotism. Was this the case with the Egyptian military leaders? Where was the reasonable, or even the wildest possibility of success? What were the motives and claims put in the foreground in their first and only manifesto? Were they a plea for liberty? Did they embody a recital of the rights and wrongs of the people? Not at all; the grievance alleged was the preference given by the Khedive to the Turkish and Circassian officers. Claims were urged for exemption from measures of economy elsewhere contemplated; for more pay, and for higher position . . . no one, in 1882, whose eyes were not obscured, could for a moment believe that Mahmud Sâmî and his troop were Washingtons or Hampdens, or that the hour of Egyptian emancipation had struck.¹³⁷

Gladstone expressed the opinion that Urabi and his movement were nothing more than military adventurers, and that the large landowners who were involved in Egyptian constitutionalism were equally self-serving.¹³⁸ In all fairness, truly altruistic revolutions were rare; Britain's own Glorious Revolution of 1688 has been shown to contain a strong aristocratic power motivation.¹³⁹

There were likewise fears that Urabi was taking advantage of British weakness, and that his success would set a dangerous precedent for the rest of the Empire. In debates over the subject in Commons, Simon Ashmead-Bartlett proclaimed that Urabi knew of

¹³⁷ Colvin, *Making of Modern Egypt*, 13-15. Interestingly, Colvin sumsumes the whole of Egyptian history before 1882 into a mere 18 pages, hinting that its entire contribution to 'modernity' was in bringing Britain to Egypt.

¹³⁸ David Steele, "Britain and Egypt 1882-1914: The Containment of Islamic Nationalism" in Keith M. Wilson, ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (London: Mansell, 1983), 4.

¹³⁹ See Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 1:30, 53.

British weakness in Ireland, the Transvaal, and other recent “hot spots,” and was taking that opportunity to mock the British Government.¹⁴⁰ Granville took a similar tack with Queen Victoria; in justifying the need to pacify Egypt; “Egypt is vital to us, and Lord Granville has said to me that we must take it. . . . We must not at this moment appear to be checked and weakened by Ireland.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, all sides bandied about ideas of Urabi’s collusion with outside powers in an effort to secure greater regional power; Tawfiq, for one, pleaded to the Sultan that Urabi was in league with the British to create an “Arabian Empire,” to play on Ottoman fears of internal weakness.¹⁴² The British, on the other hand, were considerably more interested in the canal, but Gladstone had considered the problem in 1877 and thought it not serious then. Egypt’s importance as a strategic position was limited and British military strategy did not depend on it, preferring the less easily compromised Cape route until 1890.¹⁴³ The Suez Canal endangered was therefore more a jingoistic slogan and an *ex post facto* reason for intervention than any real cause.¹⁴⁴

Racial perceptions played a part in this search for wider ambition as well. Urabi, as an ‘Oriental’, had sinister and mystical qualities. During the period of Urabi’s imprisonment, his defender A. M. Broadley referred to him as “an Egyptian, a well-read,

¹⁴⁰ *Hansard*, vol. 270 (1882), col. 1143.

¹⁴¹ George Earle Buckle, ed., *The Letters of Queen Victoria* vol 3 (London: John Murray, 1928), 301.

¹⁴² Urabi made a similar plea to the Sultan in his appeal for support, stating that the Khedive sought to make Egypt into a British client state, and to set himself up as its first Governor. See Mansfield, *British in Egypt*, 27-28; Urabi, *Defense Statement*, 33.

¹⁴³ Cain et al., *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (New York: Longman, 1993), 368.

¹⁴⁴ Schölch, “The ‘Men on the Spot’,” 773-78.

able, and gifted Egyptian, it is true, but still an Egyptian and nothing more. Orientals have always more or less believed in visions since the days of Saul and David.”¹⁴⁵ Such essentializations of the Arab character, explored notably by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, led some to believe such a simple *fellahin* officer was fit only for direction.¹⁴⁶ For example, Colvin saw the hand of the Ottoman Sultan all too obvious behind Urabi’s actions, while the sultan thought that the British might be behind them, perhaps because his own policy was geared toward using Urabi and Tawfiq to weaken each other and pave the way for a reassertion of Ottoman power in Egypt.¹⁴⁷ Edward Malet, in conversations with Abdulhamid II, took away the impression that ex-Khedive Ismail or his brother, Prince Halim, might be directing Urabi, and the Turkish Commissioner to Egypt in early 1882, Dervish Pasha, thought Urabi was playing into the hands of the British, intentionally or accidentally.¹⁴⁸ Major E. W. Polson Newman gave Urabi more agency, but still

¹⁴⁵ A. M. Broadley, *How We Defended Arábi and His Friends: A Story of Egypt and the Egyptians* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), 201.

¹⁴⁶ Said’s discussion of Lord Cromer’s view of immoral Oriental “subject races” is particularly appropriate to this. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 36-39.

¹⁴⁷ Colvin, *Making of Modern Egypt*, 12; Selim Derengil, “The Ottoman Response to the Egyptian Crisis of 1881-82” in *Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 24., no. 1 (1988), 19; Alan Palmer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1993), 167.

¹⁴⁸ Selim Derengil, “The ‘Residual Imperial Mentality’ and the ‘Urabi Pasa Uprising in Egypt: Ottoman Reactions to Arab Nationalism” in *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations Annual 1986* (Istanbul: Foundation for Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations, 1986), 34.

postulated that the events of 1882 were designed to bring in the British presence.¹⁴⁹ Even Egyptian reformers thought Urabi's actions might have been directed from London.¹⁵⁰

Urabi was not a pawn of greater powers, but neither was he the real revolutionary force in Egypt. Urabi did not wield the supreme power sometimes attributed him, in spite of martial law, even after the bombardment of Alexandria.¹⁵¹ The real reforming moderates remained in the country after 1882, and were still involved with government after the British invasion; the first post-invasion government was formed with the constitutionalist Sharif Pasha at its head. Many reforms, particularly the granting of a constitution to Egypt, were denied before 1882 because the Sultan feared having to grant all the Ottoman dominions such measures if he granted them to Egypt--another example of Egypt as precedent and keystone.¹⁵² Many years later, Sir Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, claimed such concessions as a benefit of British rule; British sources of the period reflect the erroneous belief that British magnanimity alone was responsible for these.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ E. W. Polson Newman, *Great Britain in Egypt* (London: Cassell, 1928), 19, 115. Cited from Zaheer Masood Quraishi, *Liberal nationalism in Egypt: Rise and Fall of the Wafd Party* (Delhi: Jamal Press, 1967), 11.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Mayer, *The Changing Past: Egyptian Historiography of the Urabi Revolt, 1882-1983* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1988), 8.

¹⁵¹ Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians*, 273-80, 292-303; Cf. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 240-41.

¹⁵² Selim Derengil, "Ottoman Response," 5.

¹⁵³ The tome *British Africa*, a conglomeration of lecture-based articles from 1895-1898, includes a chapter by the Secretary of the Bank of Egypt, Arthur Nichols, entitled "What England has Done for Egypt". Interestingly, United States Consul Farman's anti-Occupation memoir of the period includes a counterchapter entitled "What Egypt has Done for England". See Arthur Nichols, "What England has Done for Egypt" in William Sheowring, ed., *British Africa* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1906), 306-325; Farman, *Betrayal of Egypt*, 193-212.

The Ottomans and the British clearly misunderstood Urabi just as surely as he did in return. The Ottomans, particularly, feared what they thought Urabi represented and the precedent he might set for insurrection in other Ottoman dominions, a major reason for the Sultan's eventual turn to support Tawfiq and the British.¹⁵⁴ This precise fear that a dynamic Arab movement, aimed at removing all outside suzerainty and influence, might spread would similarly inform opponents of Nasser in 1956.

Anthony Eden's continual sighting of Nasser's shadowy hand behind upheaval in Jordan, Syria, and even Algeria owed much to this belief. Radio Cairo's constant stream of vitriol against the colonial powers, cementing Egypt's position as an anti-colonial power, certainly did not ease his mind.¹⁵⁵ However, rather than viewing this as a case of a country moving toward non-alignment, something Nasser believed in, British, French, and American observers looked for the sinister motive, the "military adventurer" aspect that existed in Urabi--even to the point of repeatedly referring to him as "Colonel Nasser" instead of "President Nasser." In the bipolar world of the Cold War, Manichean thinking (East versus West) seemed logical, and after repeated rebuffs of the Baghdad Pact and any regional security organization involving a major Western power, friendly actions towards the Soviets took on an added element of warning.

Nasser was not only unwilling to bend before colonial powers; he was politically unable to do so. His power was based upon a dedication to rid Egypt of colonial influence, and making fresh Egyptian ties to the British and French was therefore out of the question.

¹⁵⁴ Derengil, "Ottoman Response," 17-18.

¹⁵⁵ Beattie, *Egypt During the Nasser Years*, 113.

¹⁵⁶ Western powers took this, combined with Nasser's expressed ideas on Arab unity, in the most alarming manner, attributing all sorts of imperial and Communist ambitions to him, not for a moment considering that his gratitude to the Soviets for helping fund the Aswan Dam in the wake of Egypt's success in 1956 and the sale of weapons via Czechoslovakia would be no greater than it had been to British, French, or American interests.¹⁵⁷ To be fair, the Soviets never considered this possibility either.

The most important portrayal of Egypt as a keystone in the 1956 crisis echoes worries about British impotence in 1882. British clients, notably Jordan and Iraq, relied upon Britain for the maintenance of their positions; Iraq's Nuri el-Said in particular was concerned about Nasser, for Iraq was Egypt's main rival for the banner of Arab unity. Mohammed Heikal made the observation that Nasser's successful nationalization of the Canal would have dire consequences for British-backed regimes in the Middle East, and that they had known this even while being laudatory of Nasser.¹⁵⁸ The mention in Shuckburgh's diary about Nasser asserting dominance over the Middle East if allowed to

¹⁵⁶ Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Suez Canal in Peace and War* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1969) 142-43; Beattie, *Egypt During the Nasser Years*, 112-13;), 43. See also Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 52-59, for discussion of Nasser's articulation of this imperative to other Arab leaders.

¹⁵⁷ Woodward, *Nasser*, 45-46; Beattie, *Egypt During the Nasser Years*, 115-16. Several polemical books on the danger of Soviet encroachment, and the possible course for Egypt, appeared in the decade after the crisis. Two examples of note are Guy Wint and Peter Calvocoressi, *Middle East Crisis* (London: Penguin, 1957), which includes the statement that the Soviets "might be acquiring effective control of the Egyptian government and army" in a satellite manner (86); and Ivor Powell, *Disillusion by the Nile* (London: Solstice, 1967), which asserts that "there is now every indication that the Russians are pressing for the total sovietization of Egypt ... the greatest likelihood at the present hour is that Egypt is fated to become the first Iron Curtain country in Africa" (64).

¹⁵⁸ Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail*, 130.

“get away with it” reflects this further, and it has been recognized that the act cemented his leadership position among both the non-aligned nations and the Arab world.¹⁵⁹ Eden confided his fears about Nasser’s effect on Muslim powers friendly to Britain directly to Eisenhower on 5 August 1956: “If Nasser keeps his loot, how long can such loyalty last?”¹⁶⁰ However, Nasser had believed the true struggle to be not with Britain, but the United States; with the Middle East turned into an area of Cold War focus, the United States, without the odium of a colonial past, moved into the position emptied by Great Britain just as Britain had moved into that position in 1882, supplanting the Ottomans.

¹⁵⁹ Woodward, Nasser, 46;

¹⁶⁰ See Eden to Eisenhower, 5 August 1956, in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), 1955-57, XVI, pp. 146-47.

VERTICAL TRENDS AND POINTS OF DIVERGENCE

Vertical trends, or trends over time, play an important role in determining why intervention failed in 1956 while it succeeded in 1882. Aside from discussions of motivation of each crisis, be they based on capital, prestige, or simple hatred, the basic fact remains that the world of 1956 was radically different from that of 1882. Britain did not hold the position of pre-eminent power in the world; rather, Britain and France were considered second-rate Powers. Likewise, material culture was different, and interaction between national populations greater.

Technology and human migration had allowed the dispersal of Arab people and culture throughout the British Commonwealth, and kept those people in touch with their homelands. For example, in the case of the Yemenis and Arab nationalism in the 1950s, Fred Halliday has noted that

The radio was very important as a means of arousing nationalist feeling throughout the Arab world in the 1950s, and this was true, too, of the Yemeni community in Britain, who would listen to Cairo's Voice of the Arabs and its reports of events in both parts of Yemen.¹⁶¹

Surely, other expatriate populations in Britain must have heard these broadcasts and sympathized with them; likewise, native Britons could now hear the Egyptian side of the conflict as their 1882 ancestors could not, and more quickly as well. One-sided reporting

of the kind that helped pin the Alexandria riots of 11 June 1882 on Urabi¹⁶² was no longer possible, nor could the voice of a few local officials (like Malet and Colvin) govern the way Egypt was perceived at the metropole.

This technology and growing internationalism, among its innumerable other side effects, led also to give Egyptians official voices abroad. Radio Cairo, Egyptian missions in other nations, the existence of other nationalist groups who could be contacted (most notably the non-aligned nations), and the United Nations all ensured a very different chorus in 1956 than in 1882. The isolation of Nasser's Egypt was not possible, and action would need to be justified to many nations, not just those of Europe.

The march of technology affected Britain in another way. The two World Wars, with their engines of mass destruction, weighed greatly on Britain's finances and allowed other nations, particularly the United States and the soviet Union, to jump ahead in economic and military clout. And, if that were not enough, the incredible rejuvenation of defeated powers like Japan and Germany threatened to eclipse Britain entirely. Thus, while Britain was not in absolute decline, the British economy had simply failed to grow at the rate of its competitors'.¹⁶³

Eden sorely overestimated Britain's ability to afford gunboat diplomacy in the 1950s, as well as the relative power his country possessed. The observation that Britain

¹⁶¹ Fred Halliday, *Arabs in Exile* (London: Tauris, 1992), 87.

¹⁶² Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 281.

¹⁶³ See Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism* vol. 2, and David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled* (London: Longman, 1991). The sterling crisis can best be reconciled by realizing that the cost of mounting military expeditions had also increased far faster than Britain's economy.

never defied the United States on a major issue after Suez is important, because it was that failure that underscored the need for American approval, tacit or real, of British action.¹⁶⁴ However, while the combined discontent of the United States and the Soviet Union was instrumental in the withdrawal of British and French forces from the Canal Zone, explaining away Eden's failure as attributable to American disapproval loses the role Egyptian agency played in 1956, and could not in 1882.

For example, without Soviet sales of weapons to Nasser, and his formal recognition of Mao's China, American funding for Aswan may not have been pulled, and the canal may not have been nationalized. The Suez Canal Company's concession was due to end in 1968, so Egypt would have gained control of the waterway anyhow--the nationalization was, therefore, a political move. Nasser's action, Eden's response, and the ensuing crisis owed their existence to the superpower rivalry. The fact that Nasser was able to act decisively, and nationalize the Suez Canal, was in itself of monumental importance, and it reflects the single difference between 1882 and 1956 that made successful British intervention impossible: Nasser's unchallenged position as head of the Egyptian state.

In 1882, the loyalties of the country were divided: Abdulhamid, Tawfiq, and Urabi all sought to represent the real interests of Egypt. As such, it was possible for Europeans to play all of them off against one another, and take advantage of their internecine struggles to level charges of anarchy and chaos that would require a peacekeeping force. Abdulhamid certainly sought this, although he hoped the force would be Ottoman and not British or French. Tawfiq, who owed his position to the meddling of European powers in

¹⁶⁴ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, 205.

Egyptian politics, wanted a restoration of his arbitrary power, and Urabi and the Nationalists sought redress for the army and social change for improvement of the Egyptian *fellahin*.

Urabi and the Nationalists, while supporting a popular agenda, did not have the political prowess to direct the movement.¹⁶⁵ As they gained popularity, the Khedive lost allegiance, and despite his repeated vows of allegiance to the Sultan and Khedive, Urabi became the nationalist hero of the people. In such a confused mix, nobody was in control, and after the Alexandria bombardment, Egypt effectively had two governments.¹⁶⁶ With such a fluid situation, it is perhaps little wonder that Urabi's policy consisted mostly of defensive preparations. With no voices overseas save those of Wilfrid Blunt, Frederic Harrison, and a scant few others, Urabi could not hope to mobilize world opinion against the one-sided treatment his movement had received in the British press.¹⁶⁷

Nasser, on the other hand, was both politically astute and well-consolidated. He had no need to consider allegiance to outside powers; there were none, and Nasser's stated policy was against entanglements. Likewise, he had spent four years in the halls of power, consolidating his position, and as such had dealt with any contender for the reins of the Egyptian state. Even had Eden, Dulles, and Mollet been able to rid themselves of Nasser, no acceptable substitute existed that would not be even more intractable to

¹⁶⁵ Eliezer Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (Pall Mall: Praeger, 1970), 313.

¹⁶⁶ Vatikiotis, *History of Modern Egypt*, 154.

¹⁶⁷ The difficulties in mobilizing any kind of public opinion against intervention were overwhelming. See M. E. Chamberlain, "British Public Opinion and the Invasion of Egypt, 1882," *Trivium* 16 (1981), 5-28.

Western interests. With full control of the Egyptian government, and surrounded by capable advisors, Nasser could nationalize the Suez canal and defend his action legally. Any use of force on the part of the former colonial powers was sure to push other governments into Egypt's corner--including, hopefully, the United States. This is precisely what happened.

The value of history was not lost upon Nasser, as he used it both for propaganda purposes and in the formulation of his strategy.¹⁶⁸ In his tract *The Philosophy of the Revolution* he specifically states that the Free Officers' movement succeeded where Urabi had failed, and that the Egyptians were now the masters of their own fates.¹⁶⁹ Many members of the 1952 *coup* saw similarities between themselves and Urabi, and did not fail to romanticize this in articles and books published shortly after the seizure of power.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps most important was Nasser's divination of lessons from Urabi's experiences when the British did intervene--in particular, Urabi's failure to block the Suez Canal and arm the people for popular resistance.¹⁷¹

Nasser understood the importance of dividing his antagonists; even before taking power in 1952, the Free Officers' movement had made certain of US approval before acting, and moved to calm the British government as soon as Farouk was off the throne.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Woodward, *Nasser*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Economica, 1959), 26

¹⁷⁰ Mayer, *The Changing Past*, 28-32.

¹⁷¹ Mayer, *The Changing Past*, 35.

¹⁷² Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and his Generation* (New York: St. Martin's, 1978), 108; Schonfield, *The Suez Canal in Peace and War*, 136.

Such an appreciation of the international order was crucial for Nasser's success in 1956. As Dulles and Eden stalled, Nasser could be more and more confident of eventual victory. Urabi, on the other hand, had never even met Granville, Dilke, or Gladstone, and had no conception of the power struggles involved in the liberalization of Egypt and the reform of Khedival rule. His position at the time of British intervention is a closer analogue to the 1952 position of the Free Officers' *coup* that deposed Farouk, but Urabi's movement developed more slowly and did not move against Tawfiq until it became impossible to reconcile their aims with his, allowing more time for intervention to happen.

Egypt's success at Suez in 1956 was, in actuality, its success since 1952--of eliminating a sovereign with strong ties to Britain and consolidating a leadership position in the country. The Free Officers seemed willing enough to work with Britain, a nation unready and unwilling to consider invading Egypt while engaged in the Korean War and recovering from the devastation of the Second World War. Once this had succeeded, Nasser needed only a pretext to nationalize the Canal, as he had considered the consequences of such a move well before 26 July 1956.¹⁷³ Nasser had read the political situation in the Middle East with more accuracy than had Eden.

¹⁷³ Woodward, *Nasser*, 49.

CONCLUSIONS

This comparison of the two interventions does raise questions that fall outside the scope of this study, namely why Britain did not intervene in 1952, when Farouk was deposed, or how the myriad of Egyptian efforts at asserting a national identity between Urabi's failure and his own success may have affected Nasser's understanding of the colonial powers and the actions he took in 1956. However, the evidence examined in this study points towards the conclusion that Nasser outmaneuvered Eden because he had both the ability and the opportunity to do so owing to his access to the international stage and his position as the undisputed leader of Egypt.

In 1882, Britain existed as the pre-eminent power in the world, far outpacing France, Germany, or the United States but keenly aware of those polities' expansion. British imperial ideology stipulated that responsible government in colonial and other dependent regions required European tutelage, and nowhere did this seem more necessary than in a financially ruined and politically restless Egypt. Egypt in 1882 was a province of the Ottoman Empire, ruled by a hierarchy that included few Egyptians--from the sultan to the Khedive, and even into the officers' ranks of the military and the civilian bureaucracy, Ottoman Turks and Circassians held sway. Without access to the international stage, Urabi found himself painted by British operatives and the khedive as a mutinous officer, a would-be Oriental despot whose ambitions were nothing less than the complete

destruction of Britain's Near Eastern empire. The idea that Urabi could be a manifestation of a genuine Egyptian nationalist movement dissipated further when events in Egypt were perceived under the assumption that Urabi was nothing more than a military adventurer. Eventually, Urabi and his cohorts were isolated politically and, finally, destroyed militarily.

Over the next 74 years, Britain's colonial empire waxed and waned, while its power relative to other nations' declined. Two world wars took their toll, along with innumerable crises and the growing discontent of the colonized. The United States and the Soviet Union overtook Britain as the world's major powers, militarily and economically. Post-war Britain was relegated to the status of a regional player in European power politics, albeit one still clinging to the vestiges of empire in Africa, the Near East, and Asia. The image of empire as beneficial to the development of colonial peoples gave way to the image of empire as the symbol of western exploitation, and as liberal ideas like democracy and self-determination gained adherents, and an educated native elite developed, the old colonial empires were shaken and finally torn asunder by the colonized peoples themselves. Britain's military and economic power concomitantly declined in comparison to other nations', and Britain was less able to afford remaining when the prevailing intellectual climate was unfavorable to colonialism. Conversely, Egypt's relative power rose in the same period. By 1956, Egypt had been recognized as a sovereign state in itself for 37 years, and since 1946 had been considered as an equal among nations in the United Nations Organization; Nasser had four years between the 1952 Free Officers' coup and the Suez debacle to secure his position. The clout of Egypt relative to that of Britain and France was thus far greater than it had ever been.

When Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Anthony Eden felt compelled to draw a line against the further deterioration of Britain's power. In Eden's mind, Nasser's role in the 1950s was similar to Hitler's or Mussolini's in the 1930s. Eden believed that the lesson of appeasement's failure before the Second World War was that aggression must be resisted in its earliest stages, and was determined to destroy Nasser, counting on American aid in doing so. Eden first attempted to wrest the Canal from Egypt by isolating Nasser's government politically, and when that failed, militarily. However, Nasser was able to take the instance of Anglo-French aggression against Egypt and use it to isolate Eden from forces the British prime minister had assumed were supporting him--the Commonwealth nations and the United States, in particular--and to build support for his own cause among Arab nations and the budding non-aligned movement. The results were that American outrage, manifested in the simple veto of a loan, threatened to destroy Britain's economic power, the Commonwealth by and large withdrew its support from Eden, and threats of Soviet intervention to support Egypt militarily were taken seriously in London. There was little choice but to withdraw.

From the evidence presented, the role of Egypt's political landscape in determining Egypt's success or failure in ejecting a foreign intervention is hard to overlook. In 1882, with their allegiances divided and communications imperfect, Egyptians could not successfully oppose intervention. In 1956, Nasser was able to speak with the voice of Egypt--not of the *fellahin*, or of the Army, but of the Egyptian nation, one with equal rank to Great Britain or France in the eyes of the United Nations. This difference made intervention less possible for Eden to justify to observers in Britain and the United States. In the final analysis, then, the story of 1882 and 1956 must be counted as much a story of

Egyptian success as it was British failure, and an object lesson in the value of political unity.

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