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Eisenhower Internationalism and Nasser Nationalism: The Suez Crisis Defining International Policy in Post-Colonial Egypt

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Eisenhower Internationalism and Nasser Nationalism:
The Suez Crisis Defining International Policy in Post-Colonial Egypt

A senior thesis submitted to
the History Faculty of Dominican University of California
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By
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ABSTRACT

The nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptians in 1956 was an international controversy. As history, the topic has been just as controversial among scholars; however events such as: the planning of the Aswan Dam, the Protocol of Sèvres, the Bandung Conference, and the Baghdad Pact have helped crystalize the perspective and significance of the Suez Crisis. The United States dealings in Egypt during the Suez Crisis, and subsequent relations with Abdel Nasser, cemented United States Cold War foreign policy, culminating in the passing of the Eisenhower Doctrine. While these events were the enactment of containment policy, they also shaped the scholarly opinion on the cause, effects, and conclusions of the Suez Crisis. This paper utilizes State Department Records, a thorough historiographical survey, additional related primary and secondary sources, and international sources such as *Nasser, My Husband* by Tahia Gamal Abdel Nasser or **Vernon Bogdanor's continuing series of lectures on the Suez Crisis**. From this wide analysis of sources, it is clear that the United States dealings in the Middle East created a hierarchy of foreign policy goals and values, which explain U.S. policy. **Furthermore, U.S. intervention, and Nasser's ability as a nationalist icon, was the catalyst that pushed Nasser's Egypt further towards the Communist camp.**

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Introduction

Animosity between the United States of Soviet Russia (U.S.S.R.) and the United States of America (U.S.) has been a constant, nagging problem which has plagued the world for most of recent history. Those who grew up during the Cold War lived in constant fear of global nuclear annihilation. This fear was a byproduct of the technological superiority shared by the U.S. and U.S.S.R., the eminent superpowers of the twenty first century. Both nations waged war across the globe, using money, weapons, and influence to spread their doctrines far beyond their geographic borders. In the thousands of years of recorded history prior to this new system of control, global politics were conducted largely in a different way. As a precursor to the Cold War, Colonialism was the leading method of domination, a direct occupation of a land and its people, but also an indirect economic subjugation. This was how the world worked for centuries, until the Suez Crisis would help birth a new world order.

The Suez Crisis marks a major turning point in global history. Capitalism, Communism, or Colonialism, the world was at an impasse. The outdated and ineffective horns of Colonialism were dying or already dead and the two raging bulls of Capitalism and Communism were charging to take its place. The events preceding and directly following the Suez Crisis struck a fatal blow to the sickly bull that was French and British Colonialism.

In the late months of 1956, Egypt shocked colonial Britain, and by in large the world, when they decisively captured and nationalized the Suez Canal, which geographically divided the Eastern Mediterranean and Indian Oceans by way of the Red Sea. This was achieved under the command of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. Previously, the Suez Canal was occupied by the British and used as a passage to transport African and Middle Eastern oil, into Europe and Western Asia. The Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal started a revolution that would reveal American foreign policy in the Middle East for the first time since WWII. In the coming centuries, one after another, former colonies began to break from the tight shackles of Colonialism, and Imperial powers such as Britain and France were forced to respond to these direct challenges.

Historiography

Most American scholars agree that the Suez Crisis opened the door to Communism in the Middle East. The three stalwarts of this belief are found in the sources: *Legacy of Ashes*¹, by Tim Weiner, *We Now Know*², by John Lewis Gaddis and *America, Russia and the Cold War*³ by Walter LaFeber. All three of these sources were written post-Cold War and provide a meta view of the situation; It is difficult to touch on the subjects of the Suez Crisis and the Cold War without giving all three of these

¹ Weiner, Tim. *Legacy of ashes: the history of the CIA*. New York: Anchor Books, 2008.

² Gaddis, John Lewis. *We now know: rethinking Cold War history*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

³ LaFeber, Walter. *America, Russia and the cold war 1945-2006*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

sources consideration. As time progresses, different, more narrow views and interpretations of the Suez Crisis have emerged such as, Nasser as a leader, anti-colonial sentiment, international economics, and Cold War hydraulics. Sources such as: *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis*⁴ by Diane Kuntz explain the severe economic impact of the crisis. While sources such as *Britain, the United States and the Rise of an Egyptian Leader*⁵, by Michael Thornhill explain **Nasser's** rise to power and fame as a potential Nationalistic leader of the Arab world. British scholars have also written extensively on their actions in the Suez Canal. In **Vernon Bogdanor's** Lecture on the Suez Crisis⁶, he takes a highly critical stance on the actions of British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden. Another necessary topic of discussion is Arab Nationalism. Sources such as *Containing Arab Nationalism*⁷ by Salim Yaqub show how the United States went to great lengths to contain the threat of a unified Arab Nation. Finally, sources such as *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine*⁸ by Ray Takeyh investigate how the events of the Suez Crisis and Cold War dealings in Egypt and throughout the Middle East had an enormous influence on the conception, proposal, and implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Vital primary sources of communications between government officials as well as published memoirs and journals are available to the public and provide much needed context in the mess that was the Suez Crisis.

⁴ Kunz, Diane B. *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

⁵ Michael T. Thornhill. *Britain, the United States and the Rise of an Egyptian Leader: The Politics and Diplomacy of Nasser's Consolidation of Power, 1952–4*. *English Historical Review* 2004 119: 892-921.

⁶ Bogdanor, Vernon. "The Suez Crisis, 1956". The Museum of London, London. Tuesday, 10th of November 2015. Lecture

⁷ Yaqub, Salim. *Containing Arab Nationalism: the Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

⁸ Takeyh, Ray. *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: the US, Britain and Nasser's Egypt, 1953-57*. Macmillan, 2000.

Thesis

The U.S.'s decision making during the Suez Crisis simultaneously substantiated U.S. Cold War global priorities and served as a catalyst for Colonel Nasser to serve his own ends by playing the U.S. against the U.S.S.R in two specific ways: 1) The U.S. decision to not actively participate in the Protocol of Sèvres reveals a burgeoning United States-Middle East Cold War foreign policy, which revealed U.S. international priorities well beyond Egypt. Analyzing events such as George Kennan's Long Telegram on the Soviets in 1947, the Suez Crisis of 1956, and the signing of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, this paper argues that Communist containment was the top priority of United States foreign policy; however, other factors certainly played into U.S. foreign policy making as well. This included U.S. anti-colonial sentiments, loyalty to international allies, maintaining international economic interests, and the reconstruction of Europe; but, the threat of Communism consistently trumped these other factors. In fact, it was this ferocity that drove Nasser closer towards the Communist camp. 2) Nasser was not a Communist, rather he was a nationalist; however, when the United States refused to support his nationalist agenda, he realized he could get their attention by playing to their fear of spreading Soviet Communism in the Middle East. This tactic is best evidenced **by Nasser's constantly** transforming nationalism, his abuse of politics to obtain weapons, and his attendance at the Bandung conference.

Historical Overview

The idea for the Suez Canal was first conceived and signed into effect on November 30th, 1854. The contract was signed by the Viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Said Pasha. The agreement allowed French engineer, Ferdinand de Lesseps, to form a financing company for the canal and begin construction. On July 5, 1856, the final agreement was signed by the Viceroy and the Universal Company of Suez Maritime was formed, a multinational conglomerate, the primary shareholder of which were the French and the British. The Canal opened for passage in 1869. At the time of the signing Egypt was an independent nation ruled by Ismail the Magnificent. Ismail is credited with bringing Egypt into the modern world but at the sincere price of French and British colonial subjugation.

On July 26th, 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser sent shockwaves throughout the global economy by issuing a new law, placing the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal de Suez*, better known as the Universal Company of the Suez Canal, under Egyptian national control. Nasser saw his actions as heroic and patriotic, **concluding his speech by condemning the first world's "imperialist efforts [to] thwart Egyptian independence".**⁹

The takeover was outlined in six (VI) articles. Article I **reads "The Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal (Egyptian joint-stock company) is hereby nationalized. All its assets, rights and obligations are transferred to the Nation and all**

⁹ Documents on American Foreign Relations. 1956. Dir. of publ. Zinner, Paul E. 1957. New York: published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Harper & Brothers. "Decree of the President of the Republic of Egypt on the Nationalization of the Suez Canal Company (Cairo, July 26, 1956)", p. 289-291.

the organizations and committees that now operate its management are hereby **dissolved**".¹⁰ A clear and decisive act to say the least. Article I goes on to say that all international shareholders will have their stocks reimbursed at their market value on the day before the takeover.

Article II **of Nasser's new law addresses** one of the most highly disputed topics of the canal nationalization. The article states that all employees of the newly founded Suez Canal Transit Service will be picked by Nasser himself, but more importantly free passage through the canal will continue unimpeded. In 1888 the Constantinople convention concluded that the **canal and its ports "shall be open forever, as neutral passages, to every merchant vessel crossing from one sea to the other"**.¹¹ Ironically, at the time of the convention Egypt was still a part of the Ottoman Empire and was not formally included in the agreement.

Article III of the new law freezes all assets in the Canal company. This means that investors both foreign and local were unable to access their shareholdings. This article is an attempt to avoid the financial collapse that would follow if all of the shareholders in the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal dumped their stocks.

Article IV **of Nasser's address is** a controversial topic indeed. The article states that all acting employees who were previously working for the Universal Suez

¹⁰ Speech by Gamal Abdel Nasser on the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company (26 July 1956)

¹¹ Constantinople Convention, 1888 Convention between Great Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia and Turkey, respecting the free navigation of the Suez maritime canal signed at Constantinople, October 29, 1888.

Company, no matter their nationality, were obligated by law to remain at their posts. This would mean that a U.S. citizen working on the canal could, by Egyptian law, be jailed and held against their will for not working. The number of U.S. citizens working in **Suez at the time was low, estimated to be “more than one”**.¹² If an American was held against their will in a foreign country while working for a previously international company, it would be immediate grounds for U.S. intervention.

Article V solidifies just how serious Egypt was about the nationalization of the **Suez Canal. In an almost threatening way the article reads “All violations of the provisions of Article III shall be punished by imprisonment and a fine equal to three times the value of the amount involved in the offense. All violations of the provisions of Article IV shall be punished by imprisonment in addition to the forfeiture by the offender of all rights to compensation, pension or indemnity”**.¹³ The final article, article VI reaffirms that this document is effectively a new Egyptian law.

The Long Telegram

The combat of WWII brought about international alliances formed solely for the ensured survival of the modern world. One of these necessary alliances was between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. As WWII ended with the surrender of the Japanese threat, a new reality emerged. These two former wartime allies, the U.S. and U.S.S.R., were fundamentally different in their nature of both foreign policy and internal affairs. In

¹² United States Department of State. Glennon, John P., Editor
Foreign relations of the United States, 1955-1957. Suez Crisis, July 26-December 31, 1956
Volume XVI

Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955-1957

¹³ Speech by Gamal Abdel Nasser on the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company (26 July 1956)

February 1946, the U.S. Department of State sent a letter to the embassy in Moscow asking for: 1) basic features of post-war Soviet outlook 2) background of this outlook 3) its projection in practical policy on an official level 4) its projection on an unofficial level and 5) practical deductions from standpoint of U.S. policy. What they received was an eight-thousand-word telegram from George Kennan, an American official living in Moscow. United States officials got exactly what they were looking for. Kennan wrote a damning telegram later rewritten as a book **entitled “*The Sources of Soviet Conduct*”**.¹⁴

In this telegram he described a very real Communist threat, leading to a conclusion which outlined his thoughts on what can be done about this threat. Kennan **stated that Soviet international policy aimed “to increasing in every way strength and prestige of Soviet state: intensive military-industrialization; maximum development of armed forces; great displays to impress outsiders; continued secretiveness about internal matters, designed to conceal weaknesses and to keep opponents in the dark...** Wherever it is considered timely and promising, efforts will be made to advance official **limits of Soviet power.**”¹⁵ Despite this, Kennan believed that the Soviet threat could be stopped without another world war. This hypothesis laid the grounds for the start of the Cold War. The conclusion to his paper makes assertions about the potential outcome of a conflict between the U.S.S.R. and U.S. Kennan believed that the United States was inherently stronger than their Soviet counterparts, and that using containment and dedication to capitalism the United States could be victorious.

¹⁴ George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947)

¹⁵ George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947)

What was not up for debate was the fact that conflict was **inevitable**. Kennan's paper concluded with a marshal plan, stating "if the US had the 'courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society', and if 'our public is educated to realities of Russian situation', the menace of Soviet Communism could be resisted."¹⁶ This telegram birthed the foundation for U.S. foreign policy throughout the Cold War, placing the emphasis on U.S.S.R. Communism containment, and a renewed belief in the American Capitalist system. The information that Kennan provided on the Soviets was invaluable, it was the first time the United States received an in depth look at the workings of the Soviet Communist State. U.S. policy makers, including President Eisenhower, would heed the words of Kennan very closely in their decisions on containing the Communist threat in the Middle East, **and the U.S.'s role in the Suez Crisis.**

The Protocol of Sèvres

In October of 1956, a secret meeting, known as the Protocol of Sèvres, was held between Israel, France, and the United Kingdom. The three governments agreed to a **land invasion against Colonel Nasser's Egypt. Israel would launch the first attack and take control of the canal, following this, Britain and France would demand the Egyptian and Israeli militaries cease fighting and withdraw from the canal, which would be**

¹⁶ The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State
SECRET. Moscow, February 22, 1946--9 pm [Received February 22-3: 52 pm]
511. Answer to Dept's 284, Feb 3 [13]

summarily reoccupied by the British. The Israeli troops would withdraw from the canal and allow the Europeans to recapture it without resistance.

The initial British reaction to the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal was one of panic and urgency. Sir Anthony Eden, the acting British Prime Minister reached out to the U.S. for assistance. In the previous fifty years, the United States had emerged as new global superpower. They had played pivotal roles in both World War I and World War II and had emerged as an industry leader in the 1940's. The U.S. refused to support Britain's plan, a crippling blow to the perceived continued alliance between the two western powers, and a bold statement as to the United States opinion on the methods of Colonialism. In a telegram sent on July 27th, the day directly proceeding the nationalization of a canal, a telegram was received from the U.S. Embassy in London. The telegram expressed the British Government's attitude and discussed actions pertaining to the Canal. If anything was to be done about the Egyptian Nationalization of the Canal, it had to be done legally and on a worldwide scale¹⁷. The British could not simply justify an invasion under the guise of retaking stolen property. One of the main issues plaguing the British cabinet was whether Nasser's nationalization of the Canal had violated the Free Passage Act of the 1888¹⁸, allowing the passage of all merchant and military vessels through the canal in times of peace or war. It also seemed that the U.S.'s decision to act or not, would not stop British officials from continuing their plans, fearing if Britain was to wait for U.S. recourse the matter would become too bogged

¹⁷ Department of State, Central Files, 974.7301/7-2756. Top Secret; Niact. Received at 3:38 a.m. Repeated to Lima, Cairo, and Paris

¹⁸ Constantinople Convention, 1888 Convention between Great Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia and turkey, respecting the free navigation of the Suez maritime canal signed at Constantinople, October 29, 1888.

down. British cabinet urged U.S. officials **stating “Western governments must consider possible economic, political, and military measure against Egypt to ensure canal maintenance, freedom of transit through it. And reasonable tolls”**¹⁹. Britain and France were resolute in their intentions to retake the canal, to not act would be to show weakness. The U.S. feared something much greater than the fall of Colonialism, they feared the potential rise of the Communist party in Egypt and the Middle East.

The U.S. decision to not participate in the Protocol of Sèvres is a shining example of the hierarchy of importance which formed U.S. international policy. The United States desire to contain Communism overrode every other point on the list, where Communism was concerned, everything else went on the backburner. The United States feared that by taking a stance and supporting their allies, they would be taking a stance against Egyptian Nationalism. To stand against Egyptian Nationalism would be to drive Nasser straight into the hands of the U.S.S.R., opening the door to Communism in the Middle East. The events of the Suez Crisis, as well as George **Kennan’s “Long Telegram” would have a severe and undeniable impact on President Eisenhower and his drafting of the Eisenhower Doctrine.**

¹⁹ FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, SUEZ CRISIS, JULY 26–DECEMBER 31, 1956, VOLUME XVI Telegram From the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State

The Eisenhower Doctrine

On the front line of the Allied invasion into Europe was General Dwight D. **Eisenhower. Eisenhower's position and actions in World War II would be in direct** contrast to how he ran his presidential cabinet. When fighting on the front lines, subversion and planning is outweighed by the ferocity of the fighting force. The destruction and loss of life in World War II had a major impact on Eisenhower as a president. Eisenhower recognized that the United States, let alone the world, could **handle another war on the same scale. This fact played a major role in the president's** decision and policy making. Eisenhower much preferred to use covert tactics, **employing the "invisible hand"**²⁰ to spread U.S. doctrine and financials throughout the world.

While Eisenhower was a strict anti-interventionist, the cabinet with which he **surrounded himself agreed that urgent action must be taken if the Western World's** position in the Middle East was not to be challenged. At the top of the list of these fears was the threat of Soviet Communism, but other factors influenced the decision to not **intervene such as the fact that the Western World's supply of oil would be majorly** affected if passage from the canal was halted. The immediate impact of the Suez Nationalization was somewhat negligible for the U.S., most investment in the canal was from French and English sources, with only a few privately-owned U.S. shares. Eisenhower believed that if the U.S. was to intervene it simply could not be on a tri-party

²⁰ Greenstein, Fred I. *The hidden-hand presidency: Eisenhower as leader*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

basis between the U.S., Britain, and France. If action was to be taken, it must be taken on a worldwide scale, involving all the maritime powers.²¹ A temporary solution, Eisenhower believed, would be for Britain and France to release an international statement denouncing Egyptian rule of the canal leaving the decision up to an international court. If Egypt was to respond with military action to this refusal to observe new ownership, it would give Western powers a clear reason for military intervention.

Throughout Eisenhower's presidential term he remained a strict noninterventionist. He preferred using covert tactics and CIA intervention in international quarrels rather than using direct force.²² This trend continued throughout his entire presidency, and this was no coincidence. The happenings and results of the crisis at the Suez Canal had a massive impact on the foreign policy of President Eisenhower.

Eisenhower released the "Eisenhower Doctrine" on January 5th, 1957.²³ The doctrine allowed the U.S. to intervene, if requested, in the Middle East with either economic or military assistance and was deeply rooted in his beliefs of **"any nation's** right to form a government and an economic system of its own choosing is inalienable...**any nation's attempt to dictate to other nations their form of government is indefensible"**.²⁴ The doctrine specifically singled out the threat of a global Communism **ensuring the U.S.** "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression

²¹ Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington, July 27th, 1956, 8:30AM. Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, Eisenhower Diaries. Secret Drafted by Goodpaster

²² Greenstein, Fred I. *The hidden-hand presidency: Eisenhower as leader*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

²³ Eisenhower, Dwight. "President Eisenhower's Speech on the U.S. Role in the Middle East (Eisenhower Doctrine), 1957." Council on Foreign Relations. Eisenhower Doctrine, 5 Jan. 1957.

²⁴ Legacy of ashes page 97

from any nation controlled by international Communism.”²⁵ The events of the Suez Crisis taking place a year earlier, had a direct and undeniable impact on Eisenhower’s decision to release his doctrine. The doctrine intended to curb the perceived Communist growth in the Middle East, and was a direct response to that perceived threat. The Eisenhower Doctrine would dictate United States foreign policy all throughout the Cold War and provided a clear definition of U.S. sentiment and their supreme fear of Communism taking over the Middle East. This anti-communist imperative is evident from the original sending of the Long Telegraph, to the U.S. refusal to intervene in the Suez Canal, concluding with a physical document, damning the progression of global Communism in the form of the Eisenhower Doctrine. This new agenda was inspired by **the events of the Suez Crisis and Nasser’s Egypt**, and put into words in the form of the The Eisenhower Doctrine. To understand the Eisenhower Doctrine, and United States foreign policy in the Middle East, it is crucial to also understand the relationship between Nasser, Eisenhower, and other top U.S. diplomats. While the United States was creating their new agenda, President Nasser was creating an agenda of his own.

Middle Eastern Political Climate

Since the conception and conclusion of the American Revolution in 1783, U.S. politics have been staunchly anti-colonial. In the grander scheme, most U.S. politicians **believed in the right to a human being’s self**-determination, they had just fought and won a war over that very right. The conclusion of WWII in 1945 created an international power vacuum that needed to be filled. In the west stood Capitalism, in the east

²⁵ Eisenhower, Dwight. “President Eisenhower’s Speech on the U.S. Role in the Middle East (Eisenhower Doctrine), 1957.” Council on Foreign Relations. Eisenhower Doctrine, 5 Jan. 1957.

Communism, and in between those two a series of competing Colonial and ex-Colonial **nations. What would ensue was a half a decade “Cold War” that would dictate global** foreign policy and international relations into the 21st century.

Where anticommunist and pro-colonial agendas could be met simultaneously, The United States could support their Colonial allies. To do so in Egypt would be to go against everything that Nasser and his new Nationalist Egypt stood for. By supporting Colonial interests, they were actively increasing the threat of driving Nasser away from **Capitalism and towards Communism. What developed under Nasser’s rule was an** Egypt that had been flung into the modern world. Prior to the Suez Crisis, the Middle East had always been a hotspot for conflict and violence. It makes sense then when the Truman administration responded positively when British constructed a **“Middle East Command”²⁶** (MEC) to be based at the Suez Canal, with the intent of deterring and repressing any future Soviet attacks. While this decision aided in the fight against Communism it strengthened nearly seventy-year-old British Colonial subjugation which had strangled Egypt and left them deeply imbittered. The firm stance seemed necessary, the Western World relied on the passage of oil through the Middle East to repair the devastating damage from World War Two. The ensured British control of the Canal and surrounding airbases put American B-52 bombers within range of some **94 percent of the Soviet Union’s oil refineries.²⁷** This put the United States into an awkward situation of balancing its anti-colonialism versus its existing allegiances. Leaning too far

²⁶ Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt*, pp. 109-116

²⁷ Goncharov et al. *Uncertain Partners*, p. 107

in one direction could upset this balance, opening the door to Communist influence in the Middle East and Egypt.

The U.S. saw Middle Eastern leadership as weak willed and manipulatable, making it a prime target for Communist influence. As history shows, doing something **the same way twice, doesn't always produce identical results. This was the case in the U.S.'s dealings** in Egypt. The United States struggled greatly to obtain a political foothold in Egypt. Unlike in **Mosaddegh's Iran, which was ripe for revolution but lacking a cause, Nasser's Egypt was able to unify around** anti-colonial sentiments and Egyptian Nationalism. This unity meant that causing confusion and chaos among the Egyptian population would be incredibly tricky. To support the anti-colonial movement would be to directly oppose British authority, but to oppose Nasser would push him towards the Communist camp. This made the Suez Crisis and Egypt unique in its issues. Subterfuge and propaganda would not work, but the American government needed to act, to do nothing would be to show weakness.

Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles (Dulles), recommended that the American **Government make a statement along the lines of "The reckless attempt to confiscate a great international investment already in Egypt confirms that conditions are not propitious for embarking large amounts of foreign capital on another great development such as the Aswan Dam"**²⁸. Using the **Suez Crisis as the U.S.'s reason for their refusal** to fund the Aswan Dam surely embittered the Egyptian population.

²⁸ Gaddis, John Lewis *We Now Know* pp. 175-176

Nasser's Nationalist Egypt

Third World countries had long since been the plaything of Imperial powers, but Egypt would prove to be the exception to this rule. Nasser as a leader, Arab **Nationalism, and the fear of Communism put Nasser's Egypt in a unique situation to** extort the leaders of the modern world by playing on U.S. fears of Cold War Hydraulics in the form of Communism entering the Middle East. The Arab world had been fragmented for so long. Could Egypt unify the Middle East, if so they would become the center of a powerful Arab Empire? The success of these goals relied upon Abdel **Nasser's abilities as a leader. He read both the U.S.S.R.'s and U.S.'s post WWII** international policy like a book. Nasser realized he could pit the two superpowers against each other, all while sitting in the middle reaping the rewards of the ensuing fallout.

A dedication to the goal of Arab Nationalism is what drove the steam engine that was Gamal Abdel Nasser. **Nasser's** upbringing inspired a deep sense of Egyptian pride in himself, a pride which would drive him throughout his entire political career. U.S. leaders believed that if Egypt was to so radically nationalize, it could open the possibility of Egypt becoming the head of a unified Middle East. This inability to unify the Middle East made it an accessible and manipulatable stage for international conflict. The citizens of Egypt had watched for the past seventy years as its national products and resources had been extracted and exported by foreign powers. The idea of a Pan Arab unity in the Middle East seemed farfetched to say the least. There had been brief moments of partial unity such as the Umayyad Empire, Ottoman Empire, or

Muhammad's Islamic Empire but a real unity had never been reached.²⁹ While the Middle Eastern climate bred chaos, it also had the potential to be bred into a Communist or Capitalist society. The current leader and Nationalist icon Gamal Abdel Nasser could make that choice for Egypt.

Gamal Abdel Nasser

Gamal Abdel Nasser rose from the woodworks to become one of Egypt's most iconic leaders. The young, bright eyed, and sparkling toothed Egyptian found his political start in the city of Alexandria. As a young man he witnessed a clash between **protesters and police which he joined. It wasn't until after the protest that Nasser** learned the group that he had joined was a Pro Egyptian Nationalist group whose sole aim was to eradicate Colonial control from Egypt and eventually all the Arab world. After finishing school Nasser dove headfirst into a military career. His first combat was in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Throughout this career Nasser was hypnotized by the notions of Egyptian Nationalism and Anti-Colonialism. Using military and political tact, Nasser found himself at the head of a massive Egyptian Revolution under which the previous **leader "King Farouk" was ousted and** a perceived power vacuum ensued. This power vacuum was almost entirely dominated by Nasser as he proceeded to eliminate his political rivals one by one. By January of 1955 Nasser had solidified his position as the head of the RCC, (Revolutionary Command Council) and as the leader of Egypt pending a national election.

²⁹ Karsh, Efraim. *Islamic imperialism: a history*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

U.S. officials were acutely aware of the issue of Colonialism in the Middle East, but the various tribes and states of the Middle and Near East had been subjugated, and subjugated themselves for thousands of years³⁰. The British were just the current in a very long line. A true Arab unity had never been reached, and the various states and empires that had arisen throughout history fostered local loyalties, not national ones. The world was waking up to the ideas of human rights, national determination, religious determination, and basic human freedom. While ideals such as this might have been **conceived in the “first world”, they were pervasive and all inclusive. These ideals would** be spread over the entire earth, being used as a not so convincing mask for international exploitation; with these ideas came hordes of CIA agents, assassinations, espionage, military coupes, drug money, weapons, and military training. No matter the amount of subversion that came along with these messages, the message seemed to stick. The Middle East was ripe for change, but would this change come from within? It would take leaders, strong men who would take strong action, if the Middle East was to stand any chance against the dominant imperial powers surrounding them.

in World War II, a charismatic, determined leader, led his own nation and the rest of the world into a chaotic rabbit hole. The wounds from this war were still fresh, Europe was still rebuilding. Adolf Hitler was only one man, but his words and ideologies inspired a country to undertake a world war. If this had happened once it could happen again. If the Arab world was to unify as a single nation their vast reserves of oil and strategic location would make them a formidable enemy. This fear might have been a reality, but if so it was an incredibly slow moving one. Nasser fought tooth and nail to achieve some

³⁰ Karsh, Efraim. *Islamic imperialism: a history*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

sort of Egyptian Nationalism, albeit a Pan-Arab Nationalism was far from being conceived. Even if this was the case Nasser saw this Pan-Arab unity as vitally important to eradicating Colonialism in the Middle East and Africa. The idea of eradication of Colonialism drove Nasser, it was what he based his entire social and political movement on. In this respect the U.S. and Egypt were the same. Both nations saw Colonialism as an outdated evil that needed to be halted. Alongside this, was the fact that Nasser was no Communist. He did not dream of a social revolution sweeping the world, he simply dreamt of an Egypt free from Colonial rule.

Unlike the U.S., Nasser was free from the constraints of the Cold War. At this period almost every action that America took both domestically and internationally had **larger Cold War implications. Nasser's political movement was fast paced and without** regard for the larger Cold War ramifications. He would act in the interest of Egypt, not of that on a Global Cold War scale, and this scared U.S. politicians. Nasser's **refusal to** cooperate with the U.S. greatly frustrated Secretary of State Dulles. His response was one of attempted Egyptian isolation. In 1955 under heavy United States planning the Baghdad Pact was put into action. The pact, modeled after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), effectively walled off Egypt from Europe and the Western World. The Baghdad Pact isolated Egypt and Nasser, pushing him further away from the western powers into non-alignment. This non-alignment was further solidified by **Nasser's attendance at the Bandung Conference.**³¹ It was at this conference that Nasser began seriously considering the idea of an arms deal with the U.S.S.R. Nasser would have much preferred U.S. weapons over U.S.S.R. weapons, but the U.S. refused

³¹ Prashad, Vijay. *The darker nations: a peoples history of the Third World*. New York: New Press, 2004.

to match **the U.S.S.R.'s** offer. It was after this refusal that Nasser openly acknowledged his ties to the U.S.S.R., and began using these ties to manipulate his relations with the U.S.

It was not just the U.S. that Nasser did not trust, he was extremely wary of U.S.S.R. intentions in the Middle East, but the U.S.S.R. were relatively short sighted in their ability to gain a physical or ideological foothold in Egypt. Ignorance played a part, The U.S.S.R. was not a Colonial power and it had no experience dealing in the Middle East. Orders from Moscow were meant to be strictly followed by local Communist groups emplaced in the Middle East. In many cases these orders were not in line with those of the local political groups. To compound this authorities in Egypt regularly detained and imprisoned local communists.³² The U.S.S.R. proved again shortsighted by supporting the creation of the Jewish state in Palestine. By opposing it they could have stood to gain powerful allies in the Middle East. It seems that the U.S.S.R. wholeheartedly underestimated Egyptian capabilities, in 1948 they negotiated a deal to barter Egyptian cotton for Soviet grain, but then irritated Cairo by selling the grain on the world market at prices below what the Egyptians were charging.³³

In the words of Secretary of State Dulles, Arab **Nationalism was “like an overflowing stream...You cannot stand in front of it or oppose it frontally, but you must try to keep it inbounds...Although Nasser is not as dangerous as Hitler was, he relies on the same hero myth, and we must try to deflate that myth.”³⁴ From this comment it**

³² Weiner, Tim *Legacy of Ashes*

³³ Gaddis, John Lewis *We Now Know pp 166*

³⁴ Gaddis, John Lewis *We Now Know pp 175*

seems that U.S. politicians, especially secretary Dulles, were afraid of what Nasser could potentially achieve if he successfully unified the Middle East.

Conclusion

The Suez Crisis marked the first public exposure of American foreign policy in the Middle East since the conclusion of World War II. This policy, which took precedence over all else, was the absolute containment of the Communist threat across the entire globe. By directly participating in the Protocol of Sèvres, The United States would have taken a firm stance against Egyptian Nationalism. Opposing Egyptian Nationalism would be to push Nasser directly into the arms of the Communists, opening the door to Communism in Egypt. By refusing to strongly react to the Suez Crisis, the United States gave themselves a cushion of time in which to evaluate and assess the reality of the threat of Communism in the Middle East. Pressures such as allegiances to allies, the rebuilding of Europe, and the free passage of oil from the Suez Canal, were all pushed aside by the threat of a Communist takeover in Egypt. Events such as: the Long Telegram, the proposed funding of the Aswan Dam, the Baghdad Pact, the Suez Crisis, the Protocol of Sèvres, and the drafting of the Eisenhower doctrine, show how the United States used restraint and diplomacy in Egypt, rather than military action and direct intervention.

The Suez Crisis is unique in its issues. In the Vietnam war the United States chose direct military intervention. In north Vietnam, Communism was established, there was no question as to whether Communism was a local threat or not. Based on this

observation the United States intervened on a large scale. In Egypt, during the Suez Crisis, **the threat of Communism hadn't fully been established**; The United States understood that reacting in any bipolar manner would open Egypt to the threat of Communism. After all Nasser was not a Communist he was a Nationalist. Nationalism dominated his political career and the takeover of the Suez Canal; although, Nasser was not afraid to open his country to Communism if it meant further obtaining his Nationalistic goals. This was solidified when Nasser attended the Bandung conference and met many other like-minded leaders who had been swayed by the allure of Communism. **it was Nasser's abilities as a Third World leader, playing** the U.S.S.R. against the U.S., which branded him as one of the most influential Middle Eastern leaders to date. The U.S.'s decision making during the Suez Crisis simultaneously substantiated U.S. Cold War global priorities and served as a catalyst for Colonel Nasser to serve his own ends by playing the U.S. against the U.S.S.R in two specific ways: 1) The U.S. decision to not actively participate in the Protocol of Sèvres reveals a burgeoning United States-Middle East Cold War foreign policy, which revealed U.S. international priorities well beyond Egypt; 2) Nasser was not a Communist, rather he was a Nationalist; however, when the United States refused to support his nationalist agenda, he realized he could get their attention by playing to their fear of spreading U.S.S.R. Communism in the Middle East.

The ramifications of the Suez Crisis followed mankind into the 21st century. Nasser and his ambitious nationalization of Egypt marked a milestone in the long story of Arab Nationalism. This idea has been carried into the modern day Middle East, where conflict continues to rage over the ideas of Islamic Imperialism, and an independent

Arab Empire. President Nasser helped solidify the idea that a charismatic and intelligent leader, especially one located in the Middle East, could use their position to extort the leading nations of the modern world. Although the threat of a Communist Soviet Empire is not present in the modern day, the echoes of the decisions made during the Cold War are still sounding. Conflicts in Egypt, Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba have shaped the modern understanding of Communism, Capitalism, and U.S. foreign policy. Analyzing history such as the Eisenhower Doctrine or the events of the Suez Crisis and its ensuing fallout can help humanity predict and interpret the chaos of the modern day Middle East.

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