

Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis of 1956
The Anatomy of a Flawed Personality

by

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When Anthony Eden became British Prime Minister on 6 April 1955 it seemed the culmination of a brilliant career in politics. Less than two years later that career was over, effectively destroyed by his behaviour over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company by the Egyptian President, Gamal Nasser.

This study will examine Eden's actions and motives and demonstrate that his claim to have been an ardent opponent of appeasement in 1938 was untrue; that his claim that Nasser was a dictator like Mussolini and had to be stopped is contradicted by the evidence; that Nasser's control of the canal was unchanged by the nationalisation; that there was no legal basis for Britain interfering in the running of the canal; that Eden's recurring bouts of illness can have had no more than a minor impact on his actions and that it was Eden's own flawed character that guided his actions.

Eden ended up lying to the country, lying to the House of Commons and, indeed, lying to himself in his attempt to justify his actions. It was a sad end to what had been a glittering career.

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Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis of 1956

The Anatomy of a Flawed Personality

Introduction

The Iraq war was indeed the worst error in British foreign policy since the unsuccessful invasion of the Suez Canal in 1956¹

For an event that happened almost 60 years ago, 'Suez' is still a byword for British political ineptitude, as the quote above demonstrates. The British Prime Minister in 1956 was Sir

Anthony Eden, and it is his name that will be forever associated with the Suez debacle, just as Neville Chamberlain is tainted with Munich and Tony Blair with Iraq. Other British politicians were, of course, involved; Harold Macmillan, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Selwyn Lloyd, as Foreign Secretary, played their parts but Eden was undoubtedly the driving force, and it is his behaviour, before and during the crisis, with which this study will largely be concerned.

Born in 1897 Anthony Eden was first elected to Parliament for the

¹ *The Independent*, 31/5/2014, 11

Conservative Party in 1923 at the age of 26, following service in the army during the First World War, where he rose to the rank of brigade major. Rapid political advancement followed and he was appointed Foreign Secretary in 1935 at the age of 38. Less than three years later Eden resigned, finding himself at odds with Neville Chamberlain's policies concerning the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Following the outbreak of war in 1939 Eden was soon back in office, initially as Secretary of State for the Dominions, before becoming Foreign Secretary again in December 1940. Throughout the war he was Churchill's right-hand man and heir apparent. His tenure at the Foreign Office lasted until July 1945 when the Labour Party took office. Subsequent to the Conservative victory in the 1951 election he was reinstated as Foreign Secretary, a post he retained until April 1955 when he was appointed Prime Minister. During his third tenure as Foreign Secretary he played a leading role in the Geneva negotiations that led to settlements of the wars in Korea and Indochina. The difficulties between Yugoslavia and Italy over Trieste were overcome, substantially through Eden's efforts. British troops were withdrawn from Sudan, which was granted independence. Britain also signed an agreement with Egypt to withdraw its troops from the Suez Canal zone. Eden was the leading proponent of both these withdrawals in the face of considerable criticism from within his own party and elsewhere. He was popular in the country where his reputation was of being staunchly against the pre war appeasement of the European dictators. Within two months of taking over from Winston Churchill, in April 1955, at the age of 57, he called a General Election, increasing the Conservative majority in the House of Commons from 17 to 60.

He seemed to have the world at his feet and had his career ended at that point he might well have been regarded as one of the greatest Foreign Secretaries in British history. Unfortunately, he is rarely remembered for his diplomatic successes. Rather, he is forever tarnished by the debacle of Suez. Despite serving as Prime Minister for less than two years, he has consistently been voted the worst Prime Minister of Britain since the Second World War and, indeed, of the Twentieth Century.² How did this remarkable decline in his fortunes arise? When Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Egyptian President, announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956 Eden's immediate response was to threaten force to reclaim international control of the company and to depose Nasser. From that point on he gave no thought to the inevitable results of that approach. Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the Opposition, encapsulated the ramifications of British military intervention against Egypt during a parliamentary debate in its aftermath.

² http://www.leeds.ac.uk.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/news/article/867/academics_rate_brown_one_of_the_worst_post_1945_pms (accessed 1/5/2013)

The Suez Canal is blocked for many months, we are in great difficulties over oil supplies, we face financial and economic crises at home, we have lost any influence that we had in the Arab States, we have thrown the Arab States wide open to Russian influence, we have created very grave divisions in the Commonwealth, we have created a breach in the Anglo-American understanding which used to exist, and we have very seriously damaged our reputation abroad for fair-mindedness, honesty and support for the United Nations.³

Eden failed to ensure that the United States would support Britain's actions (or, at the very least, not object to them). He failed to consider the ramifications if the military action had succeeded; failed to appreciate the financial pressures that Britain faced and the adverse effect on these that this endeavour would have; failed, despite being a long time proponent of the United Nations and its predecessor, the League of Nations, to obtain United Nations authorisation and ultimately failed to appreciate that Britain's position in the world had changed. As *The Times* obituary put it: 'He was the last Prime Minister to believe Britain was a great power and the first to confront a crisis which proved she was not.'⁴

How did this situation arise where British and French troops invaded Egypt, a member of the United Nations and leader of the Arab world? Why was Eden not interested in a diplomatic solution? An experienced diplomat and negotiator, fluent in Arabic, and successful Foreign Secretary before becoming Prime Minister, how did Eden not foresee the ignominy that would be heaped on him when the collusion with France and Israel was revealed? How could he have expected to maintain good relations with the Arab world having attacked one of their number? How could he expect America to tolerate an anachronistic imperial adventure when it was vying with the Soviet Union for influence in the Third World? Why did he fail to heed the clear warnings from United States President Dwight Eisenhower that the United States would not tolerate the use of force to reimpose international control over the Suez Canal? How could he, as the Labour M.P. Denis Howell asked, '... think for a moment that when they started to make war on Egypt they could continue to get oil from the Middle East?'⁵ These are the questions that this study will seek to answer.

Until Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company, in July 1956, Eden's approach to disagreements had generally (although not always) been one of negotiation and

³ *Hansard*, 6/12/56, 1557

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4757181.stm> Extracted 7 May 2014

⁵ *Hansard*, 6/12/56, 1535

compromise. Why did this incident cause him to abandon his principles in favour of aggression, forever tarnishing his reputation? Indeed, not only did he act in such an apparently uncharacteristic way he also found he had to lie to disguise what he had done. He lied to the press. He lied to the public and he lied to Parliament. In the end he even seems to have lied to himself. As David Astor wrote in the *Observer* on 4 November 1956: 'We had not realised that our Government was capable of such folly and such crookedness.'⁶

Eden himself always claimed that he saw Nasser as a modern day Mussolini; a fascist dictator who had to be stopped immediately before he went on to greater and more destructive actions. In *Full Circle* he referred to his opposition to the appeasement policy of Neville Chamberlain in 1938 and claimed his actions in 1956 were those that should have been adopted 18 years previously.⁷ Does this claim stand up to serious analysis? This thesis will show that it does not. The Suez Group, a right wing section of the Conservative Party in Parliament, certainly agreed with Eden. Their name related to Britain's withdrawal of troops from the Suez Canal zone in the period from October 1954 to June 1956, which they opposed, rather than the actions taken after July 1956, but they supported Eden vociferously throughout the period leading to the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt in November 1956. In the days immediately following Nasser's nationalisation of the Canal Company support for a strong response was practically universal in Britain. Referring to Nasser's actions Gaitskell commented: 'It is all very familiar. It is exactly the same that we encountered from Mussolini and Hitler in those years before the war.'⁸ To a rational observer, however, this equating of Nasser with Mussolini was nonsensical. Gilles Martinet's analysis in *France Observateur* showed why.

Those who now say that the situation facing the Western governments is an 'exact parallel' with Munich should tell us what is the threat that is causing those governments to waver. It certainly cannot be Egypt's military might, even more limited than Israel's, ... Still less can it be its industrial potential, which is virtually non-existent. ... The bold front that Nasser sometimes puts on in his propagandist speeches can deceive only those who are willing to be deceived.⁹

As time passed and shipping continued to pass through the canal unhindered opinion began to change. Many, perhaps even a majority, continued to support Eden and a military

⁶ *Observer*, 4/11/56, 8

⁷ Eden, 1960, 431

⁸ *Hansard*, 6/8/56, 1613

⁹ *France Observateur*, 2/8/56, 4-5

response but an increasing number now opposed such actions. The Labour Party, and the press that supported it, in particular, began to argue that the matter should be resolved by negotiation. They urged that the Government should refer the matter to the United Nations. Eden refused. Conferences of the major users of the canal were held but Nasser refused to attend. When their proposals for settlement were put to him he rejected them. He challenged Eden to take the case to the International Court of Justice arguing that he had done nothing more than nationalise an Egyptian company. Eden, recognising that he was on weak ground legally, refused. He argued that action was necessary to preserve trust in international treaties and obligations. Had Britain and France been able to act militarily immediately this argument might well have carried the day. As time progressed, however, even Eden could see that it was inadequate. He began to search for a *casus belli*. Having tried and failed to block the canal, through *Operation Pileup*, he welcomed the French-Israeli plan with open arms. The only problem here was that the plan (or collusion) had to be kept a secret. No-one could ever be allowed to know that the Israeli attack across Sinai was anything other than a wholly Israeli action. Eden had now got himself into the invidious position where his whole strategy was based on a deception – a lie.

Following the Second World War, Britain was no longer a great power. Neither was its partner in the Suez venture, France. There were now only two great powers, or superpowers as they became known - the United States and the Soviet Union. Neither Britain nor France was capable of launching a military attack at short notice; particularly when the attack was to be at a distance of some 2,000 miles. Nor could either country hope to be victorious in the face of opposition from one or both super-powers. Despite this Eden went to great lengths to exclude the Americans from his plans. Why did he make such an elementary mistake?

Following the end of the First World War a mandate over Palestine had been granted to Britain by the League of Nations. In essence, this meant that Britain was entrusted with the administration of the area. During the period between the World Wars the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, referred to in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, began to seem a realistic prospect and a number of Zionist para-military groups were formed with the intention of forcing the British to withdraw. By 1948 the British had had enough of attacks by these para-military groups, the Irgun and Lehi, or Stern Gang. Palestine was of limited strategic significance and had no oil. The British left and the State of Israel was born. From the beginning Arab opposition to Israel was overwhelming. For many years British policy in the Middle East had generally been pro Arab. They had oil, on which British industry depended, and their rulers were mostly sympathetic to Britain. Israel had

no oil and Britain had no reason to feel friendly towards it. Eight years after the establishment of the State of Israel Suez changed everything. Britain was now an ally of Israel and both were involved in an attack on an Arab country. This total change of Middle East strategy seems to have occurred with little or no consideration. Eden was so fixated with deposing Nasser that nothing else mattered.

Economically, Britain had emerged from the Second World War almost bankrupt. Money was desperately needed for reconstruction and most of it came from North America under the 'Anglo-American Loan' scheme. The total was \$3.75bn from the United States and \$1.2bn from Canada. These loans were finally repaid, with interest of 2% p.a., on 29 December 2006. By 1956 Britain's economic state was still parlous. Its reserves of gold and dollars were dangerously low. Inflation was creeping upwards. None of this seems to have impinged on Eden's determination to launch a military operation over Suez. Britain's industry and hence its economic growth depended on Middle East oil. It could not afford to buy oil outside the Sterling Area, for example from the United States. Eden's government made no provision against any interruption in its oil supply. How could he have allowed that to happen?

Eden was, of course, a man of his time. As a young man he had seen the British Empire at its height. The empire on which the sun never set. Recently Lord Carrington, Foreign Secretary under Margaret Thatcher, said, 'For somebody like me who's very old and was brought up in the days when most of the world was coloured red, I find it very sad and humiliating that we aren't the great power we used to be.'¹⁰ For Eden, almost 60 years earlier, Nasser's behaviour must have been even more galling. Pressed by members of his own party, Conservative supporting newspapers and many members of the general public to 'do something' but knowing that he could never get the United Nations to support him he snatched at the opportunity presented by France and Israel. He gave no consideration to the consequences.

This study will explore the standard explanations of Eden's actions, i.e. Nasser was a dictator who had to be stopped; that Eden's ill health seriously affected his judgment; that British control of the Suez Canal was essential to the British economy; and show why none

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22463317> extracted 14 May 2013

of them stand up to detailed analysis.¹¹ It will examine Eden's character and his reaction to pressure and show how these resulted in his ignoring warnings and advice that should have made him reconsider. It will show that the overriding factor was his inability to control the situation as his room for manoeuvre reduced. Although others played their parts in this misadventure, particularly Harold Macmillan, Eden was the Prime Minister. Everything that was done had his stamp of approval and when the situation turned to disaster he has to be held responsible. He found himself the captive of his own rhetoric and the expectations of the Conservative party, particularly the Suez Group. He had painted himself into a corner where his only option was a military attack. As Nigel Nicolson, Conservative M.P. for Bournemouth East and Christchurch, later recalled:

He [Eden] felt his role to be that of the strong man who was going to speak up for England and for the Empire for this is what the Tory party in the Country really wanted and in a sense he was right. They did want it.¹²

This study will concentrate, so far as possible, on original documentation. This will include: Eden's autobiographies, papers and diaries; Evelyn Shuckburgh's diaries; the papers of Macmillan and Selwyn Lloyd; *Hansard*; other official British records; US official records; contemporary newspapers; Conservative Party records; Anthony Nutting's memoirs; memoirs of civil servants who were involved and correspondence between Eden and Eisenhower. It will show how Eden's character and self esteem underpinned everything he did and that his claims to have been anti appeasement, in the run up to the Second World War, were fanciful. It will look briefly at the situation in Cyprus in 1956 where another group was challenging Britain's authority in the Eastern Mediterranean, and show how Eden's actions there were just as blinkered as they were over Egypt. It will touch briefly on the role of Macmillan, Eden's Chancellor of the Exchequer who seriously misled Eden on the attitude of the Americans and failed to consider the financial and economic consequences of military action.¹³ Evidence will be presented mainly by way of quotes

¹¹ See, for example, Thorpe's authorised biography of Eden where he says that: '... for Eden the two imperatives were *economic* and *diplomatic*. ... Eden wanted to demonstrate that those who broke agreements should not succeed or be rewarded.' Thorpe, 2003, 489 or Dutton's biography of Eden where he claims: '... Eden's policies in 1956 were determined by an assessment of the gravity of the crisis, the enormity of the issues at stake and the impossibility of accepting defeat ...' Dutton, 1977, 480. Rhodes James argues that throughout the Suez crisis, Eden 'was determined to destroy this new Mussolini.' Rhodes James, 1987, 457. Owen's article on the effect of Eden's ill health concludes: 'A fit and well Anthony Eden would not have made all those mistakes.' Owen, 2005, 401. Eden, himself, claimed: 'the economic life of Western Europe was threatened with disruption by the Egyptian seizure of the canal. Here was an issue of the first importance, in which an international agreement was at stake.' Eden, 1960, 424

¹² Thompson, 1971, 125

¹³ For a more detailed look at Macmillan's role see, for example: D R Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan*; A Horne, *Macmillan: The Official Biography*.

from those who were there at the time, including Eden himself, interspersed with analysis. This evidence will show clearly that Eden's explanations and justifications do not stand up. His wilful blindness meant he never gave the Suez crisis the dispassionate analysis it cried out for. He constantly rejected any evidence or opinion that did not chime with his own. Always worried about what people thought of him he cut off all his avenues of retreat leaving his only option to plunge on hoping for the best. It will also show that Eden's own poor health is unlikely to have played more than a minor role in his decision making. It was simply his own character that led to his undoing. Eden was a weak man desperately trying to look strong; an honest man reduced to lying; a diplomat out of his depth in the world of politics.

Most commentators on Eden's behaviour during the Suez crisis start their analysis with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956. Others start with his appointment as Prime Minister in April 1955. Occasional reference is made to Eden's longstanding poor health and to his opposition to the policy of appeasement followed by Neville Chamberlain before the Second World War. This is inadequate. To explain Eden's behaviour in the Autumn of 1956 it is essential to understand his nature. What sort of man was he? It would be easy to accept Eden's own claim that he was a man of principle who had been opposed to appeasement in the 1930s and remained so opposed in his dealings with Nasser. He had seen how the European dictators had behaved and had no doubt that Nasser would act similarly. The only way to deal with him was to refuse to negotiate and to immediately threaten the use of force. As will be seen, however, the truth was very different. Eden was a man of prejudices and fluctuating emotions; lacking confidence in himself and overly sensitive to criticism. He only resigned from the Cabinet in February 1938 when he felt that negotiations with Italy were proving counter productive. Britain was making many concessions and getting nothing in return. He did not object to making the concessions, just to getting no corresponding concessions from the Italians in return. On Germany, he failed to see that here was the much greater threat and recommended continuing discussions with German officials. He was often unsure of himself, looking to others for reassurance. His political ambitions waxed and waned. At one time he would profess no interest in politics and, indeed, an active dislike, while at others he chafed under Churchill's refusal to retire to let him take over as Prime Minister. On more than one occasion he commented on his dislike of his Conservative Party colleagues. He was indecisive, constantly changing his mind. He was quite happy to negotiate when the use of force was not an option, such as over Austria, Korea, Indochina or Trieste, but when force was an option, such as Cyprus and Egypt, it was his first choice. Outwardly he gave the

impression of being always calm and unruffled but privately he was constantly anxious about his public image and found criticism very difficult to bear. He was certainly prejudiced against Catholics, Spaniards, Poles, Jews and non whites and suspicious of the Americans. He often lost his temper when dealing with those close to him to the extent that Evelyn Shuckburgh, his Principal Private Secretary from 1951 to 1954, referred to him as acting like a child.¹⁴ His oratory was poor, a failing of which he was only too aware, especially when compared to his illustrious predecessor, Winston Churchill.

Chapter one looks at the image that Eden presented to the public: calm. peace-loving, diplomatic. It will also investigate the various health problems that dogged Eden throughout his political life.

Chapter two examines what Eden was really like: his constant need for reassurance, his inability to accept criticism, his childish behaviour, his inability to make up his mind.

Chapter three considers Eden's reaction to mounting press and public criticism: his lack of friends in the media, his inability to shrug off this criticism.

Chapter four looks at his claim to have been a constant opponent of appeasement in the run up to the Second World War and shows why this was far from the truth.

Chapter five examines Eden's relationship with Nasser before the Suez crisis erupted, showing that it was his hatred of the Egyptian leader that underlay his position when the crisis occurred.

Chapter six looks at the legal advice provided by the Government's legal advisor, the Attorney General and by the Foreign Office Legal Advisor and how Eden refused to even look at this, knowing that his actions were, indeed, illegal.

Chapter seven briefly analyses the roles played by France and Israel in the invasion of Egypt. It also examines the part played by the man who gained most from Eden's downfall, Harold Macmillan.

Chapter eight deals with events from the end of July 1956, when Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company to the date of Eden's resignation in January 1957, with particular reference to the changing situation that led Eden to collusion with France and Israel.

The conclusion will summarise the evidence brought out in the previous chapters and answer the questions posed in the introduction.

¹⁴ SP MS191/1/2/2

Chapter I

Eden's Public Persona and Health Problems

Anthony's father was a mad baronet and his mother a very beautiful woman. That's Anthony —half mad baronet, half beautiful woman.¹

This chapter will examine the image that Eden presented to the world; a man of peace and supporter of the United Nations; a man of principle who accepted that the world was changing and that Britain had to change with it. The health problems that plagued his political life will also be analysed. What were those problems and to what extent did they affect him during the Suez Crisis?

Until he became Prime Minister Eden had gone to great lengths to demonstrate that he was a man of peace. He was a firm believer in the United Nations and before that the League of Nations. Throughout his political life his speeches reflect that support and his desire for peace. Referring to the United Nations in a speech at the Guildhall in 1946 he said:

We now all live not only in the same country but in the same parish and almost on the same street. ... There is no escape from rubbing shoulders. ... And so we have to seek some form of world order or endure world brawling and world chaos.²

In 1947 he welcomed the Marshall Plan:

By signing the Charter at San Francisco the nations concerned agreed to merge their national sovereignties in certain respects when they accepted limitations on their international conduct. ... But surely this is exactly what we all want to see, both in the political and in the economic sphere.³

Two years later, during a speech at a *Save the Children* event, he referred to his past history: 'I have spent the large part of my life in an endeavour to promote international understanding and goodwill.'⁴ In a speech at Warwick in 1951 he reiterated his support for the United Nations: 'Against the background of a grave international situation is the bright gleam of the United Nations forces in Korea.'⁵ In a speech at a United Nations dinner in May 1951 he declared: 'It is only when the United Nations has full power and can exercise

¹ Cosgrave, 1981, 12 According to Cosgrave, this was RAB Butler's description of Eden.

² AP 12/3/30

³ AP 12/3/51

⁴ AP 12/3/88

⁵ AP 12/3/186A

its true authority that the nations of the world can hope to enjoy security and peace.'⁶ The following month, at a meeting of Leamington Rotarians, he followed that with: ' ... the United Nations set out to prove, not only that aggression does not pay, but also that attacks on small nations could not pass unchallenged.'⁷ In October 1952 he spoke at a service of dedication during United Nations week. 'We believe that disputes between nations must be settled by peaceful means.'⁸ It was not just the United Nations that Eden looked to to ensure a more peaceful world. At an El Alamein reunion speech in October 1953 he spoke about the desire for peace in the country. 'Everyone in this country wants peace: not least those who, like you and me, have seen war at first hand.'⁹ In a radio broadcast in January 1955 he said: 'Peace is more important to every one of us than anything else in the world.'¹⁰ Later that year, in a speech recorded for his constituency of Warwick and Leamington, he spoke on the same topic. 'All my life I've worked for peace. I shall continue to do so by all and every means.'¹¹ Soon after becoming Prime Minister he spoke at the English Speaking Union. ' ... with perseverance, the harvest can yet be won, and all its sheaves be peace.'¹² Later that month he commented: 'It has always been necessary to set limits to the power of the strong over the weak.'¹³ Just before the Suez crisis erupted Eden was still offering the same views. At a speech in Lancashire on 14 July 1956 he referred to proceedings at the previous month's Commonwealth Conference: 'Our discussions have helped understanding between the nations and peace in the world. That is our first objective. It always will be.'¹⁴

Eden's speeches also demonstrate an understanding of the desire for independence by many of the people of the British colonies. The first draft of his notes for a speech for Empire Day in May 1951 give a flavour of this.

... though there have been many empires in history, ... there have been none like the British Empire - an association of free and independent nations ... bound together ... by subtle and

⁶ AP 12/3/201

⁷ AP 12/3/208

⁸ AP 12/3/244

⁹ AP 12/3/255

¹⁰ AP 12/3/310A

¹¹ AP 12/3/344B

¹² AP 12/3/372U

¹³ AP 12/3/383K

¹⁴ AP 12/3/529

enduring ties which are all the stronger for being elastic. ...We may think that certain colonies are not yet ready for further political steps forward; and we know that, left to themselves, the public services, ... would deteriorate in efficiency and, indeed, integrity: but they, the people themselves, are often prepared to sacrifice these qualities in order to achieve what they call "political freedom".I would sooner be a step ahead of the other fellow rather than a step behind.¹⁵

The final draft was less dramatic but still showed sympathy for the aspirations of colonial people.

... there has never been one that has evolved as the British Empire has done, until it is today an association of free and independent nations in a true partnership. ... we in this country and our overseas friends should have nothing to fear in the self government of the colonies in the future. But all this will take time and thought and careful planning, goodwill and understanding.¹⁶

In the House of Commons on 17 December 1953 he warned: 'It has to be realised that there are new forces of nationalism stirring in the world today, and they are as strong in Arab countries as they are anywhere else.'¹⁷ In a speech in Newcastle in March 1955 he expanded on this theme:

It is we who wish to give them [British colonies] a freedom of choice about their status in the world. Therefore so long as we are not panicked into a hasty surrender of our responsibilities before our job is done, the fact that an independent status is realised is a fulfillment of our policies not a defeat. We can no more turn it back [the tide of nationalism] than could the courtiers of King Canute. If we were to try we should not maintain our influence as some pretend; we should lose it for all time.¹⁸

Eden was also concerned that instability in the Middle East might lead to an increased risk of war in that area and the possibility of further Soviet influence over Middle East governments. In a debate in the House of Commons on 29 July 1954 he argued:

... if this House wants to see an end to hostilities between Israel and the Arab States - and surely we must all want that - the only hope of doing so is that we should be able to create for ourselves better relations with both sides.¹⁹

At the Conservative Party conference in October 1954 he urged better relations with Egypt to try to encourage stability in the region.

¹⁵ AP 12/3/198

¹⁶ AP 12/3/198B

¹⁷ *Hansard*, 17/12/56, 693

¹⁸ AP 12/3/323B

¹⁹ *Hansard*, 29/7/54, 616

We want to do everything in our power to bring about increased stability and prosperity throughout all these Middle East lands. ... We could never hope to do this effectively so long as Anglo Egyptian relations remained embittered.

This was followed by a very similar comment in October 1955 at that year's Party conference. 'We have worked for a long time past by all manner of methods to try to bring about a reduction of tension in that part of the world.'²⁰ He recognised that the Arab nations were basing their case on UN resolution 181 which concerned the initial partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs whereas the Israelis based their claim on the land they occupied after the 1949 armistice following the first Arab Israeli war. His suggestion was that the Israelis should trade land for peace.²¹

During Eden's final period as Foreign Secretary Britain had, after many fruitless earlier attempts, finally reached agreement with Egypt that all British troops would leave the Suez Canal Zone. This was a momentous step, opposed by many on the right of the Conservative Party, including, initially, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. Shuckburgh records an occasion in 1953 when Churchill, referring to Chamberlain's ill-fated visit to Munich, commented: '[I] never knew before that Munich was situated on the Nile.'²² Despite this opposition Eden pursued the policy of reaching agreement with Egypt. In a speech in December 1955 he referred to this agreement.

Should we have stayed? Were we wrong to make an agreement? I am more than ever convinced that we were right. [The] strain which maintaining this position would have imposed would have gravely handicapped us elsewhere. Worse than that relations with [the] entire Arab world would have gravely deteriorated. We should, by now, be in bitter conflict.²³ Ironically, these were considerations that totally escaped him in 1956. He again defended the position later in a speech to the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee on 6 March 1956.

Should we have dethroned Nasser before leaving [the Suez Canal Zone]? We should have had to re-occupy Egypt. ... It would be a disastrous situation, if we were to support the Jews, while the Russians supported the Arabs.²⁴

Eden had also shown a real enthusiasm to forge some form of lasting peace in the Middle East, between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

²⁰ AP 12/3/397F

²¹ AP 12/3/420K

²² Shuckburgh, 1986, 75

²³ AP 12/3/408C

²⁴ AP 12/3/466H

All this was thrown to one side when it came to his time as Prime Minister. No longer was he the man of peace when dealing with Nasser in Egypt and EOKA in Cyprus. No longer was he a supporter of the United Nations. What induced this sudden change in direction? Why did Eden abandon his 'man of peace' stance? A number of explanations have been put forward, not least by Eden himself. He claimed that Nasser was a dictator and, as Eden had been an opponent of appeasement in the run up to the Second World War, so he would not deal in the appeasement of Nasser. Others have suggested that control of the canal was essential to maintain Britain's oil supplies or that Eden's poor health played a part.²⁵ The better explanation lies in an understanding of Eden's true character, his lack of experience in the political, as opposed to diplomatic, arena and his inability to cope under pressure. Eden's health is discussed below and the other theories are the subject of the next chapter.

Ill health dogged Eden throughout his political career. His diaries refer to migraines and other symptoms on many occasions. The entry for 19 July 1941 reads: '[Doctor] diagnosed "Duodenal" but was not absolutely sure.' The following day he wrote: '... a night of only one bout of pain.'²⁶ Similar entries appear for 1942. On 10 March he recorded: 'Feeling rather wretched after bad night with the "old pain" as Beatrice calls it.' The entry for 10 May reads: 'Not feeling at all well ...' Migraines made their first appearance in the entry for 5 December: 'Unhappily I first had dazzles - then headache.'²⁷ The problem with migraines is that they can vary in intensity from mildly inconvenient to totally disabling. It seems safe, however, to infer that his migraines must have been serious to warrant constant mention in his diaries. Similar entries followed for 1943. On 7 March he noted: 'Had a wretched night. Felt sick.' This was followed on 10 July with: 'Did not feel well all day.' Eden enjoyed a game of tennis but on 11 July a new issue appeared: '... troubled by what I fear may be tennis elbow.' This continued on 25 July: 'Good deal of pain in my elbow.' By 14 September Eden was consulting his doctor again: '[Dr] Rossdale & his fellow doctor came in during morning. Latter was emphatic that I must have tonsils out ...' The migraines returned on 3 October: 'Those wretched dazzles again.'²⁸ The diary entry for 3

²⁵ e.g. David Owen, *The effect of Prime Minister Anthony Eden's illness on his decision-making during the Suez crisis*

²⁶ Both AP 20/1/21

²⁷ All AP 20/1/22

²⁸ All AP 20/1/23

April 1944 records: ' ... I had bad attack of migraine in Cabinet.'²⁹ As a result of these various debilities Eden had a week off during the height of the Second World War, from 17 to 23 April 1944, when he was Foreign Secretary. Matters, however, did not improve. As his diary for 29 March 1945 reveals: 'Then to see W[inston] & talked of many things until luncheon. Told him I must rest.'³⁰ This suggests that he felt his various illnesses were caused by stress.

Eden's diary entries were sparse during the period when the Conservatives were out of power (July 1945 to February 1951) but comments on his own health again became prominent as the likelihood of a return to power approached. On 19 January 1951 he wrote: 'Felt as though I had a temperature all evening. Ate and drank very little and felt pretty wretched.'³¹ Once the Conservatives returned to office Eden's health problems came to the fore again. On 30 March 1953 he reported: 'Last night pain returned. Very tiresome.' The following month brought decisive action from his doctors. As his diary entry for 4 April 1953 shows: 'Doctors gave their verdict which was certainly emphatic. They would not let me go [on] my journey & advised immediate operation.'³² The operation in question was to remove gall stones but during it Eden's bile duct was damaged. This, in turn, led to a series of further operations. Eden never fully recovered, suffering from intermittent fevers and pain for the rest of his life. On 6 February 1956, for example, he wrote to his wife from Canada: 'I am well but was very tired yesterday, so stayed in bed all day.' During the Suez crisis, on 21 August 1956, he wrote: 'Felt rather wretched after a poor night. Awake 3.30 onwards with pain. Had to take pethidine in the end.'³³ Despite this he did manage to chair a Cabinet meeting the next day. His diary also shows that he consulted his doctors on at least ten occasions between 26 July and 31 October 1956, in addition to spending a weekend in hospital during this period.³⁴

It is difficult to estimate how great the effect of this ill health had on his decision making. Eden, himself, denied that his poor health and medication had any effect. To compound this difficulty, Eden's medical records are still not generally available. However, Dr David Owen was granted access in 2004 resulting in a lecture that he gave at the

²⁹ AP 20/1/24

³⁰ AP 20/1/25

³¹ AP 20/1/27

³² Both AP 20/1/29

³³ Both AP 20/1/32

³⁴ AP 20/1/32

University of Liverpool. This led to an article published in the *Quarterly Bulletin of Medicine* in 2005. This discloses that, throughout the Suez crisis, as well as any painkillers he might have been taking, Eden was on regular medication of barbiturates at night (to help him sleep) and Drinamyl in the mornings. Drinamyl is a mixture of amphetamines and barbiturates, with the latter designed to reduce the side effects of the former. It was popular with young people at the time, usually referred to as 'Dexys' or 'Purple Hearts'. Its side effects include insomnia, restlessness, anxiety, irritability, over stimulation and over confidence.³⁵ Amphetamines give the user the illusion of boundless energy. They do not, however, create energy; they simply use it up more quickly. Continuous use, therefore, results in exhaustion as the effects of the drug wear off. In January 1957 Eden's doctor, Sir Horace Evans, wrote that these treatments had only become essential over the previous six months. He also said, '[Eden's] general condition was one of extreme over strain with general physical nerve exhaustion ...'³⁶ 'Nervous exhaustion' would probably be referred to today as 'chronic fatigue syndrome' or colloquially, as a nervous breakdown. It is normally found in people who suffer from an excess of stress or anxiety. Eden certainly fell into that category. No reference was made to either the abdominal problems or migraines from which Eden had previously suffered. The evidence does not suggest that Eden was abusing his medication or self prescribing. Nor is there evidence of addiction. However he did admit to the Cabinet, when he resigned, that his dependence on drugs had increased. This is reproduced in Rhodes James' official biography of Eden, although the official records are more brief.

During these last five months, since Nasser seized the Canal in July [1956], I have been obliged to increase the dose [of barbiturates] considerably and also increase the stimulants [amphetamines] necessary to counteract the drugs.³⁷

Despite the scanty direct evidence it is reasonable to conclude that Eden's poor health and the medication he took to get him through the Suez crisis must have had some effect on his decision making. Having said that it is not obvious that Eden's character changed noticeably during the four months from 26 July, when Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company, to 23 November, when Eden left for Jamaica. From the beginning he was determined that Nasser would not succeed in his nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. Equally, he was determined, from the beginning, to use force if need be. It was

³⁵ Owen, 2005, 6

³⁶ Ibid., 6

³⁷ James, 1986, 397

only the unavailability of rapid military options, and the persuasive powers of John Foster Dulles, the American Secretary of State, that stopped him ordering an immediate attack. Throughout the period from the end of July to the beginning of November 1956 Eden's position remained unchanged. He wanted the Suez Canal under international control and Nasser removed from power. Had Eden launched a military expedition as soon as the nationalisation announcement was made, and had he been taking the medication previously referred to at that time, it could reasonably be argued that it was the drugs that produced an irrational response. This was not the case. From the limited evidence available it seems that Eden's increased use of barbiturates and amphetamines began with the Suez crisis and continued throughout it. Despite this, Eden's behaviour during the crisis remained steadfastly the same. In fact it could be argued that he became more reasonable as the crisis developed. At the beginning he was all for the immediate use of force with no further excuse needed. As matters progressed he began to accept that a new *casus belli* was needed. Hence the conspiracy with France and Israel. Whatever medication Eden was taking had little discernible effect on his decision making throughout the crisis. It cannot, therefore, be argued that Eden's behaviour was irrational as a result of the drugs he was taking. There is not the slightest evidence to support that view. In addition, his Cabinet almost unanimously supported him throughout the Suez crisis. If his behaviour had been so obviously irrational because of his medication, why did his colleagues remain so supportive? It is necessary to look elsewhere for an explanation of his actions.

Chapter II

Eden's Real Character

Am alright in smooth water but get upset once I get into rough water¹

This chapter will show how Eden's real character was at considerable variance from his public persona: constantly concerned what others thought of him; unsure of his ambitions in politics; easily wounded by criticism; jealous of the Americans and prejudiced against many other groups. It will show that it was these character traits that guided his actions in Autumn 1956.

In *Facing the Dictators* Eden claimed not to keep a regular diary.² This is true but disingenuous. He did keep diaries for many years from 1914 onwards, although he did not make notes for every single day. In particular, his diary entries are sparse during periods when he was not in office. He did, however, keep a regular detailed journal when he was on diplomatic missions abroad. From these diaries and journals, along with his speeches and private papers it is possible to see Eden as he really was. The quote at the head of this chapter comes from his diary while he was at Eton and refers to his problems while sailing but, in many ways, it sums up his political life. While acting within a diplomatic framework he remained calm, constantly seeking compromise. Away from that, however, when he had to act in the political sphere, he found decision making much more fraught.

The majority of his political career was spent in the Foreign Office, with little experience in other departments. Before becoming Prime Minister he had been Foreign Secretary on three separate occasions for a total of ten years but had been neither Home Secretary nor Chancellor of the Exchequer, key positions for experience in domestic matters. On numerous occasions he had complained of his heavy workload at the Foreign Office (indeed, this may well have had an adverse effect on his health) but had always refused offers to move to another department. He was also most unwilling to delegate, often involving himself in the most trivial of matters. This lack of domestic political experience left him seriously underprepared for the rough and tumble of political life when he finally became Prime Minister.

Eden's need for confirmation of his personal popularity and his political and diplomatic efforts is reflected in the regular references in his diaries to the positive

¹ AP 20/1/2, 23/6/1914

² Eden, 1962, Foreword

comments, largely by the press and his political colleagues, that he received. His vanity is also apparent in the comments he records. An entry for 14 November 1933, when he was Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs records: '*The Times* suggests I should be in the Cabinet as Privy Seal.'³ This was followed by an entry for the following day saying 'Papers full of insistent demands that I should be in the Cabinet with [Foreign Secretary, Sir John] Simon or supersede him.'⁴ In his entry for 2 March 1935 he recounts a story he was told where the Polish Ambassador to Britain was asked if he would mind if two British Ministers went to Berlin but only one went on to Warsaw. ' "No", was the reply. "Not if the one who goes on is Eden." '⁵ Later that month, on the 23rd he records a meeting with the French Prime Minister, Pierre Laval, in Paris where 'Laval remarked to me at luncheon that Stanley Baldwin [the Prime Minister] had told him in London that I was to be Secretary of State. Why was I not by now?'⁶ Eden was instead given the position of Minister for League of Nations Affairs, becoming the first and only occupant of this post newly created to assuage his feelings. In September 1938 Eden's diary triumphantly records a meeting with a fellow M.P.: 'Richard Law, son of Bonar, came today to see me and to tell me that at the time of my resignation he had thought I was wrong ... Now, however, he realised I was right.'⁷ Two entries in April 1939, the first on the 4th and the second on the 25th, follow a similar theme.

[Colonel Beck, Polish Foreign Minister, said] I had known how to create measure of confidence between two countries where none ahead existed before. But he, Beck, would never forget nor cease to repeat how much Poland owed to the work I had done.'⁸

'[Joseph Kennedy, U.S. Ambassador to London, said] that if I knew as much about foreign countries as I did about America my absence from the government was a great loss to the nation!'⁹ On 29 December that year he records: '[Yugoslavian Ambassador said that] when he reported the official F.O. view he was continually being pulled up with the query "Yes - that is all right but what does Mr. Eden think?" '¹⁰ The entry for the following day records a

³ AP20/1/13

⁴ AP20/1/13

⁵ AP20/1/15

⁶ AP20/1/15

⁷ AP20/1/18

⁸ AP20/1/19

⁹ AP20/1/19

¹⁰ AP20/1/19

'boisterously enthusiastic reception' from some Canadian troops Eden had visited, as Secretary of State for War.¹¹ This constant recording of positive remarks made about himself continued throughout the war years. On 22 February 1940 he wrote: '[General] Hacking amused me considerably by describing [Eden's trip to the Middle East] as an inspiration and the most important flight since Munich.'¹² If this were just 'amusing' why take the time and trouble to record it? The entry for 16 August 1940, relating to a trip to Plymouth, reads: '... we began our tour ... 2 the cheers of the locals.'¹³ On 21 August he notes, '[Churchill was] very generous about my efforts. "Just magnificent. I do not believe anyone else could have done it." etc.'¹⁴ In October 1940 Eden visited GHQ Cairo as Secretary of State for War. There he learned of General Archibald Wavell's secret plans to attack the Italian Tenth Army at Sidi Barrani, code named Operation Compass. Following the initial success of this operation in the Western Desert Eden wrote on 11 December 1940: 'Rang up Winston who congratulated me warmly on a great victory.'¹⁵ This was surely a little premature as Operation Compass only started on 9 December and continued for the next two months. Eden's diaries continued in the same vein. The entry for 2 January 1941, following his return as Foreign Secretary, starts: '[Richard Rothschild] talked much of the Tory Party and my duty to lead it.'¹⁶ It is followed by the entry for 20 January recording: '[Churchill] told [Alexander and Attlee¹⁷] how glad he was I was at F.O. & said that he had wanted to make this change when he took over ...'¹⁸ On 2 February he wrote: 'Winston spoke very warmly to Beatrice of my administration at [War Office] & said I should be very proud of it.'¹⁹ Eden records a discussion at the War Cabinet in an entry for 27 July 1941 where

¹¹ AP20/1/19

¹² AP20/1/20

¹³ AP20/1/20

¹⁴ AP20/1/20

¹⁵ AP20/1/20

¹⁶ AP20/1/21

¹⁷ Earl Alexander of Tunis and Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party

¹⁸ AP20/1/21

¹⁹ AP20/1/21

Attlee complained of organisation of W.O. [War Office] I stood up for them & explained their difficulties but Winston wouldn't have it. & said there had been a marked decline since I had left.²⁰

On 10 October 1941 he recorded:

Max [Beaverbrook, Minister of Aircraft Production] pleaded bewilderment. Said he entered Cabinet not expecting that he would agree with me & had thought my advice always well informed and wise etc etc.²¹

The entry for 19 February 1942 notes: 'Dick and Jim angry ... that [Sir Stafford] Cripps is Leader of the House and not me.'²² On 25 May 1942 he wrote: ' ... Winston congratulated me most warmly on treaty developments. He said that if it came off it would be much the biggest thing I had done.'²³ This was followed by an entry for 26 May: 'Winston very generous to me. "Sole credit for this [Anglo Soviet] treaty on the British side belongs to the Foreign Secretary." '²⁴ The entry for 27 September 1942 reads:

Eric Dudley created a mild flutter by saying that he hoped I would go to No 10 soon and stay there a long time! ... After we had gone Nancy said that [Churchill] had embarrassed her with praise of my wisdom & Beatrice's looks.²⁵

For 14 November 1942 Eden records: 'Then had some discussion of greatness which [Jan] Smuts [South African Prime Minister] maintained [Abraham] Lincoln had & [Churchill] maintained I had.'²⁶ The entry for 18 December reads: '[Churchill] very pleased with what he called "My great success in the House yesterday"'.²⁷ On 2 February 1943 Eden commented: '[1922 Committee] showed a most surprising concern that I should continue to lead the House. Even Pickthorn commenting that I had surpassed their highest hopes.'²⁸ On a similar theme the entry for 4 August 1943 reads: '[Churchill] expressed warm admiration for my leadership of the House ...'²⁹ On 1 June 1945 Eden records: ' ... then to

²⁰ AP20/1/21

²¹ AP20/1/21

²² AP20/1/21

²³ AP20/1/22

²⁴ AP20/1/22

²⁵ AP20/1/22

²⁶ AP20/1/22

²⁷ AP20/1/23

²⁸ AP20/1/23

²⁹ AP20/1/23

House where small attendance but many cheers.'³⁰ His entry for 1 August 1945 reads: ' ... Crowder, ... informed me that I was the only name for which he could get a cheer at his meetings.'³¹

Following the conclusion of the Second World War Eden's diary entries are more sparse but the theme of recording positive comments about himself continued. Referring to the Conservative Party conference Eden notes, on 2 October 1946, 'Then to Mayor's reception where ... my appearance was greeted with cheers.'³² For 1950 and 1951 Eden used notebooks that were less diaries than a series of reflections or draft speeches. On the inside front cover of the 1950 notebook Eden much later noted: 'Biographer. See Cordell Hull interview.'³³ This is a reference to a meeting between Cordell Hull [President Roosevelt's Secretary of State] and Eden in Washington in 1950. 'Washington 2 Nov. Called round to see Cordell Hull. Old man very friendly. He told me that he had long wanted to see me in the saddle & in command, much as he admired Winston.'³⁴ Presumably, by referring his biographer to it Eden thought this of great significance. The entry for 15 June 1952 reads: '[Churchill] said the situation would not have arisen if I had been there.'³⁵ During a convalescent cruise in the Mediterranean Eden maintained his diary. On 14 September 1953 he noted: 'Decided to go ashore [on Kos] in afternoon. Something like a mayoral reception awaited us & an applauding crowd.'³⁶ On the front cover of Eden's diary for 1956 there is a note, presumably for his biographer: 'Feb 29 interesting.' The entry for that date reads: '[Churchill] told me how glad he was he had handed over. How confident he felt I could do the job ...'³⁷ On 6 July 1956 Eden referred to his visit to the tennis championships at Wimbledon [attending the Men's final that day] where he was 'Surprised to receive very friendly welcome from the crowd ... '³⁸

Although there is a certain amount of vanity reflected in his diary entries, the overwhelming impression is of a man unsure of himself and constantly looking for

³⁰ AP20/1/25

³¹ AP20/1/25

³² AP20/1/26

³³ AP20/1/27

³⁴ AP20/1/27

³⁵ AP20/1/28

³⁶ AP20/1/29A

³⁷ AP20/1/32

³⁸ AP20/1/32

reassurance that he was the right man for the job. After his retirement from politics Eden courted Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, biographer of King George VI, as his prospective biographer, although nothing came of this. Even at this point Eden was still flagging up entries that showed him in a positive light for his biographer to use.

This constant need for reassurance is also apparent in his diaries in relation to his oratory both inside Parliament and elsewhere. Unlike his predecessor, Churchill, he did not enjoy the rough and tumble of the House of Commons, preferring the quieter backwaters of diplomacy. His diary entry for 19 October 1935, referring to a speech he had given, reads: 'Aga [Khan] simply delighted ... "was the kind of speech that made me proud of Britain. I mean it."'³⁹ On 16 July 1937 he wrote, concerning a speech on non intervention in Spain:

My [speech] was certainly less bad than usual and some thought it was the best thing I had done yet. ... Sidney Herbert sent me a note to say it was the best speech he had heard for years. Acland Troyte kept shouting at its conclusion that it was the best Front Bench speech in the House since 1931. ... John Simon told me that he thought the first quarter of an hour of my speech the best thing he had ever heard me do. "We took their heads and knocked them together."⁴⁰

On 25 April 1939 he refers to a letter from Lord Cranborne which said: ' ... the warmest congratulation on your remarks at lunch today - I think they were a masterpiece.'⁴¹ His diary entry for 1 November 1939 reads: 'Lloyd George had listened to my broadcast [and said it was] the best thing of its kind he had heard since the war began.'⁴² On 23 August 1941 his diary records: 'An hour later [Churchill] rang me up again & said suddenly, "You spoke very well this morning about Iran."⁴³ Referring to a meeting with the backbench 1922 Committee Eden recorded on 12 May 1942: 'Spoke without notes about the war. They seemed pleased and were certainly enthusiastic. A hard boiled lot who included Herbert Williams who actually congratulated me.'⁴⁴ 'James Stuart went so far as to say that it was the best speech he has ever heard me make in the House' was the comment for 3 August 1943.⁴⁵ On 23 February 1944 he noted: 'Charles P thought [my speech] the best I

³⁹ AP20/1/19

⁴⁰ AP20/1/19

⁴¹ AP20/1/19

⁴² AP20/1/19

⁴³ AP20/1/20

⁴⁴ AP20/1/22

⁴⁵ AP20/1/23

had done.⁴⁶ Of a speech he made in Canada Eden recorded on 17 November 1952: '... Vincent described [my speech] as the best he had ever heard me make. They re-broadcast it at 7 p.m. coast to coast.'⁴⁷ All these comments show a man not entirely confident of his own abilities but in need of constant reassurance concerning both his actions and his oratory, as well as wallowing in self praise. They give a clear picture of a man beset by self doubt who constantly felt it necessary to record any positive comments he received. His diaries are noticeable for the absence of any critical comments made about him. This looks like a case of: 'Self praise is no recommendation.'

Oliver Harvey, Eden's principal Private Secretary from 1936 to 1938 and again from 1941 to 1943, records Eden's reluctance to delegate, his need for constant reassurance, and his inability to make up his mind. He noted on 29 December 1941:

[Eden] very annoyed at inadequate publicity given to our visit [to Moscow] on B.B.C. midnight news. I assured him that morning papers will give it the fullest treatment but he won't be comforted.⁴⁸

Eden's reluctance to delegate is reflected in Harvey's comments on 17 and 23 December 1942. '... [Eden] is still reluctant [to appoint a deputy] because he hates to let the controls go out of his hands even for a minute.' and '... it is essential that he delegates F.O. matter more ... but he hates letting go and both his health and the work are suffering.'⁴⁹ He followed this on 9 August 1943 with: 'But [Eden] won't give up anything, he won't share anything and he hates even discussing it with his colleagues, all of whom bore him.'⁵⁰ Eden's inability to make up his mind is well described in three notes made by Harvey on 28 March, 7 April and 1 May 1944. '[Eden] told us it was now decided that he should give up the F.O. and keep leadership of H. of C. ...'. 'Contrary to what was decided last week, A.E. is now *not* going to give up F.O. but will keep F.O. and H. of C.'. 'A.E. inclines more to keeping F.O. and giving up H. of C.'⁵¹ This inability to delegate was to be clearly shown throughout his political career. Even when he was Prime Minister he could not resist getting involved in matters that should have been dealt with at a much more junior level. On 21 June 1956 he sent a memo to the Minister of Housing and Local Government:

⁴⁶ AP20/1/24

⁴⁷ AP20/1/28

⁴⁸ Harvey, 1978, 80

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 201 & 203

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 285

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 337 - 339

Thank you for your minute about the roads in Oxford. We discussed Hyde Park Corner in Cabinet. Oxford is much more important than Hyde Park Corner, and I am sure that this proposal should come before the Cabinet. Meanwhile ... I am puzzled that the red road appears to lead back to St Giles Place at the bottom of the Martyrs Memorial; this is already a most congested junction.⁵²

On the same day he sent a note to the same Minister: 'You should see the correspondence our Private Secretaries have been having about a tower in Battersea Park.'⁵³ This concerned the erection of a temporary tower in the park during a fair! Even in the middle of the Suez Crisis he continued to meddle. On 24 September he sent a note to Macmillan: 'I have been thinking if there is any way in which I can help you over your broadcast tonight.'⁵⁴ The following month he returned to the problems with the Oxford roads. In a note to the Minister of Housing and Local Government he said: 'When Parliament returns I think we shall be under fire on our decision on Oxford roads.'⁵⁵ Eden was no doubt surprised when only one question was asked on this topic and it was answered in two sentences.⁵⁶

Evelyn Shuckburgh was closely involved with Eden for the six years from 1951, although he left his post at the Foreign Office on 20 June 1956, before the Suez Crisis broke. From the diary he kept throughout these years we can gain a real insight into Eden's character and personality. The picture that emerges is far from flattering. It shows a man who is ambitious for the top job but anxious about his public persona; childish and petulant. During a trip to Paris, in December 1951, with Churchill and Eden, Shuckburgh recalled: 'This was not an easy visit for A.E. as he had all the time to play second fiddle.'⁵⁷ During a trip to Lisbon Eden's driver took the wrong route. Shuckburgh describes how Eden went into a rage over this. 'It developed into a physical struggle between me trying to shut the window between us and the driver ... and A.E. leaning forward to wind it down so that he might call them bloody fools.'⁵⁸ Eden's sensitivity to criticism is reflected in Shuckburgh's comment on 16 March 1953: '... the Opposition treated Eden with ribaldry to

⁵² EP, 20/21/128, 21/6/56

⁵³ EP, 20/21/129, 21/6/56

⁵⁴ AP 20/21/195

⁵⁵ AP 20/21/203

⁵⁶ *Hansard*, 23/10/56, 468

⁵⁷ MS 191/1/2/1, 12

⁵⁸ MS 191/1/2/1, 35

which he was unaccustomed and which greatly upset him.⁵⁹ His comment on 15 January 1954 was:

[Eden] is like a child. You can have a scene with a child of great violence with angry words spoken on both sides and ten minutes later the whole thing is forgotten. This is not possible with grown ups but it is the regular thing with A.E.⁶⁰

Later that month Shuckburgh referred to Eden's need to be well thought of by the public: 'Tremendous cheering of all ranks for A.E. which elated him greatly. He is worried lest no journalist witnessed it!⁶¹ His self centredness shows clearly in Shuckburgh's comments on 31 January 1954:

Eden, 'Why is Lord Killearn [former British ambassador to Egypt] allowed to broadcast about Egypt? Why hasn't the *Manchester Guardian* arrived?' I realise more clearly than before how terribly vain and egocentric he is. He can't really bear any conversation to take place which does not bear upon himself, his politics, his popularity, his successes in the past or present.⁶²

The next day, Shuckburgh recorded: Eden '... was very excited by the *News Chronicle's* poll which shows 54% think W.S.C too old, and over 50% think A.E. the right successor. 12% R.A.B.⁶³ When, in June 1953, Shuckburgh told Eden, who was in Geneva, that the Lord Chamberlain had requested his presence on Westminster Pier to greet the Queen, '... he was outraged, and said I had done it all wrong. ... Anyhow, he did not like the Royal Family. ... Eventually ... I got him calmed down.'⁶⁴ Eden, finally decided not to go. Shuckburgh commented, 'We all think this is a mistake, but Clarissa {his wife} has persuaded him.'⁶⁵ On 13 February 1953 Shuckburgh noted, 'A.E. thrilled by his reception [by British soldiers] and we drove back through the Berlin ruins in a glow of political enthusiasm.'⁶⁶ The following day, however, '... very hard things were said [by Eden] of all and sundry, which later, however, he withdrew ...'⁶⁷ On 21 March 1954 Shuckburgh wrote, 'At least A.E. can see a little ahead; the trouble is that he is too keen on popularity to push

⁵⁹ MS 191/1/2/2, 172

⁶⁰ MS 191/1/2/2, 52

⁶¹ MS 191/1/2/3, 291

⁶² MS 191/1/2/3, 301

⁶³ MS 191/1/2/3, 305

⁶⁴ MS 191/1/2/3, 452.

⁶⁵ MS 191/1/2/3, 454

⁶⁶ MS 191/1/2/3, 332

⁶⁷ MS 191/1/2/3, 334

far seeing measures through.⁶⁸ As will be seen this craving of popular approval played a substantial part in Eden's downfall.

So far as Eden's prejudices are concerned examples of these spring clearly from his diaries. On his negotiations in 1933 with the Chinese and Poles he noted on 26 April, 'A morning wrestling with Chinese & Poles trying to agree amendments. More success with former than latter, perhaps because they are more civilised.'⁶⁹ Following an audience with the Pope in 1934 his diary entry for 26 February makes no mention of the topics discussed but comments, 'Half an hours appointment with the Pope in his own room, hideously appointed. In front of him was a singularly poor figure of Christ. Behind him one of the ugliest modern stained glass windows I have ever seen.'⁷⁰ His low opinion of Catholics is further revealed in the entry for 5 August 1943: 'In fact, an R.C. Irishman is not a help in our service nowadays.'⁷¹ Giving his views on a biography of William the Silent, William I of Orange, Eden notes at 19 January 1951:

Here was a man. I have never yet met a figure in history with whose outlook, characteristics and politics I sympathise more wholeheartedly. I should like to be just like him. ... I have ever disliked Spaniards just for that cruelty. They are the antithesis of toleration & for me to be civilised is to be tolerant. That's why I haven't much love for the Church of Rome either.⁷²

In September 1952 what became known as the Buraimi incident occurred. This was a dispute between Oman (supported by the British) and Saudi Arabia over the Buraimi oasis. On a modern map this is on the UAE/Oman border. Eden noted on 24 January 1953:

In the evening came news ... of another attempt by Ibn Saud upon one of our posts. Luckily the armoured cars are now out at Sherjah. They have been sent up to restore the situation. I hope that they will be able to teach a salutary lesson.⁷³

A dismissive attitude towards the Saudis and no sign of toleration there. His opinion of Jews was not much better. His diary for 8 March 1942 records a visit to Eton. 'Watched the boys troop in. We were not impressed. Dirty and sloppy with an ever increasing percentage of Jews was our conclusion.'⁷⁴

⁶⁸ MS 191/1/2/3, 378

⁶⁹ AP20/1/13

⁷⁰ AP20/1/14

⁷¹ AP20/1/23

⁷² AP20/1/27

⁷³ AP20/1/29

⁷⁴ AP20/1/22

Eden felt he had good reason to distrust the Americans after Suez. He blamed them for letting him down. However, this distrust was not something that suddenly appeared during the crisis. It is clear to be seen in his papers from much earlier. His diary entry for 25 April 1933 includes this denunciation: 'The Americans have lectured Europe long enough, now they must face the bowling. They don't care about it.'⁷⁵ On 21 July 1941 he grumbled: " ... the spectre of an American President talking at large on European politics filled me with Wilsonian memories.'⁷⁶ 'Wilsonian' refers to Woodrow Wilson, U.S. President from 1913 to 1921. On 13 May 1942 Eden complained: '[The Americans] are forever trying to steal marches on us in these small things.'⁷⁷ Oliver Harvey, recorded in his diary on 13 March 1943 that Eden felt ' ... more at home in the Kremlin [than in dealing with the Americans, as] there, at least, they mean business.'⁷⁸ By 18 June 1943 his views had changed little. 'We shall be hard put to it to keep in step with the Americans - or rather pull them into step with us - on the French business ... '⁷⁹ On 10 September 1943 he wrote: 'I am most anxious for good relations with the U.S. but I don't like subservience to them and I am sure that this only lays up trouble for us in the future.'⁸⁰ In September 1944 he expressed opposition to the partition of Palestine on the grounds that this would give the Americans more influence in the area at Britain's expense.

... we run a grave risk, if we embark on a policy ... of partition, of losing to America the pre eminent place we have always held, and which in our own strategic interests, including oil, we ought to continue to hold, in the Arab world. There is no doubt in my mind that the Americans have thoughts of usurping that place ...⁸¹

By 3 July 1945 he was complaining: ' ... we couldn't allow [the Americans] to dictate our foreign policy and if they were wrong we would have to show independence.'⁸² As late as 1955 he was of a similar view. His diary entry for 3 October reads: 'Macmillan follows

⁷⁵ AP20/1/13

⁷⁶ AP20/1/21

⁷⁷ AP/20/1/22

⁷⁸ Harvey, 1978, 229

⁷⁹ AP/1/23

⁸⁰ AP20/1/23

⁸¹ CAB 95/14

⁸² AP20/1/25

Dulles' argument like an admiring poodle & that is bad for Foster & worse for British interests in Middle East.⁸³

All this is not to say that he discounted the value of American help when available. In January 1938, when Roosevelt contacted Chamberlain, Eden, who was on holiday and out of the loop, noted in his diary:

Roosevelt was planning some form of initiative ... I attach so much importance to Anglo-American co-operation that I should myself be strongly in favour of responding to Roosevelt's appeal and promising to back it.⁸⁴

The following day he noted:

I then explained my own view [to Chamberlain] that it was so important to secure Anglo-American co-operation ... I told him my own view that we should do our best to improve Anglo-American relations and in the meantime continue our negotiations with Germany ...⁸⁵

During 1942, when the Americans were proposing the Lend-Lease arrangements, Harvey commented: '[Eden] the only Minister to urge acceptance of it - the main obstructionists being Kingsley Wood and Amery ...'⁸⁶

This was Eden; a man of many prejudices and jealous of America taking on what had been Britain's role in the world. He understood the value of American help but could not quite bring himself to accept their leadership.

Eden's ambivalent feelings about politics loom large in his diaries and writings. He constantly doubted whether politics was the profession for him. His diary entry for 11 November 1941 reads:

[Churchill] talked of future & suddenly said if anything happened to him I should have to take over. I replied that I had no ambitions that way (which is true tho' it is flattering to be thought worthy).⁸⁷

His diary entry for 6 September 1942 records a discussion he had with his wife on the possibility of his leaving politics. 'I do not really feel confident in myself as No 1 at home, and it looks as if, *faut de mieux*, I might drift that way.'⁸⁸ On 12 July 1943 he noted: 'Then

⁸³ AP20/1/31

⁸⁴ AP20/1/18

⁸⁵ AP20/1/18

⁸⁶ Harvey, 1978, 90

⁸⁷ AP20/1/21

⁸⁸ AP20/1/22

we [Churchill and Eden] discussed Tory party & both agreed how little we liked it & how little it liked us.⁸⁹ Following the end of the Second World War these feeling remained.

I am not much use as a party man. I dislike our extreme right more than somewhat. ... In other words I am not a political warrior like Winston but only a civil servant, he noted on 6 June 1945.⁹⁰ 'Depressed and cannot help an unworthy hope that we may lose - or rather have lost - this election' were his thoughts on 17 July 1945.⁹¹ Having got his wish, Clement Attlee's Labour Party having won the election, his entry for 31 August 1945 continues in a similar vein. 'I confess that I enjoy this life [i.e. out of office] and feel no restlessness for any other.'⁹² As early as 1946 he showed little enthusiasm for leading his party. While standing in for Churchill he confided to Lord Salisbury: 'I am not sure that I really feel fit enough to undertake the leadership for any long period.'⁹³ With the political tide turning in his party's favour Eden wrote to his son, Nicholas, in March 1951: ' ... there is no life in which one is more a prisoner than politics.'⁹⁴ Despite the Conservatives having returned to power in 1951 Eden confessed in his diary entry for 4 March 1952: 'Still tempted by [the possibility of a job at] NATO.'⁹⁵ During his convalescent cruise to Greece Eden noted, on 2 September 1953: 'Salisbury and Harold urge earlier return. I don't want to. I cannot feel it to [be] really necessary though this may be due to my lack of enthusiasm for politics which remains constant.'⁹⁶ Apart from Eden's own writings Oliver Harvey recorded a number of comments made to him by Eden demonstrating his lack of affection for politics. His diary entry for 12 April 1937 records: '[A.E.] spoke, as he has often before, of his reluctance to continue his life in office, which now leaves him no leisure for reading or for anything he wants to do.'⁹⁷ Some years later, on 29 September 1941, he noted: 'This [Beaverbrook] attack has nettled him [Eden] and made him more conscious of his incompatibility with the Right [in the Conservative Party].'⁹⁸

⁸⁹ AP20/1/23

⁹⁰ AP20/1/25

⁹¹ AP20/1/25

⁹² AP20/1/25

⁹³ Thorpe, 2004, 340

⁹⁴ AP22/9/87

⁹⁵ AP20/1/28

⁹⁶ AP20/1/29A

⁹⁷ Harvey, 1970, 38

⁹⁸ Harvey, 1978, 47

Even when it came to the possibility of becoming Prime Minister he was less than enthusiastic. His diary entry for 4 June 1954 reads: 'I would have been glad of the chance to take over a year ago but it meant less to me now and would mean less still next June.'⁹⁹ Despite all these protestations Eden not only accepted political advancement, throughout his career he actively pursued it. As early as 1933 he had been highly critical of his immediate political superiors in the governments in which he served. His diary entry for 7 October 1933, concerning the General Secretary of the Labour Party, Arthur Henderson, reads: 'He has so little appreciation of the underlying realities of the situation. Blunt fingers, no touch, no sensitiveness (sic) at all, and the German cheers in July still ringing in the old man's ears.'¹⁰⁰ Referring to the Foreign Secretary at the time, Viscount Simon, Eden's diary for 14 October 1933 notes: 'It is not really "nerves" ... which we might all suffer or excuse but I truly believe an utter lack of moral courage.'¹⁰¹ He continued his criticism of Simon with an entry for 24 April 1935. 'I fear that J.S. is timorous and uncertain which way to turn ... Yet he clings to the F.O. It is an unhappy situation for us all.'¹⁰² His opinion of Sir Kingsley Wood, Chancellor of the Exchequer from May 1940 to September 1943, was similarly critical. He noted on 5 August 1940: 'Kingsley struck me as an unhappy little man, overwhelmed by his job.'¹⁰³ On 2 August 1945 he opined: 'There is no hope for the Tory party unless we can clear these disastrous old men out & some of the middle aged ones too!'¹⁰⁴

This impatience with the old guard eventually extended to Churchill. On 3 December 1946 his diary reads:

Rather tiresome scene with Winston before dinner. He suddenly took exception to my going [to Adelaide], asked why he hadn't been invited too ... But these scenes are exhausting and childish. This one wasted nearly an hour.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ AP20/1/30

¹⁰⁰ AP20/1/13

¹⁰¹ AP20/1/13

¹⁰² AP20/1/15

¹⁰³ AP20/1/20

¹⁰⁴ AP20/1/25

¹⁰⁵ AP20/1/26

As time went by and Churchill showed no sign of standing down the criticism increased. On 4 June 1952 Eden wrote: 'I didn't think [Churchill] looked well & he is doing very little work.'¹⁰⁶ On 22 December 1952 Eden referred to a Cabinet meeting that day.

Impossible Cabinet in afternoon on Egypt - which was not on agenda. ... [Churchill] has no alternative policy whatsoever, just moaned. ... "Did he want to march on Cairo?" This brought a denial but nothing more.¹⁰⁷

Eden also recorded other people's criticisms of Churchill. On 4 June 1946 '[Salisbury] was outspokenly critical of [Churchill] for staying on & said he heard it from everyone, even in the country.'¹⁰⁸ On 15 June 1952 he noted: '[Salisbury] told me interview with Hunter had been deplorable. [Churchill] had been like a man possessed ... He had stormed and raged. [Salisbury] had never seen such a thing.'¹⁰⁹ On 23 January 1953 Eden noted:

[Harry Crookshank] said that... [Churchill] was an increasing liability to us. That if he had not been leading us at the last General Election we should have had another sixty seats & that more than half the party resents his association with Beaverbrook.¹¹⁰

Two diary entries for March and early April 1953 continue this theme of criticism of Churchill. On 8 March Eden noted:

Bad telegram from London about 9 p.m. refusing to accept any of our joint proposals about Egypt. It had clearly been sent by W without consultation with anyone. It included a message to Ike which we all thought ... both foolish and bad tempered.¹¹¹

On 3 April his diary records:

I was taken aback by W ringing in the morning and saying somewhat challengingly, 'So you have given up the idea of meeting Molotov. I don't like that at all.' He had entirely forgotten yesterday's conversation.¹¹²

Recording a discussion with Churchill, Eden wrote on 4 June 1954: 'There was no co-ordination on home front and Cabinet dragged on for too long.'¹¹³ By the Autumn Eden was noting further criticism of Churchill by others. 'Harold [Macmillan] did not conceal his concern at attempting to carry on with W as he now is. Nor did I' was his comment on 27

¹⁰⁶ AP20/1/28

¹⁰⁷ AP20/1/28

¹⁰⁸ AP20/1/26

¹⁰⁹ AP20/1/28

¹¹⁰ AP20/1/29

¹¹¹ AP20/1/29

¹¹² AP20/1/29

¹¹³ AP20/1/30

August 1954.¹¹⁴ On 10 September 1954 he noted, 'Had further talk with Patrick and Harold. They were gloomy at the prospects for the party if W remained & a little inclined to complain, perhaps rightly, that I had made things too easy for him.'¹¹⁵ On 22 December 1954 he refers to a meeting with Churchill and others. '... W rounded on me and said it was clear we wanted him out. Nobody contradicted him.'¹¹⁶ Despite this criticism Churchill continued as Prime Minister until 7 April 1955 when he finally resigned and Eden, despite all the doubts expressed earlier, got his wish and succeeded him.

Eden's concern with press comment is also evident in Shuckburgh's diaries. On 28 May 1952 he wrote: 'A.E. very discontented with our press contacts when we got home.'¹¹⁷ This contrasts with Shuckburgh's comment that '[Churchill] does not care a row of pins what the press say.'¹¹⁸ Eden's concern with press comments did not improve when he became Prime Minister. Shuckburgh notes on 1 November 1955: 'Harold Caccia and I were summoned early to No 10 where we found A.E. with his Press Adviser [Clark] worrying about the press reactions to his speech.'¹¹⁹ Having moved from his position as Private Secretary to Eden to a position as Under Secretary with responsibility for the Middle East Shuckburgh's contact with Eden was much reduced but did not cease. On 27 January 1956 he noted: 'Guy [Millard] thinks A.E. has become quite inhuman and that you can do nothing with him except by flattery.'¹²⁰ Later that month he wrote: '[Eden] has, in my opinion, greatly changed in the last two years. He is far away, thinking largely about the effect he is making ...'¹²¹ The following month he recorded: 'Selwyn Lloyd ... sat with me at the bedside while the P.M. dithered around the words and phrases ...'¹²²

During March 1956, General John Glubb was dismissed by the King of Jordan from his post as officer in charge of the Arab Legion. Shuckburgh noted Eden's reaction. 'For A.E. [Glubb's dismissal] is a serious blow and he will be jeered in the House which is his

¹¹⁴ AP20/1/30

¹¹⁵ AP20/1/30

¹¹⁶ AP20/1/30

¹¹⁷ MS 191/1/2/1, 64

¹¹⁸ MS 191/1/2/3, 55

¹¹⁹ MS 191/1/2/4, 289

¹²⁰ MS 191/1/2/5, 360

¹²¹ MS 191/1/2/5, 370

¹²² MS 191/1/2/5, 376

main concern.¹²³ During a debate on Cyprus in the House of Commons Labour's Aneurin Bevan struck a nerve with his barbed comment on Eden.

The trouble with the Prime Minister is that he had one heroic period—only one. He resigned on one occasion. It is not quite certain whether he was partially propelled by Mussolini's boot, but he resigned on one occasion and he has been living on that ever since.¹²⁴

The Times remarked: "[Mr Bevan] brought an angry flush to the Prime Minister's cheek by recalling that ... one heroic period."¹²⁵

These comments in his own and others' diaries paint a clear picture of Eden. Not the suave, debonair, man of reason image he liked to project but self-centred; egotistical; uncertain; prejudiced; indecisive; self-doubting; childish; always looking for praise; overreacting to criticism. During his long political career Eden had generally been well out of public sight as Foreign Secretary. When he became Prime Minister all that changed. He was now thrust into the public eye and subject to constant comment and criticism. The next chapter will examine he reacted to both press and public criticism during this period.

¹²³ MS 191/1/2/5, 401

¹²⁴ *Hansard*, 19/7/56, 1511

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 20/7/56, 10

Chapter III

Press and Public criticism

... we take the liberty of suggesting that you do try and maintain your party as a conservative party and all that it stands for.¹

This chapter examines press and public reaction to Eden and his policies during his time as Prime Minister and shows how his inability to shrug off criticism adversely affected him throughout his time in office.

When Eden became Prime Minister in April 1955 he was a man at the height of his popularity. Within six weeks he had called a General Election and been returned with a majority increased from 17 to 59. The first Prime Minister in 100 years to achieve such a feat, he was never to be so popular again.

Eden had the misfortune to take over from Churchill during a period of great industrial unrest in Britain. Strikes and industrial disputes were regular occurrences. No London newspapers were being published at the time of his appointment because of a strike and it was left to the left-wing *Manchester Guardian* to welcome him. The welcome was guarded. It recalled Churchill's comment that Eden was '... the one fresh figure of the first magnitude arising out of the generation ravaged by war. ... His dealings with Parliament and the country have always been frank and straightforward.' This slight praise, however, was tempered by a stinging put down. 'He has no touch of genius or great power of intellect'.² The Conservative press, naturally, had been very supportive during the election campaign. They were not to be so supportive again until, that is, the Suez crisis erupted.

In April 1955 the British economy was booming. Low unemployment and inflation (it rose from 0.7% in May 1954 to 3.7% in May 1955 reaching 7.3% in May 1956³) resulted in regular claims for higher wages. If these were not met strikes were the inevitable result. A major dock strike started on 28 May 1955 and lasted for six weeks. This had a serious impact on British exports. A rail strike followed. The *Daily Telegraph* and other Conservative newspapers looked to Eden's government to take the lead in bringing these to an end. Eden tried to use the negotiating skills that he had developed over many years at the Foreign Office holding many meetings with Union leaders, as did his Ministers, but to little avail.

¹ CCO4/7/315 Letter from G Broadbent and others on 2/8/56

² *Manchester Guardian*, 6/4/55, 6

³ www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/mar/09/inflation-economics (21/7/13)

A number of other problems soon presented themselves. Although Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, who had been spying for the Soviet Union for many years, defected there in 1951 this was only confirmed in February 1956 when they spoke to British journalists. Evelyn Shuckburgh noted in his diary for 20 September 1955: 'Outcry against the [Foreign Office] on account of Burgess and Maclean' both of whom had worked for the Foreign Office.⁴ The government worried, quite correctly as it turned out, that there might be more moles in the spy ring than these two. Princess Margaret, the Queen's sister, wanted to marry a divorced man. From the perspective of 60 years later where the heir to the throne is married to a divorced woman this seems of little import but, at the time, it raised many constitutional issues. Eden's political naivety was apparent when Sydney Silverman, a Labour M.P., led a concerted effort to abolish the death penalty. In the House of Commons Eden allowed a free vote on the issue, confidently expecting its rejection. When the vote showed a majority in favour of abolition Eden had no plan to deal with this. Shuckburgh noted in his diary for 25 February 1956, 'The Government did not expect to be defeated (on a free vote) [on the death penalty] and had made no preparations against that event.'⁵ Abroad, a series of bomb attacks in the British colony of Cyprus, carried out by EOKA, started the campaign for union with Greece (Enosis). The unrest in Cyprus continued for the whole of Eden's period as Prime Minister. Problems with Arab-Israeli relations were constant as was Britain's fraught relationship with the Soviet bloc. Eden tried to use the diplomatic skills honed during his years at the Foreign Office. For example, he invited the Soviet leaders, Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev, to Britain. This was not what the Conservative supporting press wanted to see. They expected Eden to be a leader who would return Britain to its place as a world power. They did not want to see negotiations with the trade unions and Soviet leaders. They wanted to stop strikes, reduce inflation and help the middle classes. Most of all they wanted to see action, not talk.

With all these problems Eden badly needed some support in the media. However, having spent all his political career ensconced in the Foreign Office, far from critical eyes, Eden had few friends in the press. He tried to rectify this by appointing William Clark as his Press Advisor but he waited until 19 September 1955 to do this. Clark had previously been diplomatic correspondent for the *Observer* and, like Eden, was unsympathetic to the right wing of the Conservative Party. Almost as soon as he was appointed he began to see a very different Eden from the one projected in public. Once again it was Eden's concern

⁴ MS 191/1/2/4, 234

⁵ MS 191/1/2/5, 397

about what people thought of him that worried him most. It took him until the end of September 1955 to decide on the changes he wanted to make in his Cabinet. He had known for years that, one day, he would be Prime Minister. Yet it took him five months to decide on a Cabinet reshuffle. Even then he felt it could not be announced immediately as there was to be a budget in October. 'Will they think I can't make up my mind?' was his worry.⁶ In his memoirs Clark comments that this was to be the dominant theme of Eden's time at Downing Street: 'Eden's indecisiveness and, equally important, his anxiety about being thought indecisive ...'⁷

It did not take long after the re-election of a Conservative Government for the press to start questioning its efficacy. On 6 June 1955 the editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* commented, 'It had been hoped that Sir Anthony Eden, on this and other aspects of the [rail] strike, would speak more firmly than he did.'⁸ An article in the *Spectator* of 30 September 1955 sneered, '... Sir Anthony has been dithering. He has made up his mind, changed it, made it up again and changed it again.'⁹ A crescendo of criticism reached a climax in late 1955 and the early part of 1956. There was to be no 'season of goodwill' for the right wing press in its relationship with the Government. The *Daily Mail* of 12 December 1955 bemoaned, 'The Government's trouble seems to be not paralysis so much as a lack of will.'¹⁰ Critical editorials began to appear in *The Times*, normally a reliable supporter of Conservative policies, suggesting that new policies were needed. An editorial on 17 December 1955 complained of '... a certain lack of touch ... beginning to be felt about the current administration.'¹¹ Henry Fairlie, writing in the *Spectator* on 23 December 1955, judged, 'From the heights on which it stood after the General Election in May, Sir Anthony Eden has led his Government steadily downhill.'¹² The *Economist* criticised the appointment of Selwyn Lloyd as Foreign Secretary in its 24 December edition stating, 'It is no derogation from Mr Selwyn Lloyd's eminent ability ... to say that he is obviously the Prime Minister's mouthpiece.'¹³ On 2 January 1956 *The Times* pronounced, 'New men on

⁶ Clark, 1958, 148

⁷ Ibid, 148

⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 6/6/55, 8

⁹ *Spectator*, 30/9/55, 5

¹⁰ *Daily Mail*, 12/12/55, 4

¹¹ *The Times*, 17/12/55, 9

¹² *Spectator*, 23/12/55, 5

¹³ *Economist*, 24/12/55, 1085

both sides in politics must find new policies. Lost grip - disturbing in the case of the Government, frustrating in that of the Opposition - has to be recovered.' It continued, 'But so far as Sir Anthony Eden's Government are concerned 1957 will be their last chance.'¹⁴ The following day the *Daily Telegraph* continued its criticism. 'This is a time for doing what is right, not what is expedient; for courage, not timidity.'¹⁵ *The Times* editorial of 5 January 1956 also commented on the fiscal situation. 'No less disturbing is the low level at which the [gold and dollar] reserves now stand ... They must be built up once again.'¹⁶

The left wing press soon joined the tide of condemnation. The *Daily Herald* of 5 January 1956 commented:

[Eden] dithers about Cyprus, he dithers about the whole of Middle East policy, he dithers about the Nation's financial trouble and he even dithered for months over shuffling his Cabinet.¹⁷

The headline in the *Daily Mirror* of the same date read, 'EDEN IS A FLOP'. They followed this with, 'Never has the prestige of a British Prime Minister sunk so low so soon after a victorious election.'¹⁸ On 8 January 1956 the *Observer*, sister paper to the *Manchester Guardian*, wrote, 'The vehement criticism of the Prime Minister which has broken out in Conservative circles is understandable. ... The "Eden must go" movement has gained a lot of recruits.'¹⁹ *The Times* commented on this criticism: 'Recent attacks in the press - including several newspapers which have hitherto consistently supported the Government - have accused the Prime Minister of indecision and weakness.'²⁰ Labour M.P. Tom Driberg, writing in *Reynolds News*, was particularly prescient when he wrote, '[Eden] hates taking decisions but, like all weak men, he will sometimes take a snap decision and stick to it, obstinately and irritably, until the fact that it cannot be stuck to becomes obvious even to him.' He concluded, witheringly: '... Great Britain is led by a spineless clothes prop.'²¹ Perhaps the most insightful comment came from the *British Weekly Journal*, in January 1956: 'Of course Eden is a failure as a Prime Minister ... Eden is a diplomat and should

¹⁴ *The Times*, 2/1/56, 9

¹⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 3/1/56, 8

¹⁶ *The Times*, 5/1/56, 9

¹⁷ *Daily Herald*, 5/1/56, 4

¹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 5/1/56, 1

¹⁹ *Observer*, 8/1/56,

²⁰ *The Times*, 9/1/56, 8

²¹ *Reynolds News*, 11/1/56, 7

have stuck to diplomacy. ... Sir Anthony Eden is the scapegoat, not the culprit.²² Even *Time* magazine joined in:

After eight months in office Sir Anthony Eden was clearly a disappointment. ... so far the Eden government has proved itself incapable of coming to grips with any major problems. Among his colleagues, Eden used to be praised as a compromiser. More and more, the most common word in Britain for Eden is ditherer.²³

This was followed a few weeks later by: 'Last week Sir Anthony Eden gave another of his vivid impersonations of a man of uncertainty.'²⁴

Among the Conservative papers there was no sense that they should support the Government in the face of this chorus of left wing disapproval. On the contrary, their fault finding became even more intense. *The Spectator* complained on 6 January 1956, 'Too little too late (as in Cyprus) sacrificing sure allies for dubious ones (as in the Israeli - Arab dispute) ... all these things are the marks of wobble and muddle at the top.'²⁵ A letter in the *Daily Telegraph* of the same day protested, 'Many of us are bitterly disappointed with the indecisiveness of Government policy in all spheres, notably foreign affairs. Oh for a Winston Churchill 40 years younger.'²⁶ The most wounding article of all must have been the one by Donald McLachlan in the *Daily Telegraph* of 3 January 1956. He recalled how, when Eden wanted to emphasise a point he would:

... clench one fist to smack the open palm of the other hand - but the smack is seldom heard. Most Conservatives ... are waiting to hear the smack of firm Government.

He followed that barb with:

Those who follow them [Foreign Affairs] have been dismayed by the hesitation and lack of clarity over Cyprus, by the determination to offer the soft answer to Marshall Bulganin and Mister Khrushchev [Soviet leaders] and by the clumsy courtship of unfriendly and fickle Arab statesmen.

Then he referred to the difficulty of following Churchill, saying:

Very few of us are bulldogs and collies cannot growl like the bulldog.²⁷

The inference was obvious. Eden was no Churchill but an effete poodle-like substitute for the great man. McLachlan offered several specific criticisms of Eden.

²² *British Weekly News*, 14/1/56, 7

²³ *Time* 2/1/56

²⁴ *Time*, 16/1/56

²⁵ *The Spectator*, 6/1/56, 5

²⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 6/1/56, 7

²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 3/1/56, 8

Firstly [he] ... relied too much in Home Affairs on the technique of smoothing and fixing which are the essence of skilled diplomacy. Secondly, that he is not cultivating Mr Attlee's superb disregard for personal popularity. Thirdly, that he looks too much over the shoulder of his Foreign Secretary.²⁸

On talks with the TUC *The Times* offered this advice:

The Government have nothing to lose by courage. Anything else will lead to failure: and if failure is to be the outcome of their efforts in any case, then the nation will respect them more for a brave effort than a timid fumble.²⁹

Criticism was not confined to Eden alone but extended to his Cabinet. Referring to inflation *The Times* complained: 'But unless the Government press on with measures much more radical and much more drastic we shall be in a worse plight a year from now.' They followed that with criticism of RAB Butler, the Chancellor of the Exchequer: 'Admittedly, he has lost his touch since last April and had no longer - least of all in his October budget - seemed to be the sure master of events.'³⁰

Despite this harsh criticism an editorial in the same paper on the same day offered Eden some hope of restoring his political fortunes. 'If the Government will be bold its own reward will be restored credit and enhanced stature.'³¹ The following day an article by Edward Spears analysing the problems in Cyprus appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*. In a scathing evaluation he complained: 'Our every concession has been recognised as the weakness it was and more concessions have followed until something like anarchy prevails ...'³²

These reprovals would really have hit home with Eden because they were all true. He was constantly concerned with his own personal popularity. Significantly, Eden's papers contain copies of many of the newspapers most trenchant in their criticisms. Selwyn Lloyd was little more than a figurehead at the Foreign Office; Eden made all major foreign policy decisions. Eden's diplomatic overtures, both at home and abroad, were much more obvious now he was Prime Minister. Although his press secretary tried to persuade him otherwise, Eden could not resist responding to the criticism. In a speech in Bradford his riposte was: 'I do not have to advise this great Yorkshire audience not to believe everything they read in certain London newspapers.' His original notes show that he had intended to

²⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 3/1/56, 8

²⁹ *The Times*, 5/3/56, 9

³⁰ *The Times*, 24/1/56, 9

³¹ *The Times*, 21/4/56, 7

³² *Daily Telegraph*, 22/4/56, 9

follow this with: 'As for some sections of the Conservative press, I can assure you that as far as I personally am concerned, their attacks do not matter one little bit.'³³ The trouble was that it was obvious that the attacks did matter to Eden. This speech was reported in the *Yorkshire Post* which was very supportive and devoted four full pages to Eden's visit to Bradford.³⁴ Eden asked for six copies of the newspaper to be sent to him. It is worth noting that the *Yorkshire Post* was owned by Sir Gervase Beckett, Eden's father-in-law at the time.

After this onslaught press criticism decreased but did not stop. On 12 July 1956 the *Evening News* returned to the fray.

... thousands of people who, by every instinct in their nature and by every process of reasoning, are Conservative ... are profoundly disturbed by the discovery that the Government are not [Conservatives], that they have no policy of their own on any important matter and that they are content to substitute drift for action.³⁵

Eden tried to make light of this criticism when he might have been better advised to ignore it. In a speech to the English

Speaking Union on 12 July he compared himself to the English cricket team which had

³³ AP 12/3/446G

³⁴ *Yorkshire Post*, 18/1/56, 4 - 7

³⁵ *Evening News*, 12/7/56, 7

been playing Australia at Leeds, that day. The team had recovered from 17 for three wickets to finish the day on 204 for four.³⁶ Eden commented:

As the day wore on it got better and you know it's some consolation, if I may say so, to a Prime Minister, who is not entirely unaccustomed to criticism to see that events can prove that even a selection committee is wiser than the critics who condemn them so roundly.³⁷

Criticism did not come just from the newspapers. Members of the Conservative party and its supporters were also vociferous in their condemnation of Eden's government. Some wrote to Eden personally; others to the Party Chairman, Oliver Poole, and others to the press. There are so many letters of criticism in the Conservative Party Archives that they have had to be divided into alphabetical sub groups. The Conservative M.P., Patrick Wall, in a letter to *The Times* commented on Cyprus: 'Among the British and Turks [in Cyprus] I found a universal belief that Her Majesty's Government had been weak in dealing with the situation ...'³⁸ On 12 March 1956 seven letters appeared in *The Times* complaining about 'the burden of the middle classes'.³⁹ *The Times* followed that with an editorial on 20 March 1956: 'The Prime Minister has, in occasions during the past year, shown unsureness of touch. There have been aberrations under strain.'⁴⁰ Letters from Conservative voters and members of local Conservative Associations continued this barrage of criticism. They generally followed a similar theme; incompetence at home and weakness abroad. To quote some examples:

I do not know whether the Government is aware of the extreme bitterness among ordinary Conservative supporters, but it is about time they did.⁴¹

The present Government is conspicuous by its lack of policy and will surely earn a place in history as the Government of supreme vacillators.⁴²

My committee unanimously considers that the present Government has a fumbling and uncertain hand in the management of the Nation's affairs, and is lacking in leadership.⁴³

³⁶ <http://www.espnricinfo.com/ci/engine/current/match/62813.html> (19/12/13)

³⁷ AP 12/3/520K

³⁸ *The Times*, 1/2/56, 7

³⁹ *The Times*, 12/3/56, 4

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 5/4/56, 9

⁴¹ CCO4/7/316 from A W Dicker on 8/2/56

⁴² CCO 4/7/316 from T Kenneth-Duncan on 29/2/56

⁴³ CCO 4/7/317 from the Chairman of the Kinver Conservative Association on 12/4/56

I hope that you people in London can do something to impress upon our pale pink and thick-headed Government some of the lessons of Tonbridge [a by election where the Conservative majority was reduced from over 10,000 to 1,600].⁴⁴

... you should be made aware of your dangerous appeasement attitude on all matters.⁴⁵

I wonder if the leaders of the Conservative party realize how deeply disappointed the rank and file of Conservative voters are with the present Government. ... Speaking as a life-long Conservative, I must confess that I shall find it very difficult to know how to vote on a future occasion.⁴⁶

[I am looking for] some firm and decisive actions by the Government.⁴⁷

I feel there is a great lack of leadership from you and your Government ...⁴⁸

Stop looking over your shoulders and worrying about what your constituents are thinking.⁴⁹

At the present critical time for our country (and for the Conservative Party) I am writing to implore that drastic changes be made in leadership.⁵⁰

... no evidence of any positive suggestions of how the Conservative Government will tackle the problems of the abuse of power by the Trade Unions and the threatening of freedom by growing bureaucracy.⁵¹

... wonder whether you really understand the difficulties of the middle classes & the resentment against the Conservative Government.⁵²

Having supported the Conservative Party all my life ... Primarily the running away and appeasing policy in all our foreign dealings gets us in the end into a mess ...⁵³

... people are saying they did not return a Conservative Government for it to pursue a policy of near Socialism [also commented that annual contributions were down by £1,000].⁵⁴

⁴⁴ CCO 4/7/316 from R Ede England on 13/6/56

⁴⁵ CCO 4/7/315 from 'Four Former Tories' on 27/6/56

⁴⁶ CCO 4/7/317 from Rev D Pateman on 4/7/56

⁴⁷ CCO 4/7/315 from H Case on 4/7/56

⁴⁸ CCO4/7/179 from B Climie on 20/7/56

⁴⁹ CCO 4/7/317 from O Guggenheim on 26/7/56

⁵⁰ CCO 4/7/179 from Col E Hume on 22/7/56

⁵¹ CCO 4/7/315 from W Coltham on 29/7/56

⁵² CCO 4/7/315 from M Broughton on 29/7/56

⁵³ CCO 4/7/317 from J Hargreaves on 30/7/56

⁵⁴ CCO 4/7/321 from Chairman of the Shipley and District Conservative Association

Mr P Harris, our former secretary resigned some two months ago from our Committee, broadly on the grounds that Government financial policy shows little consideration for the interests of certain sections of the middle classes.⁵⁵

As an old time Tory I fail to see a hair's breadth difference between Edenism and Socialism ...⁵⁶

Conservative MPs took up the chorus of disapproval:

I do not usually bother you with letters from constituents, but of late I have had so many written in the same tone as the enclosed letter from Mr Dailey that I feel I ought to let you see this one. [The letter from Dailey was very critical of the Govt.] e.g. The real workers of this country are 'fed up' with this Government trying to out-socialise the Socialists.⁵⁷

I am inundated from all parts of the country with censorious letters concerning Government policy, ...I want you clearly to understand the implications of the present malaise which is spreading through our middle class supporters who are feeling increasingly aggrieved by what is styled 'pandering to Socialist institutions and shibboleths.'⁵⁸

Criticism during the Suez Crisis

It was against this background of complaint and dissatisfaction that the Suez affair erupted. When it appeared that Eden was intent on asserting Britain's right to have some control over the canal criticism of his foreign policy was much reduced. Now it was letters of encouragement he received instead. In the period up to 30 November 1956 a total of 1,724 letters and telegrams were received supporting Eden's actions on Suez.⁵⁹ That is not to say there were no dissenting voices.

Now, over Egypt, a strong Prime Minister would not have hesitated to re-occupy the Suez Canal Zone ...⁶⁰

If there was any reasonable alternative to either the Socialist Party and the watered down socialism of the Conservative Party ... I would surely give my vote to such a party.⁶¹

Formerly a staunch Conservative, I am now not at all so sure ... the Prime Minister ... the Cabinet as a whole, and very many Conservative MPs to whom I have talked and asked questions are all AFRAID scared and nonplussed by the power of the trade unions.⁶²

⁵⁵ CCO 4/7/315 from Richmond and Barnes Conservative Association on 30/7/56

⁵⁶ CCO 4/7/179 from Henry Boyd on 31/7/56

⁵⁷ CCO 4/7/315 From Conservative MP J R Bevens on 11/6/56

⁵⁸ CCO 4/7/319 From Gerald Nabarro MP on 19/6/56

⁵⁹ CCO 4/7/131

⁶⁰ CCO 4/7/179 from W Boyd on 31/7/56

⁶¹ CCO 4/7/315 from J Constable on 3/8/56

⁶² CCO 4/7/317 from A Mansfield on 3/8/56

Already fear is being expressed that the present policy of appeasement of the unions will give us socialism by the back door ...⁶³

What on earth is the matter with you and why have you failed and are still failing to carry out Conservative Party policy?⁶⁴

The apparent abandonment of our imperial mission has given a great shock to many Conservatives.⁶⁵

When the Tory Party decides to dispense with socialism and pursue a vigorous Conservative policy generally ... then I would be encouraged to commence subscriptions again.⁶⁶

The *Daily Express* of 1 August reported a vote of no confidence in the Government by Liss Young Conservatives.⁶⁷

At the Conservative Party Conference in October 1956 the major topic was, of course, Suez. Nevertheless, there was still considerable unrest over domestic matters. A mock funeral took place outside the conference organised by the Union of Small Shopkeepers. They carried a sign referring to 'the Funeral of the Small Shopkeeper.'⁶⁸ The main burden of complaint at the conference, as reported in *The Times*, was '... the continued rise in the cost of living and the hardship caused by inflation and heavy taxation.' There were also resolutions which referred to the need for: 'a more vigorous Conservative policy' and for 'firm and clear leadership.'⁶⁹ Within Parliament the Advisory Committee on Policy (a Conservative group) took note of these many complaints. At their meeting on 31 July 1956 RAB Butler suggested: 'Abroad we must show that we mean to maintain Britain as a first class power.' Angus Maude thought it would be: '... unwise ... merely saying Britain would maintain herself as a world power. It was action that would bring the Party round.'⁷⁰

Condemnation of Britain's foreign policy was led by the Suez Group. This group had been formed in 1954 and opposed Eden's policy of withdrawing troops from the Suez Canal Zone. At that time they had been highly sceptical of Eden's claims that the British Government retained the right to send troops back into the Zone if needed. As noted

⁶³ CCO 4/7/315 from R Burns on 4/8/56

⁶⁴ CCO 4/7/319 from M Sandys on 19/8/56

⁶⁵ CCO 4/7/315 (A-C) from Lord Clitheroe 13/9/56

⁶⁶ CCO 4/7/317 from T Aiken on 1/10/56

⁶⁷ *Daily Express*, 14/9/56, 8

⁶⁸ <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/conservatives-in-conference-1> (10/12/2013)

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 10/10/56, 5

⁷⁰ ACP 2/1

above, Captain Charles Waterhouse, M.P., criticised the withdrawal from Suez in 1954. Their discontent continued throughout Eden's time as Prime Minister. Julian Amery M.P., another of its leading lights, maintained '... it was important to have a robust external policy and Britain strong abroad.'⁷¹

Further discontentment was channelled through the 1922 Committee representing Conservative back benchers. At a meeting on 27 October 1955, which Eden attended, various complaints were aired. According to the minutes, Sir Victor Raikes '... expressed his fears on the subject of Purchase Tax.' Angus Maude '... regretted the tax on household goods.' On 16 February 1956 the Chairman reported that he and the Vice Chairman had '... visited the Prime Minister and discussed with him certain statements that had appeared in the press about future Government policy.' Minutes of the 22 March 1956 record Howard Johnston criticising '...the Party Political Broadcast on television and expressed the view that the matter of capital punishment ought not to have been included in the light of the free vote.' On 3 May 1956 'Mr Cooper raised the matter of the Government's public relations.'⁷² Although the 1922 Committee minutes are opaque and couched in the mildest of terms they do show backbench disquiet over a number of Government policies. Criticism from the Suez Group was much more direct. In a letter to *The Times* on 5 March 1956 Waterhouse, referring to Egypt's refusal to let Israeli shipping use the Suez Canal, urged: 'The time for concession is past. ... We should at once declare that any further interference with traffic through the Suez Canal ... will be taken as a declaration of hostile intent and will be met by sanctions, military and economic.'⁷³ Lord Somerset de Chair, a Conservative peer, wrote to *The Times* on 1 March 1956: '... Sir Anthony Eden ... will find it hard to admit that the policy of substituting diplomacy for power in the Middle East has been disastrous.'⁷⁴

This barrage of criticism from the press and others would not have mattered had Eden's skin been a bit thicker leaving him able to shrug it off but his sensitivity to criticism was well known. Churchill advised him to 'Pay no attention to the filthy press ...' but he could not.⁷⁵ The constant theme running through the criticism was a demand for Eden to be stronger; to stand up to the Trade Unions; to stand up for Conservative principles; to

⁷¹ CPA ACP 2/1

⁷² All CPA 1922/5

⁷³ *The Times*, 3/3/56, 9

⁷⁴ *The Times*, 1/3/56, 9

⁷⁵ SP 191/1/2/4 3/1/56

stand up for the middle classes; to be a man of action and to re-establish Britain's place in the world.

All this changed when Eden made it clear that Britain would not stand by and allow the Suez Canal to be controlled by Nasser and Egypt. Julian Amery commented:

Is my Right Hon. Friend aware that he will have the overwhelming support of public opinion in this country on whatever steps he decides to take, however grave, to repair this injury to our honour and interests?⁷⁶

This was Eden's chance to show that he would stand up for Britain. Any question of taking an analytical view; of waiting to see how well or badly the Egyptians ran the canal; of taking advice on the legality of his proposed actions was pushed aside. This was to be Eden's answer to all the criticism.

During the Suez Crisis, when a cool and analytic response was needed, Eden's true character was revealed. He claimed to always have been opposed to appeasement in the 1930s and that negotiating with Nasser in 1956 would amount to the same thing. But was his opposition to appeasement quite so definite and certain as he claimed? That will be the topic for the next chapter.

⁷⁶ *Hansard*, 27/7/1956, 779

Chapter IV

Appeasement

[Eden] is anxious about the effect on his own reputation [if British Diplomatic documents are published] and fears he may look like an appeaser too ...¹

Throughout his political life, and particularly during the Suez Crisis, Eden maintained that he had been a constant opponent of appeasement. This was the principle that guided him when dealing with the Egyptian leader, Nasser. This chapter will examine this claim and show that it was completely spurious. On the contrary, Eden had been a supporter of the appeasement of Hitler and, indeed, tried to use appeasement in his dealings with Nasser before the Suez Crisis.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the verb 'to appease' is to placate by acceding to demands. 'No appeasement' was one of the principles on which Eden based his stance against Nasser over the Suez Canal. He claimed to have been against appeasement throughout his career, particularly in the period leading up to the start of the Second World War. But was he quite the anti appeasement stalwart he claimed to be? The evidence suggests not. It is true that he resigned from Chamberlain's government over its continued appeasement of Italy but examining that episode more closely along with his diaries, papers and other evidence shows that his position was not as clear-cut as he later claimed.² Nor was he so quick to refuse to deal with Hitler as he was with Mussolini and, later, Nasser.

As far back as 1933 Eden was aware of the threat of Nazi Germany. At the disarmament conference in Geneva he wrote,

I still saw no hope but that we should put convention with figures on the table ... Condition of this was however that convention should be 'respectable'. The attempt might fail but I know of no other that could be made. Adjournment meant failure, a small convention was no better for it meant re-armament of Germany, a convention with real measure of disarmament which might bind Germany the only hope.³

Here it can be seen that his proposal to 'bind' Germany was a convention for mutual disarmament. Appeasement by another name. Later that year he noted: '[The Italians]

¹ OH(W) 8/11/41, 61

² See Avon, *Facing the Dictators*

³ AP 20/1/13 11/3/33

have still it seems hope of a more reasonable Hitler after the German elections are over.¹⁴ Eden's approach to Hitler appears confused. He seemed to see the risk of not standing up to him but, at the same time, was positive about his meetings with the German leader. He constantly retained hope that Germany would see the sense of peaceful co-operation. During a trip to Berlin in 1934 he noted: 'I am convinced ... may be that [the Germans] will have enough to do internally during the next few years.'¹⁵ The next day his comment was: '[Hitler] is much more than a demagogue. He knew what he was speaking about & seemed to be more sincere than I had expected. He has even a suspicion of a sense of humour ...'¹⁶ By 1935, his opinion of Hitler remained positive: '[Hitler] hinted at a desire for an alliance with us. We might be glad one day of [Germany's] help to assist us to keep our colonies.'¹⁷ Later that month, however, after a further meeting with Hitler, his views were rather less positive: 'Total result of visit for European settlement very disappointing ... [Viscount] Simon toys with the idea of letting [Germany] expand eastwards. I am strongly against it. Apart from its dishonesty it would be our turn next.'¹⁸ Later that year, when he was Foreign Secretary, Eden was again hoping that diplomacy would bring Germany to a peaceable solution:

At the moment Hitler was in a hole. We had asked him a number of perfectly reasonable questions which in fact he could only fail to answer if his intention was bad. It was therefore most important that he be given no occasion to cloud the issue.⁹

Although in 1937, he wrote a letter to Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, pointing out that: '.... despite comforting speeches, we are not in truth getting stronger vis a vis Germany at least', he took no action, either in the House of Commons or in Cabinet, to propose policies that would increase Britain's strength or reduce Germany's.¹⁰ By early 1938 he seemed less concerned by the increase of German military strength when he wrote to Chamberlain, 'Moreover there seems to be a certain difference between Italian and German positions in that an agreement with the latter might have a chance of a

⁴ AP 20/1/13 25/10/33

⁵ AP 20/1/14 19/2/34

⁶ AP 20/1/14 20/2/34

⁷ AP 20/1/15 25/3/35

⁸ AP 20/1/15 26/3/35

⁹ AP 20/1/16 5/6/36

¹⁰ AP 20/5/13 16/1/37

reasonable life.¹¹ One week later Eden was arguing that talks with Mussolini should be broken off. 'I reminded [Chamberlain] that last year when we made the so called "Gentleman's Agreement" with Italy Mussolini sent 4,000 men to Spain a week after. I feared I had no more confidence in him now.'¹² The next day, however, he wrote, 'There would be nothing to prevent us continuing to negotiate with Germany.'¹³ This shows clearly that Eden understood the threat posed by Hitler but favoured negotiation and appeasement as the best way to deal with this. Only with Mussolini was he in favour of breaking off negotiations and even then, only when Mussolini's lack of co-operation was plain for all to see. Part of the explanation for this may be that Eden was very antipathetic towards Mussolini, stemming from his meeting with the Italian dictator in Rome in June 1935. At this meeting Il Duce had dismissed proposals to stop him from invading Abyssinia. The two men had not got on and Eden had been appalled by Mussolini's table manners. Appeasement had been the essence of the policy followed by Chamberlain's Government in its dealings with the European dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, in the years leading up to the beginning of the Second World War. Eden had been a part of that until his resignation. As shown above, he was even an enthusiastic supporter of the policy with regard to the much greater threat posed by Hitler.

In December 1935, Eden was a member of the Cabinet when the Hoare Laval pact became public knowledge. This was a proposal by the British and French Foreign Ministers (Sir Samuel Hoare and Pierre Laval) to allow Italy to annex part of Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) thereby rewarding Italian aggression. Publicly, British policy at the time was to oppose Italian expansion; largely through the use of sanctions (including potentially oil sanctions) administered by the League of Nations. Privately, however, Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister had accepted the advice of his Chiefs of Staff that Britain was not strong enough to oppose Italy militarily.¹⁴ Mussolini had threatened that the imposition of oil sanctions would provoke him into an attack on the British fleet in the Mediterranean. The British position, therefore, was to appease Italian ambitions in Africa and get the best deal possible through negotiations. In June 1935 Eden had, himself, gone to Italy with proposals to settle the Abyssinian question. These had been rejected by Mussolini. Eden's diaries just before this contain criticisms of this policy. On 12 May 1935 he noted: 'Italy's

¹¹ AP 20/6/6 9/1/38

¹² AP 20/1/18 16/1/38

¹³ AP 20/1/18 17/1/38

¹⁴ Braddick, 1962, 351

request was a diplomatically phrased demand for a free hand in Abyssinia. This should have been strenuously resisted, emphasis laid on our support of the League [of Nations] etc.¹⁵ Eden was not a senior member of the Cabinet at this time. Even so, and despite these comments, there is no evidence that Eden made any real effort to change British policy. Indeed, he attended a meeting at the Hotel des Burgues on 1 November 1935 along with Hoare, his French counterpart Laval, and three others. At the meeting Laval recalled that: '... Eden had spoken to him some time ago about the possibility of Abyssinia ceding to Italy not only the Ogden [region] but also the provinces of Borana and Bale.'

Eden also

... drew attention to the distinction between an exchange of territory promoted by Great Britain and France and our inviting the League of Nations to cooperate in granting a mandate as a reward for the aggressor.¹⁶

Exactly what difference this would make in practice he did not explain. On the back page of his 1953 diary Eden refers to the Hoare Laval pact, perhaps for his biographer's use.

Point to remember about Hoare Laval. As originally agreed terms were to be presented first to Mussolini. No communication to [Abyssinians] at all. ... I now feel pretty sure of reason for this - Mussolini had been squared in advance by Laval. He would have accepted. Then, backed by that acceptance [the Abyssinians] would have been told. ... A pretty manoeuvre, the significance of which I admit I didn't seize at the time.¹⁷


This 'explanation' is just conjecture, and its purpose is unclear, unless it is to place responsibility for the proposal with the French in the shape of the duplicitous Laval. From Eden's point of view he seems to be claiming that he was unaware of the background to the pact so was not to blame. He certainly took no responsibility for the agreement at the time. Politically it did him no harm at all. When details of the pact became known in Britain there was political uproar and Hoare was forced to resign. Eden replaced him as Foreign Secretary. Throughout the Abyssinian crisis Britain could have appealed to the League of Nations to impose punitive sanctions on Italy, including closing the Suez Canal to Italian ships, but did not wish to risk offending Mussolini. Instead the Cabinet preferred the use of 'soft' sanctions and diplomacy. Eden, with his fellow Cabinet members, accepted that appeasing Mussolini, rather than risking war, was in the best interests of Britain and her empire.

¹⁵ AP 20/1/15 12/5/35

¹⁶ AP 20/4/5B

¹⁷ AP 20/1/29

Eden was Foreign Secretary during the early years of the Spanish Civil War, which saw the fascist Francisco Franco overthrow the republican government. He regarded events in Spain as of no interest to Britain: '... victory of either side in Spain matter of indifference to us.'¹⁸ Initially he seems to have been unaware that both Mussolini and Hitler were using the conflict in Spain as a proving ground for their men and materiel: 'The Spanish Government claims that these Italians are regular military units. We should think this very unlikely' was his comment.¹⁹ Britain and France pursued a non-intervention policy



of banning the import of weapons into Spain. This was not an even-handed policy. Hitler and Mussolini continued to send weapons and men to Spain despite the blockade. The Luftwaffe used attacks on Spanish cities such as Guernica (pictured aside) as a proving ground for their air tactics. While the

Government side received some assistance from the Soviet Union this was much less than Franco and the fascists received. In March 1936 Eden wrote, 'My own feeling is at present against the granting of belligerent rights to Franco for international reasons rather than Spanish reasons.'²⁰ So, he did not support Franco but he made little attempt to oppose him. This was one dictator that Eden did not feel the need to stand up to.

The end of the First World War saw various treaties signed between the victors and the vanquished, including the Treaty of Versailles. Part V of this treaty severely restricted the size of the German army and navy. Despite this, in June 1935, the British Government signed an agreement with Germany that the German navy could increase in size to a maximum of 35% of the size of the British navy. It also permitted the German navy to build

¹⁸ AP 20/1/17 13/1/37

¹⁹ AP 20/1/17 15/3/37

²⁰ AP 20/1/16 21/3/36

submarines, which had been specifically forbidden by the Versailles Treaty. This agreement was signed without the knowledge of the French. The Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, explained, 'In recent years many opportunities of achieving disarmament had been lost through delay in seizing the favourable moment. ... it was essential to seize the present opportunity and secure the German signature to the agreement.'²¹ He did not explain how allowing Germany to substantially increase its navy would help to achieve disarmament. Eden was a member of the Cabinet who agreed this substantial increase in German armaments. In fact he was asked to go to Paris to explain the agreement to the French Foreign Minister. Cabinet minutes are, of course, notorious for what they do not say. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Eden made any objection to the agreement with Germany. Part XIV of the same treaty provided that the Rhineland, an area on the Franco-German border, would initially be occupied by Allied troops. When they left, this area would stay demilitarised, although it remained part of Germany. The Treaty of Locarno reinforced this term in 1925. At first Germany willingly agreed to continue this demilitarisation and in 1930 the final Allied troops left. On 7 March 1936 Germany repudiated this part of the treaty and German troops returned to the Rhineland. Eden's comment was: '[The Cabinet] are prepared to accept Hitler's amendment [to disarmament convention] on condition Germany returns to the League [of Nations]. The timidity is almost terrible.'²² Despite this, when he spoke on the matter in a statement in the House of Commons, he was as timid as the rest of the Cabinet. 'There is, I am thankful to say, no reason to suppose that the present German action implies a threat of hostilities' He went on to say: ' ... if peace is to be secured there is a manifest duty to rebuild. It is in that spirit that we must approach the new proposals of the German Chancellor.'²³ At a Cabinet meeting the previous day Eden referred to a memorandum that he had circulated some three weeks previously, saying,

Taking one thing with another it seems undesirable to adopt an attitude where we would either have to fight for the zone or abandon it in the face of German reoccupation. It will be preferable for Great Britain and France to enter betimes into negotiations with the German Government for the surrender, on conditions, of our rights in the zone.

He went on to say, 'We must discourage any military action by France against Germany.'²⁴ So, Germany was to be allowed to unilaterally abrogate one of the terms of the Treaties of

²¹ CAB/23/82

²² AP 20/1/14 28/3/34

²³ *Hansard*, 9/3/36, 1812

²⁴ CAB/24/261

Versailles and Locarno and Eden recommended no direct action being taken. Indeed, he wanted to ensure that France, also, took no action. This approach was also reflected in his speech to the House of Commons on 16 July 1937. '... this House ... will, I am sure, wish to take no step which might have the effect of jeopardising in advance the cause of international appeasement ...'²⁵ Here we see Eden not just accepting appeasement but recommending it as a policy. In his autobiography, *Full Circle*, Eden referred to this period. 'A check to Hitler when he moved to reoccupy the Rhineland ... would have made him pause.'²⁶ That is not what he was saying in 1937.

On 20 February 1938 Eden resigned his position of Foreign Secretary in Chamberlain's Cabinet. In his resignation speech to the House of Commons he made his position clear.

Let me make it plain. I do not suggest and I would not advocate that the Government should refuse conversations with the Italian Government, or indeed with any other Government which shows any disposition to conversations with us for the betterment of international understandings, yet we must be convinced that the conditions in which these conversations take place are such as to make for the likelihood, if not for the certainty, of their success. I contend that these conditions do not exist to-day.²⁷

He then referred to:

... conversations which have, and rightly have, as an objective ... appeasement in the Mediterranean as a whole ... to promote lasting appeasement ... I do not believe that we can make progress in European appeasement ... if we allow the impression to gain currency abroad that we yield to constant pressure.²⁸

Two days previously he had written to Chamberlain asking him not to promise Grandi, the Italian ambassador, anything until the Cabinet had had a chance to see and discuss it.²⁹ By the time the Cabinet met to discuss relations with Italy Eden had made up his mind to resign. Oliver Stanley, President of the Board of Trade, commented that this '... had come as a complete shock to the Cabinet.'³⁰ The Lord President of the Council, Viscount Halifax, pointed out that, 'A few days ago everyone had been agreed on the desirability of

²⁵ *Hansard*, 16/7/37,

²⁶ Eden, 1960, 431

²⁷ *Hansard*, 20/2/38, 46

²⁸ *Hansard*, 20/2/38, 46-48

²⁹ AP 20/6/9 18/2/38

³⁰ CAB/23/92, 2

conversations with Italy and Germany.³¹ Walter Elliot, Secretary of State for Scotland, said: ' ... this was an entirely new situation.'³² The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Simon, remarked that

... he also felt rather disturbed and surprised at the extent of the ground of differences of opinion as stated by the Foreign Secretary. He had had special opportunities to observe these matters, and he had never realised the width of the breach.³³

The Secretary of State for India, the Marquess of Zetland, said... ' ... what the Cabinet had just heard [Eden's intention to resign] came as a great shock.'³⁴ The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, Sir Thomas Inskip, was as perplexed as his colleagues. He ... 'had not been conscious of deep differences of opinion on matters of principle. Even on the previous day, he had not thought that there was any difference of principle, but only of method and time.'³⁵ Clearly Eden had not discussed his reservations with his fellow Cabinet members prior to his resignation. Where, now, was the principled opponent of appeasement that Eden later claimed to have been? If, as Eden later claimed, his resignation was on a point of principle on appeasement, why was he still talking of promoting 'lasting appeasement'; of making 'progress on European appeasement'? Why had he neither voiced his objections in Cabinet nor discussed his difficulties with his fellow Cabinet colleagues? The answer, of course, is that he understood that appeasement was necessary at that time. David Reynolds, in his article, 'Eden the Diplomatist, 1931-56: Suezide of a Statesman?', argues that any hopes Eden had of an agreement with Mussolini ' ... were dampened by Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War from mid 1936 .. '³⁶ Given that Germany was also involved in the Spanish Civil War, arguably to greater effect than Italy, it is difficult to see how the two can be differentiated on these grounds. Reynolds other comment, that Eden was put off Mussolini by his virulent anti Britain propaganda campaign is closer to the truth as discussed below. Eden was just as much pro-appeasement as all the other members of the Cabinet. He did not reject appeasement. In fact, he accepted that appeasement was sometimes necessary but simply considered that now was not the time for further concessions to Italy.

³¹ CAB/23/92, 3

³² CAB/23/92, 3

³³ CAB/23/92, 5

³⁴ CAB/23/92, 8

³⁵ CAB/23/92, 9

³⁶ Reynolds, 1989, 67

In 1956, when Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company Eden referred to his own 1938 resignation. He claimed to have been opposed to appeasement then as he was opposed to appeasement now. This bears no relationship to the facts. As Foreign Secretary he had been negotiating with both the Italians and the Germans. Where was his 'principled' objection to appeasement then? If he really had objected it would certainly have been discussed in Cabinet, and yet none of his Cabinet colleagues was aware of it. Perhaps the clue lies in Eden's own comments at the Cabinet meeting where he resigned. He said, 'It was more a matter of emphasis and handling than of principle.'³⁷ He wanted more from Mussolini than Mussolini had so far been prepared to give. Why was Eden happy to continue discussions with Hitler (and ignore Franco) but was not prepared to continue talks with the Italians? The answer must lie in the geographical areas in which the three dictators operated. Franco was confined to Spain and showed no inclination to look for expansion elsewhere. Hitler's activities at the time were confined to central and eastern Europe where Britain had few interests. Mussolini, however, wanted to turn the Mediterranean into an Italian lake. In other words, to have control of the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to the Nile. Britain could never have allowed that. It would have left all shipping between Britain and its empire at the mercy of Italian forces. So Eden rebuffed the Italians but was willing to continue talking to the Germans. There was little sign of principle here, just practicality.³⁸

In September 1955 Nasser agreed to buy more than \$200m worth of Soviet arms through Czechoslovakia.³⁹ The United States and Britain were both concerned that this would lead to Communism gaining a foothold in the Middle East, which they were both desperate to prevent. The United States President before Eisenhower was Harry S. Truman. He introduced the doctrine of opposing Communist expansion wherever it occurred that still held sway in the United States, and Britain feared that Soviet influence would adversely impact its traditional role in the Middle East. However, they both felt unable to take on the role of arms supplier to Egypt. In 1950 they, along with France, had signed the Tripartite Declaration agreeing to restrict arms sales in the Middle East in an attempt to bring some stability to the region. In addition Eisenhower would have faced great difficulties in supplying arms to Egypt in the face of a hostile Congress. What else could Britain and the USA do to retain Nasser's goodwill? Eden thought he had the

³⁷ CAB23/92, 5

³⁸ See L.Pratt, *East and West of Suez. Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939* (London: LSE, 1976)

³⁹ Oren, 1992, 87

answer - Britain and the USA would help fund the construction of the Aswan High Dam. He called it 'a political dam'. Egypt is a country of more than 100m square kilometres. In 1956 less than 3% of that land was cultivatable, along the river Nile, to feed a population of some 23 million people. Nasser proposed to increase the proportion cultivatable to 4% by controlling the water in the Nile by way of a new dam at Aswan - the Aswan High Dam. As well as producing water for irrigation this would control flooding and provide hydro-electric power. His problem was that this was going to cost in excess of \$1.3bn, an enormous amount in 1955. Most of this could be raised and paid for in Egyptian currency but the balance of \$400m would need to be paid in foreign currency. Where was Nasser to get this money from? There was an initial worry that Nasser might approach the Soviet Union. Eden saw this as a further threat to British influence in the area. On 20 October 1955 he sent for the US Deputy Ambassador (in the absence of the Ambassador)

... and expressed in strong terms his personal interest in proposals concerning the High Dam in Egypt which [British Ambassador to Washington] Makins was instructed today to discuss in Washington at the highest possible level as soon as possible.⁴⁰

On the same day Macmillan sent a telegram to Makins setting out his and the British Government's worries. A copy of this was given to the US Ambassador in London.

I am much concerned about the need for prompt action to forestall any move by the Russians to undertake the construction and financing of the High dam. Coming on top of the recent Czech sales of arms to Egypt, this would be a serious blow to Western prestige and influence in the Middle East ...⁴¹

Although Foster Dulles was keen on this idea there was considerable opposition to it from the U.S. Cabinet, particularly because Eden expected the U.S. to put up the majority of the money. Towards the end of November Eden became even more enthusiastic over funding the dam. In a telegram to Eisenhower he wrote,

... I am convinced on our joint success in excluding the Russians from this contract may depend the future of Africa. ... we must avert the disaster of the two Egyptians leaving Washington without the conviction that agreement is going to be reached.⁴²

Shuckburgh noted:

⁴⁰ *FRUS* XIV 632

⁴¹ *FRUS* XIV, 633

⁴² *FRUS* XIV, 809

... there is a terrific scare that the Egyptians are going to give the Aswan Dam project to the Russians. ... The P.M. is taking a strong lead in the direction of getting the World Bank and the US Government to put up quickly whatever is needed for the Aswan Dam ...⁴³

The Labour M.P. Lance Mallalieu saw clearly what this was. In a letter to *The Times* on 2 January 1956 he wrote:

The Aswan Dan will be a good test. To refuse hitherto to assist with the building of the dam, and now to offer to finance it without any conditions as to Egyptian behaviour towards Israel - just because of the fear that the Russians may finance it if we do not - is appeasement of the first order.⁴⁴

Eden's efforts regarding the Aswan Dam were simply appeasement by another name. He wanted Nasser to favour Britain and the West, so he was prepared to give him an initial amount of £5.5m with more to come as the dam construction progressed. He encouraged the Americans to provide the balance. Amery was highly critical of Government policy in the Middle East generally. His letter to *The Times* of 9 March 1956 complained:

The dismissal of General Glubb from the command of the Arab Legion [in Jordan] and the stoning of the Foreign Secretary ... in Bahrain attest to the bankruptcy of the policy of appeasement in the Middle East.⁴⁵

For the whole of his political career this had been Eden's approach. Even when he had personal doubts he did nothing to bring them to the attention of his Cabinet colleagues or the public. Despite concerns over German rearmament he stood by while they reoccupied the Rhineland and substantially increased their navy. At no point did he ever suggest breaking off negotiations with them. He kept talking to the Italians despite Mussolini's constant broken promises until eventually he realised that the talks were fruitless. He did his best to bribe Nasser with a promise of funding for the Aswan High Dam. His claims to have been opposed to appeasement in 1938 and again in 1956 do not stand up. Like the vast majority of his fellow politicians in the 1930s he had been in favour of appeasement then just as he was with the Aswan High Dam later. His hatred of Nasser had a different source, as will be seen in a later chapter.

Rejection of appeasement was one ground to which Eden often referred when trying to justify the use of force to reintroduce international control of the Suez Canal. The other ground was his support for international treaties and agreements. However, when looked at more closely it becomes clear that Eden supported this principle only when it suited him.

⁴³ Shuckburgh, 1986, 305 - 306

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 2/1/56, 9

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 5/3/56, 9

So far as Cyprus was concerned, for example, he was quite happy to ignore the international agreements contained in the Geneva Conventions.

In April 1955 violence erupted on the British colony of Cyprus. British rule here had begun in 1878 when the island was ceded to Britain by the Ottomans. In 1925 it became a British Crown Colony. For many years the Greek majority on the island had been arguing for *enosis*, union of Cyprus with Greece. No progress was made with this as Britain saw Cyprus as an essential base in the eastern Mediterranean. This was particularly true once British troops left Egypt in 1954. The Turkish minority on the island opposed *enosis* and Britain sided with them. In April 1955 a group called EOKA began a campaign of violence in Cyprus against British rule and in support of *enosis*. In *Full Circle*, Eden claimed that EOKA '... was acting, not in the name of independence which is common form in colonial agitations, but in the name of *Enosis*.'⁴⁶ This is disingenuous. EOKA very clearly wanted the right of self determination for Cyprus. They thought that *enosis* would certainly follow.

As a result of the violence the Governor of the island, General Sir John Harding, proclaimed a State of Emergency on 26 November 1955. Despite this, discussions continued between the Greek Cypriot religious leader, Archbishop Makarios, and the British with a view to reaching some arrangement that would satisfy all the parties. In January 1956 the Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, announced in the House of Commons that: '... as a result of the talks the differences between us have been narrowed down quite considerably.'⁴⁷ This failed to satisfy many Conservative members. On 1 February Henry Kerby, Conservative M.P., asked Lennox-Boyd: '... whether, in view of the fact that Archbishop Makarios, as a British subject, is guilty of continuous incitement to sedition, he will order the Governor of Cyprus to deport him from the island?'⁴⁸ The Colonial Secretary demurred. This lack of progress, combined with the continuing violence instigated by EOKA left many Conservative supporters frustrated. As the Conservative M.P. Patrick Wall complained, in a letter to *The Times*: 'Among the British and Turks [in Cyprus] I found a universal belief that Her Majesty's Government had been weak in dealing with the situation ...'⁴⁹ His view was clearly that the Government needed to be 'tougher'. Amery (he of the Suez Group) noted:

⁴⁶ Eden, 1960, 395

⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 26/1/56, 377

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 1/2/56, 117W

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 1/2/56, 7

It is essential to the defence of our vital interests and the fulfillment of our obligations in the Middle East that we should have full possession of the island and not merely a base on it.^{50 51}

In a letter from E Smith to Lord Hailsham, on Bradford Conservative and National Liberal headed paper, he complained that, 'I, and a lot of our supporters in Bradford, are horrified by the proposal of the Government to negotiate with the potential murderer Makarios.'⁵² R Bell wrote on 13 July 1956, '[The Government] have displayed a spineless attitude in regard to dismemberment of the Empire, viz: Canal Zone, Ceylon bases, Gold Coast and now climbed down to throw Cyprus to the mob.'⁵³ Similarly, R L Carew bemoaned on 10 February 1956: '[You have] gone in for such a feeble policy in Cyprus; over a dozen of our troops have been foully murdered and not a single Cypriot executed.'⁵⁴ These and many other letters show the pressure that Eden and his Government were under to meet force with force. Eden abandoned his normal diplomatic approach and decided to get tough. He took the advice given by Kerby and on 9 March 1956 Makarios, along with several other orthodox priests, was exiled to the Seychelles. Negotiation was now no longer an option. In a debate on the subject Liberal M.P. Clement Davies asked the pertinent question: ' ... if the Government propose to continue negotiations may I ask with whom they propose to negotiate?'⁵⁵ This deportation did not go down very well in the United States either. *The Times'* Washington correspondent reported:

The State Department ... has expressed its official concern through diplomatic channels. Lincoln White, the State Department spokesman said, 'The important thing is to get into an atmosphere in which negotiations can be resumed.'⁵⁶

All Eden's famed diplomatic skills were put aside. Not only had the leader of the Greek Cypriots been deported but the Governor of Cyprus began imposing collective punishments on the Greek population of the island. Two reports in *The Times* reflected this. The first, on 17 March 1956, recorded: ' ... ten families evicted from their homes

⁵⁰ AMEJ, 1/2/124/2, 4/7/56

⁵¹ It is worth noting that by 1959 Amery had changed his position as he was an official supporter of a Bill to establish Cyprus as an independent republic.

⁵² CCO 4/7/179

⁵³ CCO 4/7/321 (U-Z)

⁵⁴ CCO 4/7/315(A-C)

⁵⁵ *Hansard*, 12/3/56, 32

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 14/3/56, 10

because of a failure to provide information to the authorities on several murders.⁵⁷ The second, a month later, recorded an order from the Governor for collective punishment, following the killing of a Greek Cypriot policeman:

By the Governor's order, as a mark of public abhorrence of the deed and to help the security forces to trace the perpetrators of the crime, the inhabitants of the town of Nicosia and its suburbs are being subjected to a collective punishment which is without precedent so far as is known. Every restaurant, bar, club, coffee shop, cinema, confectioner's shop, cabaret, and, in fact, any place of entertainment which is owned by a Greek Cypriot, has to remain closed for a week.

The Times wryly commented: 'It certainly will not increase the number of pro British Cypriots.'⁵⁸ Although the Government constantly reiterated the view that Cyprus could not be granted independence because this would mean the domination of the Turkish minority by the Greek majority this was just a cover and not the important issue. Eden made it clear in a speech on 1 June 1956 that Cyprus was an essential part of Britain's vital interests in the eastern Mediterranean. 'No Cyprus, no certain facilities to protect our supply of oil. No oil, unemployment and hunger in Britain. It is as simple as that.'⁵⁹ He made no mention of protecting the Turkish minority.⁶⁰ *The Times*, in an editorial of 22 June 1956 complained: 'They [the British Government] have been miserably slow in breaking the diplomatic deadlock in Cyprus and they have years of fumbling behind them ...'⁶¹

Eden's later arguments over Suez, when he constantly referred to the sanctity of international treaties and agreements, is in direct conflict with the treatment of many Greek Cypriots. As shown above collective punishments were common. By 27 June 1956 17 collective fines had been imposed in a total of £105,850, 27 householders and 53 shopkeepers in Nicosia had been evicted. All were allowed to return after three months.⁶² Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention specifically prohibits collective punishments. 'No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 17/3/56, 6

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 19/4/56, 8

⁵⁹ *The Manchester Guardian*, 2/6/56, 4

⁶⁰ It should be noted that, by 1959, the British (Conservative) Government took a completely opposite view and began negotiations that led to Cyprus becoming independent in 1960.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 22/6/56, 11

⁶² *Hansard*, 27/6/56, 464 & 466

committed. Collective penalties ... are prohibited.⁶³ At no point did Eden ever consider this. International treaties were obviously only to be sacrosanct when it suited.

Eden claimed to have always been an opponent of appeasement and committed to supporting international agreements. When examined both claims turn out to have been spurious. Once Government records became available it became apparent that he had supported the appeasement of Germany.⁶⁴ It was Eden's own character that drove him to take irrational decisions concerning Nasser and his relationship with the Egyptian leader will be the topic of the next chapter.

⁶³ <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0173.htm> (11/12/2013)

⁶⁴ See P.Beck, 'Politicians versus Historians: Lord Avon's "Appeasement Battle" against "lamentably appeasement-minded" historians' *Twentieth Century British History*, 9,3 (1998)

Chapter V

Eden and Nasser

But Eden wasn't happy. His aim was to overthrow Nasser - he didn't want a settlement. He wanted a situation which would provoke Nasser into doing something which would give us an excuse to invade.¹

This chapter will examine the relationship between Eden and Nasser prior to the latter's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. It will show that Eden was determined to depose Nasser long before the nationalisation. This hatred of Nasser underlay all Eden's subsequent actions.

In October 1954 an agreement was signed that would mean that, after 76 years, the last British troops would leave the Suez Canal Zone and Egypt by June 1956. Both Britain and Egypt had been searching for such an agreement for many years without success. An article dated 20 June

1950 in the Egyptian newspaper *Rose el Yousef*, commented:

[Sir Ralph Stevenson - UK ambassador to Egypt at that time] is still looking for a settlement of the Egyptian problem, that settlement for which Britain has been yearning for 65 years, but could not achieve it. In all probabilities she will never get that settlement. Any settlement involves two equal parties but the Egyptian problem has only one partner, viz the rightful claimant; as to the other he is but an aggressor.²

The *Los Angeles Times* of 21 December 1951 reported: 'It is the announced intention of the Nahas Pasha government to drive the British forces out of the canal zone.'³ Initially

¹ BDOHP, Sir Mervyn Brown, 8

² Stevenson, 10859/1/6/15

³ Stevenson, 10859/1/6/90

Eden's actions suggest that he was in favour of keeping British troops in Egypt. By the beginning of November 1951 6,000 additional British troops had been flown into Egypt to try to control the disturbances by Egyptian nationalists. Eventually total British troop numbers would exceed 80,000. By the beginning of 1952 attacks on those troops and their camps within the Suez Canal Zone had reached a point where the military commander and the British Government decided that something had to be done. On 25 January 1952 the British commander in the area demanded that the Egyptian policemen in Ismailia surrender their weapons and leave the canal zone completely. They refused and retired to their barracks. British troops, armed with machine guns, armour and tanks surrounded the barracks and demanded the police surrender. The police refused and the British were left with little option but to attack. In the result, 50 Egyptians were killed and 80 injured. When news of the affray reached Cairo rioting ensued, including attacks on Europeans and European business. At the Turf Club the Canadian Trade Commissioner and nine Britons were killed. The British commander suggested to Eden that any plan for British troops to attempt to restore order might very well make matters worse, and, indeed, he was doubtful that he had enough troops under his command to carry out any such move. Eden replied: ' ... that if instructed to intervene he must do so, whatever the risks.'⁴

As time progressed, however, Eden formed the opinion that Britain should withdraw its troops from Egypt. At a Cabinet meeting on 22 January 1952 it was pointed out that:

... the expenditure of £125 million on foreign exchange in maintaining our armed forces overseas might be reduced substantially in the course of time, if, for example in the Middle East, bases were maintained in peace time to which troops could be flown in an emergency.⁵

Opposition came from many places. The Prime Minister, Churchill, was opposed. ' ... [Churchill] hopes there won't be an agreement; he would prefer to march out fighting' recalled Shuckburgh. The Suez Group too was opposed. A leading light, Captain Charles Waterhouse M.P. commented:

I and my friends had feared that there would be a sell-out. This is not a sell-out. It is a give-away. Instead of having physical control of a great base, instead of having troops on the major waterway of the world, we have got this piece of paper in our hands. It is indeed a hard day for anybody on this side of the House to have to sit and support this Government which has, as we believe, not taken a wise decision on the Suez Canal.⁶

Later in his condemnatory speech he said:

⁴ Eden, 1959, 232

⁵ CAB/128/24

⁶ *Hansard*, 29/7/54, 739

... we are becoming weary of our responsibilities, our burdens are becoming too irksome for us and we are really losing our will to rule. ... I believe that the British Empire and the British Commonwealth still have a mission to fulfill ...⁷

He prophesied: ' ... I feel strongly that in signing it [the Canal Agreement] we may have opened the grave of British greatness.'⁸ The Suez Group felt so strongly on this question that,

There is strong talk among some of the rebels that they will campaign in the 1922 Committee against Mr Eden as Sir Winston Churchill's successor, if the Foreign Secretary persists with this plan.⁹

Julian Amery spoke later in the same debate. He recalled the establishment of British power in the Middle East: ' ... we built the foundations of what became a British Empire in the Middle East after the First World War' and protested: 'We are leaving [Suez] because we are undergoing a certain moral collapse.'¹⁰ Before the debate he had corresponded with Waterhouse emphasising how strongly he felt on the issue:

So I can only say that I still hold to the view that I expressed last night, namely that if the Government surrenders over Egypt we shall withdraw our support, even at the risk of letting the Socialists in.

He followed that with a draft (but unsent) letter:

If we are to gain our end, therefore, I feel that we have got to convince them [the Government] that there is no limit to which we shall not go in seeking to prevent what we regard as a national disaster.¹¹

In 2000, long after the Suez crisis was settled he, somewhat fancifully, claimed that had Britain persisted in its Suez adventure and captured the whole of the Suez Canal subsequent events in the region and beyond would have been very different. It would, he claimed, have prevented: two Arab-Israeli wars; the murder of Nuri al-Sa'id and King Faisal in Iraq; the series of Iraqi revolutions; destabilisation of Lebanon; the Egyptian invasion of Yemen; the rise of Colonel Gaddafi in Libya; the Soviet takeover of Aden and Somalia; the emergence of Palestinian terrorism; the rise of Idi Amin in Uganda; the Russian invasion of Hungary; the U.K. failure to join the European Common Market and the rise of de Gaulle.

⁷ *Hansard*, 29/7/54, 743

⁸ *Hansard*, 29/7/54, 745

⁹ *The Recorder*, 16/3/54

¹⁰ *Hansard*, 29/7/54, 781

¹¹ *AMEJ*, 1/2/7, 16/3/54

'Suez' he commented 'was, indeed, Europe's Waterloo.'¹² The difficulty with 'what if', of course, is that one can imagine anything one likes but it is an indication of how the members of the Suez group saw the world and Britain's place in it. It was a sadly deluded dream.

Much of Amery's information on the Middle East came from Patrick Domville. His official status is unclear but what is apparent is that he travelled extensively around the region and submitted many reports to Amery in the period from 1951. His views chimed with Amery's own and he seems to have tailored his reports to substantiate them. For example, he wrote to Amery on 5 May 1954: 'We still have no reason to leave the Canal. I am assured that [Nasser] has not far to go. Elimination is arranged and certain.'¹³ On what evidence he based this conclusion it is impossible to tell. Fear of Communism and a willingness to see it everywhere influenced many of the letters and reports that Amery received. A letter dated 22 June 1954 from George Taylor claimed:

The Communists have a fairly substantial and organised influence in the army. It is absolutely certain that Communist funds have been used to finance the [Muslim] Brotherhood. ... Some contact exists between the Communists and certain leading supporters of the Revolutionary Committee.

An undated report entitled 'Is the Egyptian Regime Communist?' concluded:

... communism is the guiding light in Egypt, communists are in control of the country's internal and international life, communists or procommunists hold key positions in the administration, army, police, intelligence, press, industry, finance, business etc. Communists are enjoying complete freedom of action.¹⁴

This was, of course, arrant nonsense. By March 1954 Nasser was in complete control in Egypt. Demonstrations by the Communists, among others, were severely dealt with and known Communists were expelled from the country or imprisoned.

The underlying view of the Suez Group is well summed up in Amery's article in *Time and Tide* dated 24 July 1954:

The men who rule Britain, not just in the Government but in Parliament and the Civil Service have largely lost faith in Britain's mission. ... Some 40 of us in the House of Commons have decided to oppose any agreement which involves the withdrawal of all our forces from Egypt.¹⁵

¹² Kelly & Gorst, 2000, 124-126

¹³ AMEJ, 1/2/70

¹⁴ AMEJ, 1/2/74

¹⁵ *Time and Tide*, 24/7/54, 983

So far as they were concerned Britain was and should remain a world power. They looked back to a time when Britain was the world's largest creditor, whereas, by the end of the Second World War, it was the world's largest debtor. They fondly imagined that having nuclear weapons would return Britain to its position of prominence. 'We are thus, once again, [with the hydrogen bomb] or we shall be, so far as defence is concerned, in the front rank of powers.'¹⁶ It was a sadly deluded dream, as later events were to show.

The Conservative press was strongly opposed to leaving Egypt.

Britain has made too many surrenders since the war. The disease caught on and vast areas of the British Empire were handed over. Burma. India, Ceylon. And then Abadan. Every scuttle disastrous in undermining the unity of the British Empire and British influence for peace. Now Britain must stand firm. To make any further surrenders to yield any further resources, would endanger not only the well being of the Empire but its security too.¹⁷

Eden, however, was resolute. In March 1952 he wrote to Churchill: 'The plain fact is that we are no longer in a position to impose our will on Egypt regardless of the cost in men, money and international goodwill ... If I cannot impose my will I must negotiate.'¹⁸ In June that year he summed up the position, telling his Cabinet colleagues: 'The essence of a sound foreign policy is to ensure that a country's strength is equal to its obligations.'¹⁹ He did receive support from a number of quarters. The Conservative M.P. Charles Mott-Radclyffe prepared a report in May 1954 on the situation in the Suez Canal Zone.

They [the troops in the Canal Zone] know that at any time the Egyptians could sabotage the canal if they wished to do so. In short troops are neither guarding the base nor the canal. They are merely guarding each other. ... Without this proviso [that the population is reasonably friendly and can supply local labour] all [senior officers] agree that the base is a useless white elephant. ... I could not discover anyone who thought that the Egyptians were in the least likely to attempt to close or sabotage the canal ...²⁰

Finally, in October 1954 agreement was reached. Britain would withdraw all its troops from the Canal Zone by June 1956. The congratulations that Stevenson, British Ambassador at the time, received show how much this was appreciated by both the British and Egyptian governments. A telegram dated 18 October 1954 to Stevenson read: 'Warmest congratulations to you and your staff on this successful outcome of long and difficult

¹⁶ *Hansard*, 29/2/56, 1092, Amery

¹⁷ *Daily Express*, 17/6/54, 7

¹⁸ FO371/96985

¹⁹ CAB 129/53

²⁰ CPA CCO 4/11/2-3, 9

negotiations. The Government are most grateful for your devoted labours.'²¹ Eden, himself, wrote to Stevenson: ' ... I should like you to know how grateful I am to you for all the hard work you have put in on these negotiations , and the great contribution you have made to the success of our efforts.'²² There were many similar letters and telegrams from British diplomats around the world who appreciated how difficult the negotiations had been.²³ The following year the *Egyptian Gazette* complimented Stevenson: 'Here, in Egypt, he will always be affectionately remembered as the man who finally steered Anglo Egyptian relations to port safely after so many bleak and stormy periods.'²⁴ It is obvious that Stevenson had had some considerable difficulty in persuading the British Government to sign the agreement. A letter he received from Cecil Campbell dated 11 March 1952 commented: ' ... a score of Conservative Members of Parliament and the editor of the *Economist*, are the only people outside Broadmoor who regard re-occupation as the obvious and easy solution.'²⁵ In a letter to Vernon Bartlett dated 1 March 1953 Stevenson wrote:

Our only course to my mind is to face the inescapable facts of the situation, make up our minds about what is right and then do it. I fear however that, as has generally been the case in the past, emotionalism will befog the issue.²⁶

In a letter dated 5 February 1955 he claimed:

I was lucky indeed to be the first ambassador to Egypt who had a realistic [Egyptian] government to deal with. The result was, of course, that there was much greater difficulty in getting the idea of an agreement accepted in London than in Cairo.²⁷

This spirit of rapprochement did not last long. Even before Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company Eden was finding him very difficult to deal with. He considered whether he could be overthrown and replaced with someone more sympathetic to Britain and the Western powers. In a memo to the Foreign Secretary, Harold Macmillan, on 12 October 1955, he asked, 'Do you think you could get an estimate from our Ambassador in Cairo as to Nasser's present position, the extent of his support, and the chances of any

²¹ Stevenson, 10859/1/8/1

²² Stevenson, 10859/3/13

²³ Stevenson, 10859/3/13

²⁴ *Egyptian Gazette*, 16/6/55, 1

²⁵ Stevenson, 10859/3/8

²⁶ Stevenson, 10859/3/11

²⁷ Stevenson, 10859/3/5

rival, e.g. Ali Maher.²⁸ He was quite happy that Egypt's problems with Sudan remained unresolved. In a further memo to the Foreign Secretary, now Selwyn Lloyd, on 18 March 1956 he hoped:

... that Chapman Andrews will be discouraged from really working for a solution [to Egyptian/Sudanese problems]. We have no present interest in bringing Egypt and Sudan together or in pressing on with the [Aswan] dam.²⁹

It is clear from this that the joint British/American plan to help finance the Aswan High Dam had already been quietly abandoned although the Egyptians were not informed of this until June 1956. On 4 May 1956 Eden was complaining to the Foreign Secretary: '... the Voice of Egypt [radio station] continues unchecked and pours out its propaganda into the area of our oilfields.'³⁰ By 30 June he had turned his attention to the Minister of Defence, Sir Walter Monckton: 'I feel there is a steady deterioration in our position (political) in these Arab lands.'³¹ This dissatisfaction with Nasser, therefore, did not start with the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. Matters deteriorated even further when, in March 1956, General John Glubb (Glubb Pasha), commander of the Arab Legion, was dismissed at 24 hours notice. Glubb was a British army officer and had been commander of the Legion, in essence the Jordanian army, since 1939. In addition the Legion had been funded by the British Government to an amount in excess of £60m over the previous nine years.³² A number of Glubb's senior army colleagues were dismissed at the same time. Eden saw this as a direct attack on British prestige in the Middle East and was convinced that Nasser had been behind the decision. From then on Eden was determined to get rid of Nasser. In this he was supported by members of the Suez Group. When discussing General Glubb's dismissal Waterhouse criticised the Government for not mentioning Egypt.

I was disappointed by the fact that in an otherwise excellent review, as I respectfully thought it, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State never once mentioned Egypt. I feel that to have this debate without discussing Egypt, and without discussing Egypt carefully, is fantastic. I do not think the right hon. Gentleman opposite mentioned Egypt either but, to my mind, Egypt is the key to the whole position.³³

²⁸ AP 20/20/91

²⁹ AP 20/21/46

³⁰ AP 20/21/93

³¹ AP 20/21/140

³² Hansard, 7/3/56, 2111

³³ Hansard, 7/3/56, 2140

Waterhouse went on:

I look upon Egypt as an enemy. I feel that the time for turning the other cheek to our enemies has passed. At some point we must have the courage to say that we disagree with a nation in an action that it has taken. Britain is still powerful, and on occasions our strength must be used.³⁴

Eden made the closing speech in the debate and it was far from being one of his best. Various barbs from the Opposition such as: 'Get on'; 'Make your own speech'; 'What is your view?' and 'That is obvious' resulted in him losing his temper. 'I am going to get on and honourable members opposite will not like some of what is coming to them,' he retorted along with: 'I am not in the least concerned with what Nasser may or may not have said.'³⁵ *The Times*, reporting on the debate concluded: '... it was not a happy day for the Government and most Conservatives were in a gloomy mood when the debate ended.'³⁶

Oddly enough, Glubb himself, was much more sanguine about his sacking. In a letter to *The Times* on 9 March 1956 he appealed for a calm approach. He also pointed out the logical flaw in Eden's reasoning that his sacking had been at Nasser's insistence.

While deeply appreciating the generous feelings expressed in Britain towards myself, I cannot avoid the fear that such feelings of resentment might well lead to unwise political decisions. ... The Egyptian revolutionary government is ideologically opposed to monarchy.

King Saud at the same time is the hereditary enemy of King Hussein [of Jordan] ...³⁷

He followed that up with a comment on the BBC radio programme 'At Home and Abroad' on 13 March 1956, as reported in *The Times*: 'We have always considered that the hand over of control of the Arab Legion was inevitable. It was merely the timing that was in question.'³⁸ Glubb's view was supported by the fact that King Hussein of Jordan had declined to attend a meeting of Arab leaders in March 1956, at which Nasser represented Egypt, President Kuwatly represented Syria and King Saud represented Saudi Arabia. Hardly the action of a man dancing to Nasser's tune. All this advice fell on deaf ears. Eden was convinced of Nasser's involvement and was adamant that Nasser must be eliminated. As Nutting wrote, Eden's view was:

³⁴ Hansard, 7/3/56, 2141

³⁵ Hansard, 7/3/56, 2225

³⁶ *The Times*. 8/3/56, 10

³⁷ *The Times*, 9/3/56, 11

³⁸ *The Times*, 14/3/56, 8

Nasser was our enemy No 1 in the Middle East and he would not rest until he had destroyed all our friends and eliminated the last vestiges of our influence. If he succeeded it would be the end of Eden. Nasser must therefore be himself destroyed.³⁹

On 12 July 1956 Nutting was having dinner at the Savoy hotel with Harold Stassen, a U.S. diplomat, when he was called to the telephone. It was Eden. Nutting had previously sent him a paper in which he had suggested methods of neutralising Nasser's influence in the region. Eden was not interested. Despite talking on an unencrypted telephone line and with little attempt to disguise who he was, Eden launched into a tirade.

What's all this poppycock you've sent me? ... what's all this nonsense about isolating Nasser or "neutralising" him, as you call it. I want him destroyed, can't you understand? I want him removed, and if you and the Foreign Office don't agree, then you'd better come to the Cabinet and explain why. ... And I don't give a damn if there's anarchy and chaos in Egypt.⁴⁰

Nasser's deal to buy a substantial quantity of weapons from Czechoslovakia, announced in September 1955 only served to reinforce Eden's paranoia. To Eden, this showed clearly that Nasser was actively encouraging Soviet involvement in the Middle East. He was supported in this view by George Kennedy Young, Deputy Director of MI6, who considered that: 'Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria threatened Britain's survival. Their governments would have to be subverted or overthrown.' He also referred to Nasser as: 'An out and out Soviet instrument.'⁴¹ This comment was made to Wilbur Eveland, an American Military Intelligence officer working for the CIA. Eveland thought this was 'sheer lunacy.'⁴² No doubt relying, at least to some extent, on this intelligence view, Eden wrote to Eisenhower on 4 March 1956:

There is no doubt that the Russians are resolved to liquidate the Baghdad Pact. In this undertaking Nasser is supporting them and I suspect that his relations with the Soviets are much closer than he admits to us. ... a policy of appeasement will bring us nothing in Egypt.⁴³

MI6 claimed that their information on Nasser's intentions came from an agent within the close circle around Nasser. He was code named 'Lucky Break'. Despite the fact that the

³⁹ Nutting, 1967, 27

⁴⁰ Nutting, 1967, 34 See also W.S.Lucas, *Divided We Stand*, on Anglo-American plots to destabilise or eliminate Nasser.

⁴¹ Eveland, 1980, 170

⁴² Eveland, 1980, 170

⁴³ *FRUS* Vol XVI, 249

information provided by 'Lucky Break' found no corroboration elsewhere both Eden and Macmillan relied on it. Macmillan wrote to Makins on 28 November 1955:

We are afraid that Nasser, whether innocently or deliberately, is dangerously committed to the Communists. Consequently we believe that it would be advantageous, in any event, to overthrow him if possible ...⁴⁴

Humphrey Trevelyan, the new British ambassador in Cairo, and Foreign Office officials, poured cold water on the idea that Nasser was some sort of Communist collaborator, saying: ' ... there was no evidence that any member of the [Egyptian Ruling Group] is a Communist.'⁴⁵ Eden, however, was more impressed by the comment of Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office: 'Trading on Nasser's dependence on Russia to make good his arms policy, the Russians will shamelessly turn the screw, until Nasser becomes a virtual satellite.' Eden underlined this and commented: 'I agree'.⁴⁶ Shuckburgh was sceptical about this information.

It begins to look as if Nasser is even more unreliable than he seemed, and may even be consciously handing over his country to Communism. But I do not quite believe that. I think he thinks himself supremely clever and is playing East off against West to the last moment.⁴⁷

The historians Lucas and Morey suggest that 'Lucky Break' was little more than a figment of George Young's imagination. Their analysis is that:

... MI6, desperate for action, built up the reports of low level sources or used their own imaginations to convert their nightmare vision into a plausible semblance of reality.⁴⁸

Given that 'Lucky Break' produced nothing of any importance regarding the plans of the Egyptian Government (and, in particular, gave no forewarning of the plan to nationalise the Suez Canal Company) and that the information provided on Nasser's intentions were never corroborated by other means, this seems the better view. None of that mattered. The MI6 analysis chimed with Eden's own view meaning he never thought to question its veracity. Events in later years showed conclusively that Nasser had no interest in encouraging communism within Egypt. Why would he when he already had all the levers of power in his own hands already?

⁴⁴ FO371/113738

⁴⁵ FO371/118832

⁴⁶ FO371/118832

⁴⁷ Shuckburgh, 1986, 305

⁴⁸ Lucas & Morey, 2000, 102

It was no surprise, therefore, that when, on 26 July 1956, Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company Eden was not interested in a negotiated settlement. He had made up his mind about Nasser long before and wanted Nasser deposed and control of the canal out of Egyptian hands. The rights and wrongs of the situation were irrelevant. The legal advice he was given he ignored. That advice is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter VI

The Legal Position

The lawyers are always against our doing anything. For God's sake keep them out of it. This is a political affair.¹

What, exactly, was the legal position regarding the use of force to depose Nasser and place the Suez Canal under some form of international control? What advice did Eden receive on this, from whom, and how did he react? This is the theme of this chapter.

As shown in the previous chapter, Eden was determined, from the start, to use force, not just to wrest control of the Canal from Egypt, but to ensure Nasser's downfall. An initial problem, however, was that there were no legal grounds on which British intervention could be based. In a Cabinet meeting on 27 July 1956 it was accepted:

... we should be on weak ground in basing our resistance on the narrow argument that Colonel Nasser had acted illegally. The Suez Canal Company was registered as an Egyptian company under Egyptian law; and Colonel Nasser had indicated that he intended to compensate the shareholders at ruling market prices. From a narrow legal point of view, his action amounted to no more than a decision to buy out the shareholders.

At the same meeting it was agreed:

They [the Egyptian Government] must be subjected to the maximum political pressure which could be applied by the maritime and trading nations whose interests were most directly affected. And, in the last resort, this political pressure must be backed by the threat - and, if need be, the use - of force.²

At a meeting at the Foreign Office the same day it was noted: 'The Secretary of State said we must, from the outset, be prepared to take military measures, if necessary.'³ On the same day Eden wrote to the American President, Dwight Eisenhower, looking for his support. He suggested:

We should not allow ourselves to become involved in legal quibbles about the rights of the Egyptian Government to nationalise what is technically an Egyptian company. ... we must be ready, in the last resort, to use force to bring Nasser to his senses.⁴

Eisenhower's response on 31 July 1956 made it clear that he viewed things quite differently. He suggested calling an international conference of all the Canal users before

¹ Nutting, 1967, 95

² CAB 128/30

³ FO371/119092, 27/7/56

⁴ Boyle, 2005, 154

any consideration was given to the use of force. This was hardly the response Eden had hoped for. It is noticeable that his view on the legality of Nasser's actions was arrived at before any legal advice had been taken. The decision also shows a peculiar lack of logic. Acknowledging that Nasser had done nothing wrong but, nevertheless, being prepared to use force to stop him. What it boiled down to was that Britain was not going to be 'pushed around' by an Egyptian dictator. It was not just the politicians who propounded this view, that Britain should use force, if necessary. Sir Harold Caccia, a Deputy Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, held a meeting with Robert Murphy of the American Embassy on 29 July 1956 in which he argued: 'We must be prepared to use whatever means were ultimately necessary to achieve our purpose.'⁵ A telegram from the British Embassy in Bonn to the Foreign Office suggested: 'Resolute action by the free world would either make Nasser change his tune or else lead to the overthrow of his Government by the Egyptians.'⁶

Despite this unpromising start Eden searched assiduously to find some legal authority to support his actions. Unfortunately he was unable to find this from the legal advisors on whom the Government depended. Although the Attorney General, Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller, agreed that Nasser did not have the right to nationalise the Suez Canal Company so that the management of the Canal and its profits, would now fall to Egyptians, he concluded:

In these circumstances, I think that, at the Hague Court for instance, the view might very well be taken that while the present Egyptian action was inconsistent with the spirit of the [1888] Convention and was also illegal on other grounds, it did not, in itself, amount to an actual breach of the Convention.⁷

The senior legal advisor at the Foreign Office, Gerald Fitzmaurice, took an even stronger view.

The fundamental legal difficulty in the Suez Canal case is that although the Egyptian Government are committing a number of illegalities none of them amount, at any rate at present, to a direct breach of the Suez Canal Convention.⁸

Nasser seemed similarly confident. In an interview reported in *The Times* on 5 September 1956 he challenged: '... the [Suez Canal] company derived its existence from Egyptian

⁵ FO371/119096

⁶ FO371/119096, 4/8/56

⁷ FO800/747, 3/8/56

⁸ FO800/747, 1/8/56

law. Nobody contests this. If they do they have a remedy - the International Court. Let them try it.⁹

As the prospect of Britain and France using force to regain control of the Canal increased the legal advisors were adamant that there could be no legal basis for this. In a letter to Lord Coldstream on 6 September 1956 Fitzmaurice distinguished the issues:

Whether the Egyptian action in relation to the [Suez Canal] Company had been illegal and had involved a possible breach of the Suez Canal Convention and the quite separate question whether that illegality, even if flagrant, could justify the use of force according to present day international law standards and doctrines.¹⁰

In a letter to Francis Vallat, legal adviser at the UK delegation to the United Nations, on 9 October 1956 he was specific: 'An attack on Egypt could not possible (sic) be justified under the head of self defence within the [United Nations] Charter meaning of the term ...' Fitzmaurice knew that the Government was obtaining its legal advice, not from the normal advisors but from the Lord Chancellor, Lord Kilmuir, and was desperate to ensure that this opinion was brought to the attention of those in power. His letter continued:

If there were any way of conveying it to the Private Secretaries at No 10 I should like this to be done. It might not be a bad thing to send a copy to Dobson at the Lord Chancellor's Department as it is more than likely that it is in that quarter that the Prime Minister obtains his advice.¹¹

Although the Lord Chancellor was a lawyer he was no expert on international law. Furthermore, as a member of the Cabinet his advice was inevitably coloured by his loyalty to his Cabinet colleagues. He advised:

We have, therefore, three good grounds of intervention: (a) danger to shipping in the Canal (b) the dangers to our nationals in Ishmalia (sic) (c) the danger to the Canal itself and the consequent effect on many nations.

Fitzmaurice was dismissive of this advice as his pencil comments show. Regarding (a) and (b) he wrote: 'what danger except what we create?' As to (c) he commented: 'So we can intervene in any war in which a bomb might drop into the Canal!'¹² Additional support for Eden's position came from a somewhat unlikely source - the letters page of *The Times*. In a letter published on 11 August 1956 A.L. Goodhart, emeritus professor of jurisprudence at University College, Oxford, wrote, ' ... [a State] may use force to protect a vital national

⁹ *The Times*, 5/9/56, 9

¹⁰ FO800747

¹¹ FO800/747

¹² FO800/749, 29/10/56

interest which has been imperilled.¹³ An analysis by Professor Sauser-Hall on the juridical status of the Suez Canal Company argued that Britain and France could bring the issue before the International Court. He made no comment, however, on the possible use of force.¹⁴ In a paper in August Fitzmaurice considered the possibility of taking the matter to the International Court.

We have in fact never pressed Egypt to go to the International Court ... nor do we want to because the proceedings before the International Court would take a good two years.

Moreover, we think we should lose there.¹⁵

David Carlton's comment that Britain could not go to the International Court because Egypt had not signed up to its jurisdiction is, therefore, incorrect.¹⁶ As shown above even Nasser invited this course of action.

Even as late as 1 November 1956 Fitzmaurice was still trying to persuade the Government that any military action in Egypt would be illegal. In a memo to Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick he wrote:

... the mere fact that danger may arise from the existence of hostilities with Israel is not, under international law, a ground justifying armed intervention by us ... the Suez Canal is not British property, nor is the Suez Canal Company ...¹⁷

The Attorney General was equally unsupportive. In a memo to Selwyn Lloyd on 1 November 1956 he argued:

... I am unable to devise any argument which could purport to justify in international law either our demand that [Egypt] who had in no way threatened our nationals, should withdraw her forces from a part of her own territory which she is engaged in defending ...¹⁸

He copied this memo to the Lord Chancellor and to Eden. All to no avail. Eden and his Cabinet steadfastly refused to ask their own legal officers for advice preferring to rely on the opinions of the Lord Chancellor. This did not sit well with the legal advisers.

Fitzmaurice wrote on 2 November 1956:

... the Government did not consult any of their regular advisers on international law questions, namely the Foreign Office legal advisers and the law officers of the Crown ... the

¹³ *The Times*, 11/8/56, 9

¹⁴ FO371/119088

¹⁵ FO800/747, 26/10/56

¹⁶ Carlton, 1981, 408

¹⁷ FO800/747, 1/11/56

¹⁸ FO800/749

Lord Chancellor has no general official function of giving legal advice to the Crown or Government.¹⁹

In a note to the Foreign Office legal team on 1 November 1956 he wrote: '... we have, from the beginning and at all times, strongly opposed the use of force as having no legal justification ...'²⁰ He followed this on 5 November 1956 with: 'I know that the law officers are very much upset at what has occurred. And were considering whether they would not have to resign.'²¹ He also objected strongly to Government claims that they were acting on advice from the highest legal authority. On 31 October he wrote to Kirkpatrick:

... we [the Foreign Office law officers] can see no legal justification for [the use of force] ... I see that in [the] ... telegram to Amman No 2215 (which was not seen by Mr Vallat or myself before dispatch and which we have only just seen) it is stated that Her Majesty's Government 'are advised on the highest legal authority that they are entitled under the [United Nations] Charter to take every measure open to them within and without the United Nations to stop the fighting and to protect their nationals and interests which are threatened by these hostilities.' We wish respectfully to dissociate ourselves from that advice. ...²²

He returned to this point in a memo of 6 November 1956 to the Attorney General complaining:

... the Government can, of course, ask the views of any lawyer they please [but] they cannot, in the constitutional sense, say that they have received, and are acting on advice from the highest legal quarters or on the highest legal authority ...²³

Others within the Foreign Office were more guarded in passing on the opinions expressed by Fitzmaurice and Manningham-Buller. When the Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy spoke to A D M Ross at the Foreign Office asking for the British Government's view on the legality of Nasser's actions he was told: '... Nasser's action was indeed illegal. I had seen the opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown and the comments of the Legal Advisor.'²⁴ Somewhat economical with the truth. Eden was not interested in any advice that was contrary to his own view. Nasser had to be taught a lesson.

It was not just direct legal advice that the law officers and others offered. They also tried to point out the realities of the situation, in particular trying to clarify the role of the United Nations. In a note dated 24 August 1956 Fitzmaurice wrote: '... The Security

¹⁹ FO800/747

²⁰ FO800/748

²¹ FO800/747

²² FO800/748

²³ FO800/747, 6/11/56

²⁴ FO371/119093

Council [of the United Nations] is not an institution for settling disputes, or even for doing justice between nations, but an institution for preventing or stopping wars.²⁵ He was supported in this view by Sir Pierson Dixon, the United Kingdom's permanent representative to the United Nations, who wrote:

... where there has been no act of armed force, the inclination of many members of the Security Council would be to recommend methods of conciliation ... I am quite sure that it is out of the question to extract from the Security Council a good vote on a resolution designed to justify [the] subsequent use of force.²⁶

Two memos from Fitzmaurice to Kirkpatrick followed on 31 August and 4 September 1956. The first argued:

If ... we carry out an attack on Egypt ... at a time when ships are still going through the Canal or when at any rate there has been no wilful obstruction on Nasser's part the conclusion will inevitably be drawn that the real object of the exercise is not to keep the Canal open but to get Nasser out.²⁷

The second discounted Eden's argument that Nasser was a dictator like Hitler or Mussolini. 'I do not think the comparison with Hitler will carry much conviction. If only because people are unable to take the Egyptians seriously in the way they would the Germans.' Kirkpatrick added a note 'The problem remains. Should we resolve to perish gracefully because [world] opinion thinks that this is what we should do?'²⁸ This comment is very revealing of the mindset of those at the heart of the decision making. There was a conviction that failing to intervene in Egypt would mean Britain's eventual economic collapse. Probably sooner rather than later. *The Times* supported this view. In an editorial of 1 August 1956 it argued:

If Nasser is allowed to get away with this coup all the British and other Western interests in the Middle East will crumble. ... Quibbling over whether or not he was 'legally entitled' to make the grab will delight the finicky and comfort the faint hearted but entirely misses the real issues.²⁹

An article in *The Times* the following day tried to analyse the situation in more detail and took a more realistic view:

As a matter of politics he [Nasser] may deem it convenient now to close the Canal, either by actually forbidding the passage of certain classes of ships or by imposing prohibitively high

²⁵ FO800/748

²⁶ FO800/748

²⁷ FO800/748

²⁸ FO800/748

²⁹ *The Times*, 1/8/56, 9

tolls. But, as a matter of law, his capacity to act in this manner does not flow from his nationalization of the Company: it flows from his physical control of the Canal. It is a control which he has manifested in inescapable terms by refusing passage to ships and cargoes destined for Israel, in violation even of the Security Council resolution of September 1, 1951, which called upon Egypt 'to terminate the restrictions on the passage of international commercial shipping through the Suez Canal.'³⁰

Even the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee were doubtful about using force without further provocation. In their meeting of 31 July 1956 they concluded: 'As there has been no interference so far with the Canal, Her Majesty's Government should provoke one ...'³¹

Here was the crux of the matter. Whether Nasser had acted illegally or not in nationalising the Suez Canal Company was completely irrelevant. Nasser could close the Canal at any time simply because the waterway flowed through Egypt. A letter from Sir Frederick Leith-Ross printed in *The Times* on 4 August 1956, also pointed out succinctly: '... once a country becomes independent we must not be surprised when it acts independently.'³²

Other letters followed. Patrick Duncan wrote: 'If at Suez "imperialism" grapples with "anti-imperialism" I have little doubt that "imperialism" will be defeated.'³³ The Egypt Committee accepted that the legal grounds for taking action were thin. They wanted the London conference to concentrate on the other aspects of the nationalisation of the canal. Before this conference on the Suez Crisis it was noted:

It is no part of our case to argue that the Canal does not belong to Egypt. We agree that it does. ... We do not want discussion at the Conference to centre on the legal aspects of this issue. ...At the same time it will be important not to concede the legality of the Egyptian Government's action in nationalising the company.'³⁴

Eden was not interested in views other than his own. He agreed with Charles Waterhouse: 'The challenge of Nasser has got to be met ... by a direct uncompromising negative.'³⁵ The reality that the position of Britain and other Western European nations was completely unchanged by the nationalisation of the Canal Company was ignored. Nasser had been in a position to close the Canal to any or all shipping before the Canal was nationalised, as Eden, himself, had admitted in 1952. 'An ill disposed Egyptian Government might at any

³⁰ *The Times*, 2/8/56, 9

³¹ FO371/119094

³² *The Times*, 4/8/56, 9

³³ *The Times*, 6/8/56, 7

³⁴ EC 14/8/56, 3 - 4

³⁵ *The Times*, 8/8/56, 9

time try to restrict or stop traffic going through the Suez Canal. It could do this either by direct obstruction or by applying pressure to the Suez Canal Company.³⁶ In fact, the Egyptian government had done so, so far as Israeli shipping was concerned.

Nationalisation made not a jot of difference. The real challenge was to Britain's prestige in the Middle East.



It was not just the Government's legal advisors who were opposed to Eden's approach to the Suez crisis. ' ... the whole of the Department as one man rushed to the window and booed Eden, which I think must be unprecedented in the history of the Foreign Office ...'³⁷ This was the memory of Sir Mervyn Brown of the day after the ultimatum had been issued by Britain to Egypt and Israel. Eden had just left 10 Downing St to go to the House of Commons when the Foreign Office staff let their feelings be known.

³⁶ CAB/129/54

³⁷ BDOHP Sir Mervyn Brown, 10

Brown was the Foreign Office official responsible for dealing with Suez Canal issues at the time of the crisis. He remembered that:

... Eden was raring to go and send troops in but he couldn't find the excuse. In fact we were doing our normal Foreign Office job of trying to resolve the crisis by diplomatic means ... Negotiations between Selwyn Lloyd and the Egyptian Foreign Minister Fawzi ended up quite successfully and a resolution was adopted in the Security Council with 6 points for the settlement of the Suez Canal crisis. ... But Eden wasn't happy - his aim was to overthrow Nasser - he didn't want a settlement ...³⁸

So far as the ultimatum to Israel and Egypt and the subsequent invasion were concerned:

... there was no question of advice being asked because of course the advice would have been against it. ... the hostility towards Eden was remarkable. I doubt whether there has been any issue in modern times where the [Foreign] Office has been so united on a matter of policy. ... in the Foreign Office I don't think there was a single person who supported what turned out to be Eden's policy on Suez ...³⁹

Another official, Sir Paul Gore-Booth, wrote to his mother on 3 November 1956:

... the F O as a whole has been horrified by what the Govt. has done ... even if quite a bit is ... accomplished, the irrevocable damage to our standing in the world will still be considerable ... I have put in to high (official) authority a short piece, on my own responsibility, saying that the office generally is dismayed ... I find myself appalled ...⁴⁰

The 'short piece' to which he referred was a note to Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick and Sir Patrick Dean expressing his severe reservations about the action Britain was about to take.

I have seen a lot of members of the office of all ranks and have been deeply impressed with the dismay caused throughout our ranks by this action. People are doing their duty but with a heavy heart and feeling that whatever our motives we have terribly damaged our reputation.⁴¹

Brown summed up: ' ... Suez was a disaster, a major disaster, and one reason was that the Prime Minister took foreign policy into his own hands and ignored the Foreign Office or didn't consult the Foreign Office because he knew it would be against him.'⁴² The Foreign Office was deliberately excluded from offering advice as Eden was only interested in views the same as his own. In 1965 Gore-Booth suggested that a confidential report be prepared on Suez from the Foreign Office records. This turned out to be impossible because: ' ... on

³⁸ BDOHP, Sir Mervyn Brown, 8

³⁹ BDOHP, Sir Mervyn Brown, 9

⁴⁰ Bod. MS Eng. c. 4559 fols. 12r-13v

⁴¹ Bod. MS Gore-Booth adds. 10/1, fols. r-s

⁴² BDOHP, Sir Mervyn Brown, 9

the crucial events leading up to the hostilities there [was] ... no confidential evidence in the Foreign Office official files at all.⁴³ In other words, no Foreign Office officials had been consulted.

Eden failed to see the realities of the situation. The concession to run the Suez Canal granted to the Suez Canal Company had only another 12 years to run. An Egyptian spokesman had made it clear that it would not be renewed. 'The concession will not be extended by a single second; and the Government already has plans to take over the company management at midnight on November 6, 1968.'⁴⁴ This enthusiasm to run their own affairs was also reflected in the Egyptian reaction when last British troops left the Canal Zone. *The Times* headline on 14 June 1956 was 'Crowds cheer hoisting of Egyptian flag.' The story continued: ' "Egypt has ended her suffering." *Al Ahram* [an Egyptian newspaper] exulted today.'⁴⁵ None of this made any impression on Eden. In just over 12 years control of the Canal Company would be transferred to Egypt in any event. Why was it so important to stop it happening sooner? He refused to ask for legal advice (and ignored any advice he did receive), and excluded Foreign Office officials from any discussion of his plans. He had made up his mind.

The next chapter will touch briefly on the roles played by the three other major influences on Eden in this period: Britain's ally in the Suez venture, France; Eden's own Chancellor, Harold Macmillan; and the third party involved in the 'scenario' used as an excuse to send French and British troops into Egypt, Israel.

⁴³ FO 370/2807

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 5/6/56, 8

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 14/6/56, 10

Chapter VII

Macmillan - France - Israel

Eden records in his diary a meeting with Churchill where Churchill had asked how he got on with Harold Macmillan. 'I said, "Very well. Why?" Churchill responded, "Oh, he is very ambitious." I laughed.'¹

This study concentrates almost exclusively on Eden and his motives for his actions during the Suez Crisis. There is not room to examine in detail the roles played by the other major parties involved, France and Israel. Nor is there room to investigate in detail Harold Macmillan's role and motives during this period. Nevertheless, it is necessary to sketch out the reasons why they behaved as they did because if any one of them had behaved differently the outcome might have been completely different. That will be the theme of this chapter.

For the French, the seizure of the Suez Canal Company by Nasser was not the driving force behind their actions. It was a convenient excuse to attempt to force Nasser from power in Egypt. The Second World War had severely damaged France's claims on its colonies. The French had suffered a crushing defeat in Indochina in 1954, with their forces being overwhelmed by those of the Viet Minh. This really marked the end of French influence in Asia. However, they did still have colonies in Africa with, arguably, the most important being Algeria. Many French had emigrated to Algeria while it was under French rule and they and their descendants made up a substantial proportion of the Algerian population. The French Government was determined that Algeria would remain a part of France. In 1959, Prime Minister Guy Mollet said, in a statement to the United Nations: 'France will never abandon Algeria.'² The majority population, however, angered by discrimination against them, wanted independence and the National Liberation Front (FLN), founded in 1954, began a campaign of violence against French rule. This resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of French troops in Algeria so that by 1956 more than 500,000 French soldiers were stationed there. Nasser made his support of the FLN clear and the French Government blamed him for supplying the weaponry and ammunition used by the FLN. 'Bourges-Manoury ... was one of those, with Robert Lacoste, who were

¹ AP 20/1/30, 21/12/54

² http://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/3/7/37996/RDC_57_15_ENG.pdf Extracted 14/02/2014

convinced that the fall of Nasser automatically meant the end of the war in Algeria.³ The opportunity to depose him during the Suez Crisis was too good to miss. As soon as it became clear that Eden and his government were intent on forcing Nasser to relinquish control of the Suez Canal Company, and, if possible, deposing Nasser, the French were willing allies.

For Israel, the standard explanation, and the one put forward by Eden, for playing a part in the conspiracy is that they feared an attack by the Egyptian army and wanted to preempt this.⁴ In September 1955 Egypt had received a large amount of Soviet arms from Czechoslovakia. In addition Egypt was refusing passage through the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping and Palestinian guerrillas were crossing into Israel from Egypt. The Israeli Government was concerned that all this presaged an attack on Israel by Egypt. The truth was, of course, that, despite the acquisition of modern arms and other weaponry the Egyptian army was in no position to attempt an invasion of Israel. Indeed, when the Israelis launched their attack into Sinai in October 1956 they quickly realised that the Egyptian army was no match for them. This probably came as little surprise to the Israeli leaders. An intelligence report for the Israeli army in September 1954 concluded: 'In the current situation the Egyptian army is incapable of efficiently absorbing large amounts of sophisticated weapons.'⁵ Despite this evidence both Prime Minister Ben Gurion and Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan maintained that the Egyptians might strike at any time. This may be explained by the normal reluctance of the Israeli leaders to assume that Israel was in no danger. By the middle of 1956, however, their views had changed. An Israeli intelligence report concluded that Nasser was not interested in waging war on Israel and Ben Gurion was able to say to his ministers:

You should not doubt one thing: one-on-one our forces are superior to any of the Arab armies, be it Jordan, Syria or Egypt. If I had to rank them I would say the Jordanians are the best. The Syrians would take second place and the Egyptians, the last. Their soldiers are the worst.⁶

During meetings with the French before the decision to invade Egypt Dayan said he was, '... confident that we [the Israelis] could defeat the Egyptians on land and in the air even if

³ Pineau, 1976, 130

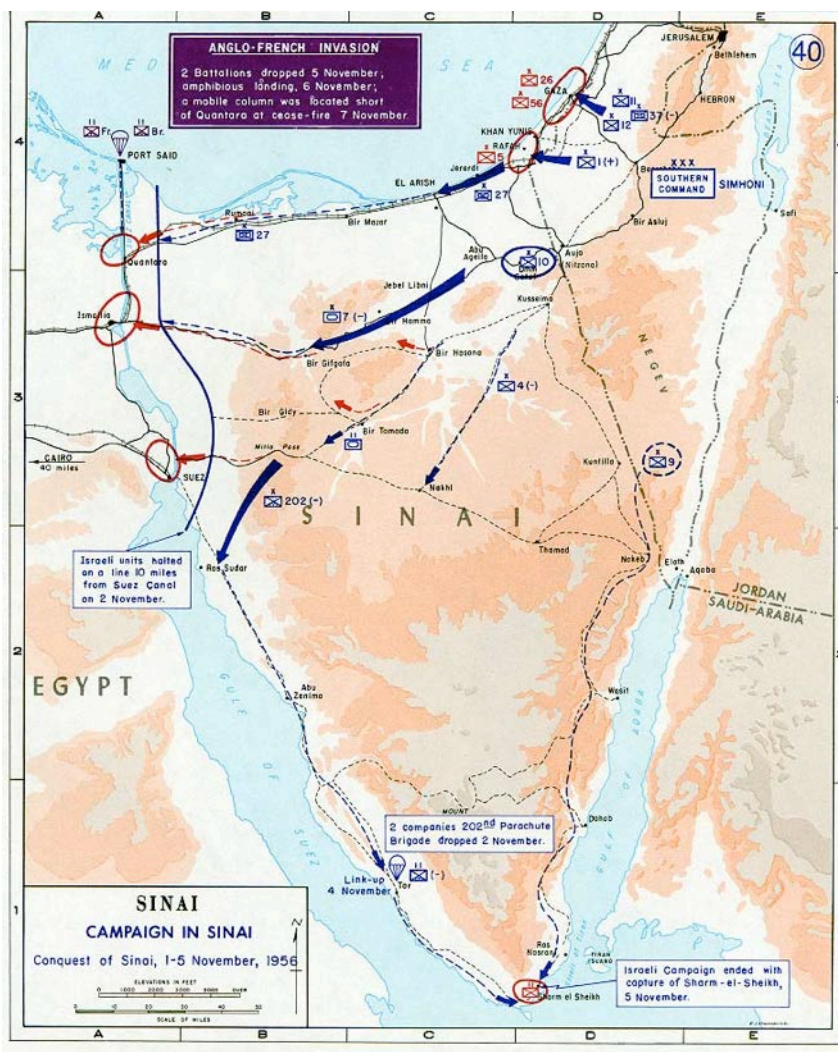
⁴ Eden, 1960, 516

⁵ Laron, 2009, 73

⁶ Laron, 2009, 80

we fought alone - not only without the British but without the French.⁷ If Ben Gurion and Dayan now believed that Egypt posed no military threat to Israel why did they then get involved in the Anglo-French plan to invade Egypt? Because of the way in which the state of Israel had been formed in 1948 its border with the surrounding Arab countries was long and very irregular. If, for example, the border with Egypt could be pushed up to the Suez Canal it would be much shorter, more clearly defined and more easily defended. To do this unilaterally might produce more political problems than it was worth. It would result in almost universal condemnation with the possibility of major Western powers, not excluding the United States, entering the fray on the side of the Egyptians. However, when Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company the Israelis saw this as a heaven sent opportunity. Dayan suggested to Ben Gurion in the initial days of the crisis that this was an opportunity to either ' ... capture the Sinai Peninsula ... [or] capture Sharm el-Sheikh ... [or] take over the

Gaza Strip.⁸ When the French suggested an alliance with Israel and Britain to wrest control of the Suez Canal from Egypt the Israelis were enthusiastic, if careful, in agreeing. This would be an opportunity to push their border with Egypt west across the Sinai Peninsula and to gain control of the Gulf of Aqaba, although the canal, itself, held no interest for them. In the end this attempt to extend Israeli territory came to nothing. Eisenhower forced them, eventually, to retreat from the territory they occupied in Sinai. Despite



⁷ Dayan, 1976, 198

⁸ Dayan, 1976, 182

the failure to push their border west this was clearly a major reason for Israeli participation. It is noticeable, as well, that the Israelis were the ones who wanted a written agreement (the Protocol of Sevres) on the alliance with Britain and France. Eden was desperate to have nothing in writing as he intended denying that any such agreement existed. The French seem to have been largely uncaring as to whether there was a written agreement or not. For the Israelis its importance was two-fold. They did not trust the British who had many alliances with Arab nations and secondly it was the first major agreement between Israel and major Western Powers. This was a significant step for a country that had only come into existence eight years previously. This signed agreement with two major powers and the opportunity to extend its borders were almost certainly of more importance than any fear that Egypt was poised to attack them

Harold Macmillan has always been a somewhat enigmatic figure during the Suez crisis. Eden's official biographer, Thorpe, described Eden's cabinet as divided into three categories: 'the openly loyal; including Selwyn Lloyd and Alec Home ...; the covert doubters, including Rab Butler [and] Walter Monckton ...; and Harold Macmillan, who was a category all by himself'⁹. What is clear is that he played a significant part in the decision to invade Egypt and then, almost immediately British and French troops landed in Egypt, he was among those strongly urging a cease-fire and withdrawal. Why did he have this sudden change of heart? As Chancellor of the Exchequer Macmillan received regular updates from his civil servants about the state of the British economy. By the end of 1955 Britain's gold and dollar reserves had declined to \$2.1bn; just above what the Treasury considered the lower limit needed to maintain some degree of flexibility.¹⁰ In January 1956 Sir Leslie Rowan, head of overseas finance at the Treasury, wrote to Macmillan, warning:

... we are not capable of meeting our existing commitments (other than with the help of physical controls and [American] Aid) without the probability or even the certainty of continual crises which may well undermine our total policies and will certainly undermine the sterling system.¹¹

It was not, however, until April 1956 that Macmillan informed Eden of these problems, at which point he said that devaluation of the pound would probably be necessary in the Autumn. In August, when military operations against Egypt were becoming increasingly likely, the Treasury again referred to the low level of reserves. Macmillan commented:

⁹ Thorpe, 2004, 499-500

¹⁰ Cooper, 2008, 300

¹¹ Quoted in Cooper, 2008, 300

The problem is simple to state -- difficult to solve. We must either obtain a diplomatic success, which will eventually mean that Nasser will go the way of Mossadeq [deposed in Iran]; or impose our will by force. If we fail in both I think our strength and life will begin to wither away. The general view in the Middle East and East is that Britain has 'had it'. That is what this is really about.¹²

At the Cabinet meeting later that month he continued in similar vein:

...if Colonel Nasser's policy succeeded our whole position in the Middle East would be undermined, our oil supplies would be in jeopardy, and the stability of our national economy would be gravely threatened.¹³

If he thought that Britain's position could only be improved by military action over Suez it was surely incumbent upon him to try to stabilise the financial position as best he could. As the likelihood of military action increased speculation against sterling increased with it. The Bank of England was forced to use its currency reserves to support sterling meaning that those reserves dipped below \$2bn. If this continued then devaluation of sterling was the likely outcome. Macmillan could have applied to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for aid; he could have asked the United States for help. He did neither until it was too late. In October 1956 France applied to the IMF for loans to cover its temporary payments imbalance. It received a loan of \$262.5m. During the previous month Macmillan met the United States Treasury Secretary, George Humphrey. Despite the fact that Humphrey gave Macmillan no clear promises on financial aid, either from the United States itself or the IMF, Macmillan chose to interpret the discussion as promising financial help once the Presidential election was over (6 November). Why he did not make any formal application for financial aid in October, as the French did, is unclear. In his memoirs he wrote:

... there was no hint, at this time, of any difficulty being put in our way, or of financial backing to Britain not being available in full, whatever the circumstances.¹⁴

This is disingenuous. Support from the United States was essential to Britain's financial stability. It was surely Macmillan's duty to obtain either the necessary loans or clear assurances from the United States that they would raise no objection to obtaining the funds. Why he did not do so is puzzling. By 6 November Macmillan concluded that Britain would receive no support from the United States and passed this information on to the Cabinet. He claimed to have spoken to the United States Treasury although there is no documentary evidence of this. The historian John Fforde concludes that Macmillan

¹² Quoted in Cooper, 2008, 302

¹³ CAB 128/30

¹⁴ Macmillan, 1971, 135

probably never made any calls and simply made up the story of being rebuffed.¹⁵ Even after the ceasefire was announced on 6 November the United States continued to deny financial support to Britain until all British forces had left Egypt. It was the ultimate humiliation. Britain set a target date for withdrawal of 22 December having achieved none of the professed targets. No control over the canal; no part in the clearing of the waterway and having to rely on American support to stop the collapse of its currency.

It was not only in the area of finance that Macmillan was less than diligent in establishing the position of the United States. During his visit to Washington in September 1956 Macmillan also held discussions with Eisenhower. They were friends from their time together during the Mediterranean campaigns of the Second World War. During this meeting the question of Suez was never raised. Somehow, Macmillan interpreted this as an assurance that Eisenhower would not interfere in British plans for military action in Egypt. On his return to London he claimed: 'I know Ike. He will lie doggo.'¹⁶

Throughout his political life (and during his time in the army during the Second World war) Macmillan kept a diary. For the period from 4 October 1956 to 3 February 1957, however, no diary exists. It has variously been suggested that Macmillan was too busy to keep his diary during this period or destroyed it later, either at Eden's request or on his own initiative. It seems unlikely that he was too busy. How long would it take to jot down a few lines each evening? That he destroyed it at Eden's request presupposes that Eden knew what was in the diary and felt compromised by it. Even if that were true why would Macmillan want to protect his predecessor? The better explanation is that Macmillan wrote the diary and later destroyed it for reasons of his own. Eden would have been well advised to take note of Churchill's advice that Macmillan was ambitious, rather than laughing at it.

In comparison to Eden's meteoric rise up the political hierarchy Macmillan's progress had been very slow. First elected in 1924 it was 1940 before his first Government appointment. His first senior appointment came in 1951 when he became Minister of Housing and Local Government. When Eden became Prime Minister he appointed Macmillan as Foreign Secretary but that only lasted for nine months, at which point Eden moved him to the Treasury, probably because Eden wanted a greater say in foreign affairs than Macmillan was prepared to accept. At that point Macmillan was 61 whereas Eden was only 58 and RAB Butler, the obvious successor to Eden, was only 53, so it might have been expected that Chancellor would be the high point of Macmillan's political career.

¹⁵ Fforde, 1992, 556

¹⁶ Kyle, 2003, 258

As it turned out, Eden was forced to resign and Butler was pushed aside enabling Macmillan to take over as Prime Minister. Was it just incompetence on Macmillan's part that saw him make so many elementary mistakes? He failed to inform the Cabinet of the country's parlous financial situation, misinformed Eden over Eisenhower's intentions, failed to take any action to ensure continued oil supplies to Britain and neglected to make arrangements for loans from the IMF. He was also the most vociferous supporter of military action until it started when he became the loudest voice calling for a cease fire. Did Macmillan simply misjudge the situation or did he deliberately mislead Eden and his Cabinet colleagues? Whatever the answer he played a prominent role in the whole misadventure that led directly to Eden's resignation and his own promotion.

Chapter VIII

The Suez Crisis

Whereas 'Suez' as a method of removing Nasser was always a non starter, as a way of removing Eden it was brilliant.¹105



This chapter analyses the events from the date on which Nasser gave the order to nationalise the Suez Canal Company to the point where Eden was forced to resign. This includes Eden's and his Cabinet's first reaction; American attempts to find a negotiated settlement; Britain's discussions and agreement with France and Israel to provide a pretext for invasion of Egypt; the abandonment of the military action and Eden's eventual resignation.

On 26 July 1956 Nasser made a speech at Alexandria in which he constantly referred to 'de Lesseps'.

Unknown to most of those listening or

watching this was the code word for the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. As the speech continued his intention to nationalise the company became clearer until, by the end, no one could be in any doubt as to the Egyptian Government's intentions. Eden was having dinner at No 10 Downing St when the news was brought to him. It was no surprise that he was not interested in negotiations with Nasser. From the beginning he wanted Nasser deposed and control of the canal out of Egyptian hands. His first reaction was to use British military might to regain ownership of the Canal Company and depose Nasser. He immediately summoned all the Government ministers along with the First Sea Lord, Earl Mountbatten, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Gerald Templer, the French Ambassador, Jean Chauvel, and the American Chargé d'Affaires, Andrew Foster, to a meeting. Eden was adamant that Nasser 'must not be allowed to get away with it' and

¹ Thorpe, 2010, 332

force was his first choice. From the beginning, the Cabinet accepted that the legal position was weak. Despite this Selwyn Lloyd was of the opinion 'that the only solution was a Western Consortium taking over and operating the Canal, establishing itself, if need be, by force'.² The difficulties with this approach became apparent immediately when the question of military action was discussed with Mountbatten and Templer. The Mediterranean Fleet was, at the time, at Malta and could be ready to sail within eight hours. 1,200 Royal Marine Commandos could be collected from Cyprus and a landing forced at Port Said. There were two problems. Firstly, it would be impossible to follow this up with early reinforcements. (Templer was of the view that an adequate force would take six or seven weeks to assemble.) Secondly, the force would be too small to control the 100 miles of the Canal.³ Eden reacted badly to this news even though, just a month previously he had been complaining that the military establishment needed to be reduced and that the strategic reserve of 47,000 men was much too large.⁴ Nevertheless he had to accept that the crisis would not be resolved in a few weeks.

Unlike Eden and his Cabinet the Americans reacted in a much more non-committal way. Although Dulles conceded: '... there is a note of desperation in Nasser's action, relating to the Aswan Dam, and failure of the Russians to offer help when the United States turned the proposition down.' the agreed response was simply that the United States regarded the matter with the 'utmost seriousness'.⁵

Although press comment following the nationalisation of the Canal Company was almost exclusively hostile to Nasser there were some notable exceptions. While the *Daily Mirror*, a Labour supporting paper, carried the front page headline: 'GRABBER NASSER' on 30 July 1956, followed by a warning of dire consequences for Nasser as a result of his actions *The Times* appeared more circumspect.⁶ 'President Nasser's seizure of the canal company ... does not ... directly alter the present security position on the canal.' Despite this opening comment *The Times* went on to complain

Freedom of transit for the world's shipping [is] dependent on Egyptian goodwill and loyalty to international agreements. What the seizure of the company and President Nasser's

² *FRUS*, XVI, 3 - 5

³ Smith, 2013, 109

⁴ AP 20/21/131, 25/6/56 and AP 20/21/144, 7/7/56

⁵ *FRUS*, XVI, 7

⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 30/7/56, 1

speeches show is that he is ready to tear up international agreements and base himself on hatred of the West.⁷

Julian Amery, in a letter printed in *The Times* on the same day, demanded that: '... Colonel Nasser revoke his nationalization decree and restore the Suez Canal Company to its former rights. ... it may well be necessary ... to use armed force.' He also had a dig at the Americans: 'If our American allies cannot or will not join us, then Britain and France must go ahead without them. It will not be the first time.'⁸ The left leaning *Manchester Guardian* took a more conciliatory and analytical line.

One of Sir Anthony Eden's remarks yesterday was rather strange. He said that no arrangement for the canal would be acceptable which left it in the unfettered control of one country which could use it for the purposes of national policy. Acceptable or not, this was just the arrangement which was made when the British Government evacuated the base. ... we accorded [Egypt] the unfettered control.⁹

Letters to Conservative Central Office also offered advice and criticism. 'Now, over Egypt, a strong Prime Minister would not have hesitated to re-occupy the Suez Canal Zone ...'¹⁰ In general, however, they were supportive of Eden. In the period from 28 July to 31 December 1956 he received 1,724 messages of support.¹¹ The minutes of the Advisory Committee on Policy for 31 July 1956 show the way in which Conservative M.Ps were thinking:

RAB Butler 'Abroad we must show that we mean to maintain Britain as a first class power.'
Angus Maude, '... unwise ... merely saying that Britain would maintain herself as a world power. It was action that would bring the Party round.'
Julian Amery, '... it was important to have a robust external policy and Britain strong abroad.'¹²

The next meeting should have been held in the Autumn but did not take place until 25 January 1957. At this meeting there was no mention of Eden or Suez.¹³

Having accepted that an immediate military strike was not possible Eden and his Cabinet began to consider the options open to them. The Egypt Committee was set up, to include Eden, Macmillan, Lord Salisbury and Lord Home initially. Selwyn Lloyd and Walter

⁷ *The Times*, 30/7/56, 9

⁸ *The Times*, 30/7/56, 9

⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 31/7/56, 6

¹⁰ CCO 4/7/179 W H P Boyd on 31 July 1956.

¹¹ CCO 4/7/131

¹² CCO ACP 2/1

¹³ CCO ACP 2/2

Monckton (Defence Secretary) joined the committee soon after. Other Cabinet members and senior military officers were present at meetings as necessary. At its very first meeting on 27 July 1956 the view was expressed that letting Nasser 'get away with it' would be the thin end of the wedge so far as Britain's position in the Middle East was concerned.

'Failure to hold the Suez Canal would lead inevitably to the loss, one by one, of all our interests and assets in the Middle East.'¹⁴ On 30 July Eden and Macmillan met the United States Deputy Under Secretary of State. He reported to Washington: 'They said British Government has decided to drive Nasser out of Egypt. The decision they declared is firm. They expressed simple conviction military action is necessary and inevitable.'¹⁵ This is in direct conflict with Eden's claim in *Full Circle*: 'As signatories of the Charter of the United Nations, we were bound first to seek redress by peaceful means.'¹⁶ Eden and his Government had no intention of seeking redress by peaceful means. They were intent on armed intervention from the beginning.

Faced with the difficulty of ordering an immediate military strike the Egypt Committee was aware that it would have to be seen to do something. Notes of the meeting on 28 July 1956 record:

Such preliminary [military] steps might provoke Egypt or the Soviet Union to raise the issue in the Security Council. On the other hand, they would help to avert, in this country, the criticism that the Government were inactive.¹⁷

It was also very clear in its immediate objective: 'While our ultimate purpose was to place the Canal under international control, our immediate objective was to bring about the downfall of the present Egyptian Government.'¹⁸ The problem remained of how best to achieve this. On several occasions Macmillan suggested involving the Israelis but Eden and Lloyd were opposed. Eden commented that it was important that Israel should not take advantage of developments in the situation to move her military forces against Egypt.¹⁹ Even the possibility that the Arab world might suspect some agreement between Britain and Israel would make Britain's position in the Middle East difficult.

¹⁴ EC 27/7/56, 4

¹⁵ FRUS, Vol XVI, 61

¹⁶ Eden, 1960, 428

¹⁷ EC 28/7/56, 2

¹⁸ EC 30/7/56, 2

¹⁹ EC 30/7/56, 5

The Egyptians will do their utmost to misrepresent our actions as part of an Imperialist Zionist plot hatched in conjunction with the Government of Israel. If this impression were to take root in Arab minds the difficulty of restoring a satisfactory relationship with the Arab countries generally would be enormously increased.²⁰

Macmillan was also, at least initially, concerned with the practical problems Britain might face. He commented: '... we were in the Canal Zone with 80,000 men and yet were unable to prevent the rise of a government hostile to us ...'²¹ The possibility that the canal might come under some form of United Nations control was discounted. 'Any formal association with the United Nations would be unacceptable since this would give the Arab states a strong position in the running of the canal.'²² Clearly the idea of international control was a chimera. Eden and his cabinet paid lip-service to it but were secretly opposed. At best they wanted British control; at worst control by a group of nations that excluded Egypt and other Arab states.

Eden's well known propensity to change his mind and worry about his image was clearly shown in discussions concerning two destroyers built for Egypt in British shipyards. Should they be allowed to leave? Initially the Government tried to stop them sailing. Advised that they did not have the power to do this they agreed to let them go but refused to supply them with ammunition. On 7 August 1956 the matter was considered again. '... the Government would be exposed to damaging political criticism in this country ...[if the ships were allowed to leave]'²³ In the end it was accepted that the destroyers could go. They sailed on 24 and 30 August 1956.

Although discussions continued within the Egypt Committee on almost a daily basis the only question treated seriously was how to organise the military campaign. Little or no attention was given to the reaction of the Arab world to an attack on one of their own; the support (or lack of it) that might be expected from the Americans; what action Egypt might take; how world and British opinion would react to military intervention; how the Commonwealth countries would react; what effect the military action might have on Britain's own oil supplies; what would happen once the canal was under Anglo-French control; who might be called upon to form a new government in Egypt once Nasser was

²⁰EC 7/8/56, 3

²¹ EC 3/8/56

²² EC 31/7/56, 2

²³ EC 7/8/56, 2

deposed. These topics were mentioned but no serious consideration was given to answering the questions raised.²⁴

On the question of American support, the Cabinet made many unfounded assumptions. A brief for the UK delegation to the Suez Conference concluded: '... it seems safe to count on full support from only the following:- United States; France; Australia; New Zealand; Netherlands; Portugal; Turkey.'²⁵ The confidence in 'full support' from the United States turned out to be sadly misplaced. A further meeting of the Committee on that day was informed: '... that consultation was proceeding with the United States Government regarding the maintenance of oil supplies in the event of the closure of the Suez Canal and of the [oil] pipeline ...'²⁶ Who informed the committee of this is unclear as Macmillan was absent from this meeting. In fact, there is no evidence that such 'consultation' was ever undertaken. Eden too, laboured under the misapprehension that American support was guaranteed. As he wrote to Churchill on 17 August. 'Most important of all, the Americans seem very firmly lined up with us on internationalism.'²⁷ This cosy assumption of American support reappeared in a memo from the Minister of Fuel and Power, Aubrey Jones, on the consequences of closure of the Suez Canal. 'Towards the end of the third month [after closure], with full and timely American co-operation, additional supplies would be coming from the Western hemisphere ...'²⁸ Jones followed the same theme on 7 September 1956 when he said: 'he had no doubt that, should supplies through Suez be interrupted the United States would be ready to come to our aid immediately ...'²⁹ What gave him this confidence is difficult to say. Makins, the British ambassador to Washington, in a report to Selwyn Lloyd dated 30 July 1956, explained: '... in prevailing conditions we can look for little help [from the Americans] ...'³⁰ Makins continued to explain that Britain could expect no help from the United States if they resorted to force to settle the dispute but no one in the British Government was listening. Unfortunately, he left the United States on 11 October 1956 and was not replaced until the Suez crisis was over, meaning no senior

²⁴ e.g. EC 20/28/24 On 7 August 1956 instructions were drawn up for Gladwyn Jebb, the British Ambassador in Paris that military occupation of the canal might involve Britain in military occupation of the whole of Egypt. No consideration of how many men might be needed or for how long.

²⁵ EC 14/8/56, 3

²⁶ EC 14/8/56, 2

²⁷ AP 20/33/25A

²⁸ EC 18/8/56, 1

²⁹ EC 7/9/56, 2

³⁰ FO 371/119080

diplomat was in place to relay American reservations at the critical point in the affair. A further problem was that no serious approaches to establish the position of the United States were ever made. The only senior British politician to meet Eisenhower during the whole of the Suez crisis was Macmillan who visited Washington in late September 1956. Makins, also present, wrote:

Much to my surprise it was a purely social call, and the issue of the hour [Suez] was not discussed at all. ... It was subsequently recorded that it was this interview which convinced [Macmillan] that Ike would not, in practice, oppose unilateral action by us against Egypt, but there was nothing in the conversation which could have really persuaded him that this was the case, except that Ike didn't raise the subject.³¹

Macmillan claimed to remember the meeting very differently. On his return he wrote to Eden:

Ike is really determined, somehow or other, to bring Nasser down. I explained to him our economic difficulties in playing the hand long, and he seemed to understand. I also made it clear to him that we must win, or the whole structure of our economy would collapse. He accepted this.³²

It is difficult to understand how he came to this conclusion given that Suez was not discussed at all. Macmillan's claim is either a complete fabrication or he totally misremembered what had been said. It is difficult to understand how the latter could be true. It was either wishful thinking on Macmillan's part or he deliberately deceived Eden. Eisenhower was running for President again with voting due to take place on 6 November and his campaign slogan was 'Peace and Prosperity'. He was not going to get involved in a Middle East war. This policy was reflected by his Secretary of State, Foster Dulles, who tried to deflect Britain and France from a military response to Nasser and towards a negotiated settlement. In a meeting with Eisenhower and others on 31 July he stated: "We must try to make [Nasser] disgorge by international means - not by force."³³ Perhaps unfortunately, he never stated categorically to the British and French that the United States would oppose the use of force. When he met Selwyn Lloyd on 1 August he used the same phrase about making Nasser disgorge, but that force was the last method to be tried (but not ruled out) and that it must be backed by world opinion.³⁴ As a first step towards resolving the matter (or in Eden and Macmillan's case giving them time to organise a

³¹ BL, MS Sherfield, 957

³² Thorpe, 2011, 347

³³ *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, 65

³⁴ *FRUS*, XVI, 95

military expedition) Britain, France and the United States agreed it would be appropriate to call a conference of the nations most prominent in their use of the canal. Egypt was invited but declined to send a representative. On 23 August the conference produced a proposal, largely of Dulles' making, to establish an international body to oversee the running of the canal. A group of five chaired by Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, was appointed to bring the proposal to Nasser to see if he was prepared to negotiate. His answer, on 9 August, was to the point:

.. for nearly 50 days and in spite of the difficulties created by France and the United Kingdom and by segments of the former Suez Canal Company, the traffic has been going with regularity and efficiency. The crisis and the so called 'grave situation' are, therefore artificially created...³⁵

Anwar Sadat, editor of the Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Gumbouriya*, and later successor to Nasser, summed up the position Eden now found himself in when he wrote in the newspaper: 'It has now become clear that Eden wants nothing but war ... He has no other course open to him than either to declare war or to resign.'³⁶

Following Nasser's rejection of the original plan for international control of the canal Eden was in a quandary. British and French troops were not yet in a position to mount an attack on the Canal Zone. To some extent Dulles came to his rescue by proposing another conference. This came up with the idea of the Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA). This would not need Nasser's agreement as ships would be stationed at either end of the canal to collect dues, organise convoys and supply pilots. For Dulles, this was simply another delaying tactic. At a Press Conference he said: 'We do not intend to shoot our way through.'³⁷ In a BBC television programme in 1976 Murphy confirmed this.

Oh, Mr Dulles, no. I think that this was strictly a device, a delaying tactic, a device to prolong the matter and give time for a better understanding in world public opinion etc. I'm sure John Foster Dulles had no faith in it as a practical solution.³⁸

As things turned out nothing came of SCUA.

The difficulty now for Britain and France was that the canal continued to function without any major problems. They began to see that they would receive little support in the use of force unless that could demonstrate a clear *casus belli*. The nationalisation of the Canal Company was now generally seen as inadequate, in itself, to warrant any form of

³⁵ SELO 6/64

³⁶ Kyle, 2003, 222

³⁷ Kyle, 2003, 246

³⁸ SELO 6/56

armed intervention. The solution seemed to be to ensure that the canal did not operate efficiently under Egyptian control. The allies had a very low opinion of the Egyptians' ability to run the canal without the skills of foreign pilots and other staff. They assumed that once they left chaos would ensue. 'The Egyptian Government would be incapable of running the canal without the European pilots.'³⁹ To their disappointment chaos did not ensue. The canal functioned as well as it had done previously. Eden decided to put the canal operation under more pressure and organised *Operation Pile Up*. As many ships as possible would arrive at either end of the canal and demand to be supplied with a pilot each. The British were confident that this would result in chaos and delay. A total of 50 ships presented themselves for transit but, to British and French dismay, the Egyptians were able to provide adequate pilots and all the ships passed through the canal unhindered. On 17 September Harold Watkinson, Minister of Transport, reported: '... the Egyptian Authorities had so far been able to handle the Suez Canal traffic effectively since the bulk of the non-Egyptian pilots had left.'⁴⁰ So much for *Operation Pile-Up*.

Despite this set-back Eden was still determined to depose Nasser and reclaim control of the Suez Canal Company. His problem was how to do it. Had Britain had troops available on, or very soon after, the nationalisation of the company all might have been well. They could have invaded Egypt, gained control of the Canal and forced Nasser's resignation. As time had gone by, however, American and world opinion had hardened in opposition to such a strategy. Eden needed something else to provide the excuse he was looking for. On 14 October 1956 Albert Gazier and Maurice Challe, representatives of the French Government, provided Eden with his excuse. They met Eden at his country residence, Chequers, and proposed that Israel attack Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula. France and Britain would react by sending troops to ensure the safety of the Suez Canal. Eden reacted enthusiastically to this proposal. He ignored the negotiations that Lloyd was conducting at the United Nations with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Fawzi. He totally reversed Britain's foreign policy in the Middle East by allying with Israel against an Arab country. He abandoned the Tripartite Agreement aimed at reducing hostilities in the Middle East. Nutting summed up his feelings after the meeting:

I knew then that, no matter what contrary advice he might receive over the next forty-eight hours, the prime Minister had already made up his mind to go along with the French plan. ... we were to ally ourselves with the Israelis and the French in an attack on Egypt designed to topple Nasser and to seize the Suez Canal. Our traditional friendships with the Arab world

³⁹ EC 20/28/91, 7/9/56

⁴⁰ EC 20/28/101

were to be discarded; the policy of keeping a balance in arms deliveries as between Israel and the Arab states was to be abandoned; indeed, our whole peace keeping role in the Middle East was to be changed and we were to take part in a cynical act of aggression, dressing ourselves for the part as firemen or policemen, while making sure that our fire-hoses spouted petrol and not water and that we belaboured with our truncheons the assaulted and not the assaulter.⁴¹

None of this mattered. Here was the excuse Eden needed.

During the three days of 22 - 24 October various discussions were held in the Parisian suburb of Sèvres. Selwyn Lloyd attended at the beginning but was unenthusiastic about the proposals. He wanted 'a real act of war' by the Israelis, a delay of three days before Britain and France intervened and a real threat to the Suez Canal.⁴² The Israelis were distrustful of Britain and would not accept this. However, when Christian Pineau, the French Foreign Minister, visited Eden in London he found Eden much more amenable. He returned to Paris to announce that Britain would now play its part in the plan. Later that day two British diplomats, Donald Logan and Patrick Dean arrived to finalise the plans.

The former later recalled:

We [Patrick Dean - Assistant Under Secretary at the FO - and Logan] pressed [Moshe] Dayan hard for assurance that the Israelis understood that unless their military action posed a threat to the Canal our forces would not act. It did not come easily. The Israelis did not conceal that their main objective would be Sharm el-Shaikh on the Straits of Tiran to enable them to maintain passage for their ships to the port of Aqaba. We emphasised that a move in that direction would not pose a threat to the Canal ...⁴³

Eventually, however, the two British Diplomats, along with the French and Israelis signed a hastily contrived document covering the main points. Israel would launch its attack on Egypt on the evening of 29 October; Britain and France would issue appeals to both sides to withdraw to a distance of ten miles from the Suez Canal (knowing that the Egyptians would never agree) and then launch a military campaign to 'protect' the canal. This became known as The Protocol of Sèvres. Eden was horrified to learn that there was a written agreement, destroyed the British copy and tried to have the French and Israeli copies destroyed also.⁴⁴ He failed. The French copy is missing but the Israeli copy is in

⁴¹ Nutting, 1967, 94

⁴² Dayan, 1976, 220

⁴³ BDOHP, Sir Donald Logan, 64

⁴⁴ No trace has ever been found of the British version of the Protocol of Sevres, despite extensive searches. See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/releases/2006/december/sevres.htm> (15/11/13)

their archives, although it only came to light long after the events.⁴⁵ To his dying day Eden denied that any such agreement, written or otherwise, existed. He maintained that the Israeli incursion posed a real threat to the canal and demanded outside intervention. That was not the view of Anthony Howard, a British army officer involved in the Suez landings. 'I don't remember any reference being made to separating the combatants or to us being on a peace-keeping role. It was all against what we called Johnny Gyppo.'⁴⁶ Although Eden admitted that Britain had some knowledge of the Israeli plans he never admitted that he had been involved in planning the attack in conjunction with the Israelis and the French.⁴⁷

The operation went as planned, with Israeli troops quickly reaching the Mitla Pass in Sinai, about 30 miles from the canal. The following day, when the British Cabinet met, it approved the issue of the appeals or ultimatums to both sides to withdraw from the area around the canal. However, reservations began to creep into the discussions. Lloyd proposed deferring any military action for 24 hours to see if the Americans could be persuaded to support the Anglo-French response, although he admitted there seemed little prospect of success. Macmillan then began his amazing U turn from committed supporter of military intervention to urging immediate withdrawal by commenting:

Our gold and dollars were still falling at a dangerously rapid rate; and, in view of the extent to which we might have to rely on American economic assistance, we could not afford to alienate the United States Government more than was absolutely necessary.⁴⁸

Despite these reservations Eden resolved to press on and hope for the best. He could hardly do otherwise. When the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister arrived in London, the idea of a 24 hour delay was quickly abandoned. The ultimatums were issued on 30 October. Given that they demanded that Egypt withdraw its forces to a point some 180 miles from its border with Israel while allowing Israel to keep its forces 160 miles inside Egypt it was hardly surprising when the Egyptians rejected it and the Israelis accepted. By five o'clock on 31 October British aeroplanes had begun bombing Egyptian airfields. This was considerably later than the Israelis had asked for but the attacks on Israeli towns by Egyptian bombers that Ben Gurion feared had not materialised.⁴⁹ Everything seemed to be moving smoothly forward.

⁴⁵ A duplicate of the Israeli copy is at Appendix ii

⁴⁶ SELO 10/11

⁴⁷ See, e.g. *Hansard* 20/12/56, 1458 & 1518

⁴⁸ CAB 128/30/299

⁴⁹ Dayan, 1976, 219

What Eden had not foreseen (or had closed his mind to) was the ferocity of criticism that came his way from all over the world. Although France and Britain had vetoed a critical resolution at the United Nations Security Council a resolution before the General Assembly condemned the Anglo-French action and called for a cease-fire.⁵⁰ On the same day, at a Cabinet meeting, Eden proposed that Britain and France should transfer the responsibility for policing the area to a United Nations force as soon as one could be established.⁵¹ Lloyd urged the Cabinet to consider the strength of feeling in the United States and elsewhere:

If no concessions were made to those feelings, it was possible that oil sanctions might be imposed against us. We might be compelled to occupy Kuwait and Qatar ... and we should alienate, perhaps irretrievably, all the Arab states. The Government of Syria had already broken off diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom. It was possible that Iraq, Jordan and Libya would follow her example. In Iraq this would have disastrous consequences, for the Prime Minister would fall and the King himself might be overthrown. We could not hope to avoid serious difficulties with the Arab states for more than a very short time longer, certainly not for as long as it would take us to complete an opposed occupation of Egypt.⁵²

Eden, perhaps for the first time, saw the reality of the situation and was looking for a way out. His proposal, however, was doomed to failure. The United Nations did not possess such a force and his idea was essentially that the Anglo-French force should act as an agent of the United Nations. Considering the anger expressed in the United Nations about the Anglo-French actions, acceptance of such a proposal was never a possibility. He had no choice but to keep going with the military expedition.

In the early morning of 5 November British and French paratroops began their landing at Port Said. Ground troops soon followed. The invasion of the Canal Zone had begun. Nasser immediately reacted by ordering the sinking of blockships in the canal. The very thing that Eden claimed he was trying to prevent had happened because of his actions. By midnight the following day the invasion was over. Once again it was Lloyd who led the way. In a Cabinet meeting on 6 November he explained:

It was now urgently necessary that we should regain the initiative in bringing hostilities to an end...we should shape our policy in such a way as to enlist the maximum sympathy and

⁵⁰ Resolution 997, 2/11/56

⁵¹ CAB/128/30/301

⁵² CAB/128/30/301

support from the United States Government ... If we agreed to break off hostilities at once, we could maintain that we had achieved our primary objectives.⁵³

There was no discussion on how this might affect their allies, the French. At one stroke, therefore, the long stated objectives of deposing Nasser and regaining international control



of the Suez Canal Company were abandoned. In the Cabinet meeting minutes there is no mention of Eden expressing any view.⁵⁴ Having lost the support of Lloyd and Macmillan he was left to salvage his reputation as best he could. Worse was to follow for the Anglo-French alliance. Initially they had tried to insist that a United Nations force should be in place before they left Egypt and that their engineers should play a part in the operation to re-open the canal. Eisenhower made it plain that neither was an option. The British and French forces had to leave Egypt before any attempt at re-opening the canal could begin. Any hope that Eden had of persuading his party that Britain had achieved everything it had hoped was swiftly disabused. As the Secretary of the North Cornwall Conservative Association wrote:

⁵³ CAB/128/30/304

⁵⁴ CAB 128/30/304

But what a change now as one humiliation follows another. It is no use saying that we have done all we meant to do and that all is well for that will not deceive a child.⁵⁵

Even before the Anglo French operation was launched rumours of collusion began to circulate. On 30 October Gaitskell referred to a report from the United States:

There is no longer any doubt in the minds of American officials that Britain and France were in collusion with the Israelis from the beginning, and sanctioned the invasion of Egypt as an excuse to reoccupy the Canal Zone. Strenuous denials by British and French diplomats have failed to shake Washington's conviction that this was the case. ...American opinion appears to be shared by virtually all delegations to the United Nations.⁵⁶

Selwyn Lloyd denied it. 'There was no prior agreement between us about it' he claimed.⁵⁷ Eden said nothing.

On 20 November 1956, just two weeks after the cease-fire was announced, *The Times* reported a communique from 10 Downing Street. 'The Prime Minister is suffering from the effects of severe overstrain ... he has cancelled his immediate public engagements.'⁵⁸ Three days later Eden left Britain for a period of recuperation in the West Indies. When he returned the question of collusion was again raised. This time Eden did reply. On 20 December he denied the charge in the House of Commons. '[The charge] that Her Majesty's Government were engaged in some dishonourable conspiracy is completely untrue and I most emphatically deny it.' And ' ... there was not foreknowledge that Israel would attack Egypt - there was not.'⁵⁹ This was to be Eden's last appearance in the House of Commons as Prime Minister. The Israeli version of the Protocol of Sèvres was finally published in 1995, although several people had been given access to it before that time.

Right at the end can be seen Eden's failure to understand the world of politics. Leaving Britain for three weeks at the height of the crisis proved disastrous. He thought he could return and take up the reins of power and revive his political career. He could not and he resigned on 10 January 1957. Suez had been his nemesis.

⁵⁵ CCO 4/7/142 (T-W)

⁵⁶ *Hansard*, 30/10/56, 1460

⁵⁷ *Hansard*, 30/10/56, 1569

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 20/11/56, 10

⁵⁹ *Hansard*, 20/12/56, 1458 and 1518

Conclusion

Eden struck me as rather at sea and trusting to luck¹

In the face of opposition from Churchill and the Suez Group Eden had negotiated the military withdrawal from Egypt in 1954. Economically, this was essential. Some 80,000 British soldiers were stationed in the Canal Zone and the cost was unsustainable. He always claimed to be a man of peace who searched for a solution to diplomatic problems through negotiation and compromise. He claimed to be a man of principle who 'played by the rules' and expected others to do the same. When the Suez Canal Company was nationalised he accused Nasser of breaching international treaties and agreements. Action to uphold those treaties and agreements was, therefore, justified. He pointed out the similarities of Nasser to the European dictators, Hitler and, especially, Mussolini.

However, there was a lot more to Eden's actions over Suez than the response of a man of principle. Having trusted Nasser two years earlier he had now been made to look foolish. This was Eden's 'Munich' moment. As this thesis has shown Eden was a man whose temper was famously short and who did not react well to criticism. Being treated as a gullible fool by Nasser must have produced a great feeling of resentment. It was not just that he was, as *The Times* wrote, 'The last Prime Minister to think that Britain was a Great Power'. No, he was simply a weak man out of his depth when it came to politics. He allowed his irritation with Nasser to boil over, meaning he reacted to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company with anger rather than consideration. Having done so he found the vast majority of his Party supporting him for probably the first time in his career. Indeed, even the Labour leader and members of the Shadow Cabinet agreed with him. Being in opposition the latter had the luxury of being able to change their minds, which they soon did. No such possibility was open to Eden. No longer was he going to be branded a 'ditherer'. There was to be no hesitation. He had made up his mind and would not change it. All this, of course, simply played into the hands of the Suez Group and the right wing of the Conservative Party. Eden allowed himself to be boxed into a corner by those groups and had neither the courage nor the political acumen to get out of it. His poor health played a part and he probably convinced himself that Nasser posed a similar threat to Britain and the world as Mussolini had despite all the evidence to the contrary. The whole of the Government legal apparatus advised him that Britain had no legal authority to

¹ http://www.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/hellenicObservatory/pdf/Seminars/2010-11/Morewood_transcript.pdf - 24/8/14

use force to resolve the situation. Eden was not interested. Nor did he ask for any advice from within the Foreign Office and elsewhere. He was only interested in advice that encouraged him. Nine years later Gore-Booth concluded:

... the lesson to be learned from Suez was a simple one. It was this: if Ministers consulted their officials then rejected their advice this was perfectly proper and might on many occasions give the right answer. If, however, a government undertook operations by a process of deliberately refraining from taking official advice, or keeping officials informed, then the result in due course would be disastrous.²

Eden's own reflections on Suez paint an entirely different picture. Here there is no self criticism, although he did accept that: ' ... we must review our world position and our domestic capacity more searchingly in the light of the Suez experience, which has not so much changed our fortunes as revealed realities.'³ If only he had understood those realities before acting! When *The Times* claimed that quibbling over Nasser's right to nationalise the Suez Canal Company missed the real issues, it entirely missed the point. It was right but for the wrong reasons.⁴ Whether Nasser was in the right or not did not give Britain the authority, under international law or the rules of the United Nations, to invade Egypt. Further, the nationalisation of the Canal Company was irrelevant to the difficulties that Nasser could cause to Britain's oil supplies. Long before the nationalisation he had demonstrated that Egypt could stop the passage of any ship it chose. No Israeli ships were allowed through. No ship carrying goods to Israel was permitted passage. It was the physical situation of the Suez Canal in Egypt that gave Nasser his power over who used it. Ownership of the Canal Company was irrelevant. Nasser, himself pointed this out in a speech on 18 August 1956.

The question of security is not affected by nationalisation. If there was any foreign security before, it existed when British troops were on Egyptian soil and when they went – and not when nationalisation took place – the question of security arose. But, in fact, we were always responsible for the security and stopped Israeli ships from using the Canal even when British troops were in Egypt.⁵

The *Times of Burma*, in an editorial of 29 August 1956, summed up the essential problem faced by Eden while also neatly setting out the real reasons behind his actions.

² FO 370/2807

³ Prem 11/1138, 28/12/56

⁴ *The Times*, 1/8/56, 9

⁵ FO 371/119112

It is hardly likely that President Nasser will so easily hand over part of Egyptian sovereignty just because some Western powers fear their political influence will diminish if they do not retain direct or indirect control of the Canal.⁶

This was the crux of the matter. The nationalisation was a blow to British and, more importantly, Eden's own, prestige. Although Eden claimed to be concerned for the supply of oil reaching Britain (despite the complete lack of any evidence that Nasser intended any interruption) it was the blow to his personal standing that hurt him most. He was adamant that the Suez Canal should be under international (i.e. not Arab) control, ignoring the fact that, by its very geographic position, it would always be physically under the control of Egypt. What he really wanted, however, was, as Nutting shows, to demonstrate his own strength by getting rid of Nasser.⁷

Eden was also deeply concerned about the possible extension of Soviet influence in the Middle East. The reports from MI6 only reinforced the view that the Soviet Union was, wholly or partly, behind Nasser's actions. This, despite the fact that his own diplomats in Egypt were reporting no evidence of Communist influence on Egypt's ruling group.⁸ Indeed, all the evidence pointed the other way.

At no point did Eden ever consider the likely repercussions if Britain attacked Egypt. Five minutes reflection would surely have revealed to him that the use of force would immediately produce precisely the results he was trying to avoid. As Thorpe says:

The immediate consequence of the crisis was that the Suez Canal was blocked, oil supplies were interrupted, Nasser's position as leader of Arab nationalism was strengthened, and the way was left open for Russian intrusion into the Middle East.⁹

Even had the military adventure succeeded the Canal would still have been blocked and oil supplies interrupted. Nasser might have been deposed but the Egyptians would surely have looked even more to the Soviets for assistance. Indeed, it was the Soviet Union that eventually funded the construction of the Aswan Dam in the period from 1960 to 1970. Even when it was all over Eden still failed to understand the basic errors he had made. He saw the failures as being largely military. 'One of the lessons of Suez is that we need a smaller force that is more mobile and more modern in its equipment.'¹⁰

⁶ FO 371/119127/JE14211/1363

⁷ e.g. Nutting, 1967, 11, 34, 49

⁸ See, e.g. FO371/118832/JE1015/1 Note from Trevelyan 'I have no evidence that Nasser intends to ... allow the Eastern Communists to challenge his power. I have no evidence that Nasser or any member of the CRC is a Communist.'

⁹ Thorpe, 2010, 345

¹⁰ Prem 11/1138 Eden's reflections in a note dated 28 December 1956

Prior to the Suez Crisis Eden had been generally supportive of the Palestinian Arabs, encouraging the Israelis to trade land for peace. He saw that the Arab-Israeli peace was fragile and did his best to ensure it endured. He supported the restrictions on the import of arms into the Middle East through the Tripartite agreement. By his collusion with Israel he completely abandoned all this, actually encouraging the Israelis to be the aggressors by attacking Egypt. The Tripartite agreement was abandoned, so far as Egypt was concerned. Eden claimed that this was justified because Egypt had disowned the pact. The fact that the pact was between Britain, France and the United States and that Egypt had never been a signatory he deemed irrelevant.

Suez was Eden's downfall as Prime Minister because of his inability to handle criticism; his political inexperience; his naivety in believing that Britain's collusion with France and Israel could be kept secret; his initial failure to court friends in the media and his inability to keep his personal feelings separate from his political actions. He knew he needed American support but made no attempt to ensure it; he simply assumed it, that the Americans would turn a blind eye. As Selwyn Lloyd said when he was asked to comment on Eden's autobiography, *Full Circle*, before publication:

There is a strong anti American bias throughout. ... His partisanship of the Israelis against the Egyptians is rather crude. ... My principal criticism of the book ... is that I think it will damage his own reputation so much. Many of the things said in it seem rather petty and to indicate personal malice and resentment of criticism.¹¹

This summed Eden up; petty, full of personal malice and resentful of any criticism. He was a weak man who wanted to show all his critics that he was tough; a diplomat out of his depth in the world of politics and an honest man forced into continual lying to bolster his story. He clung desperately to his view that Nasser was a dangerous dictator like Hitler or Mussolini in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. He claimed that international treaties were sacrosanct but, as his actions in Cyprus and elsewhere showed, was very relaxed about ignoring the Geneva Convention. He took personal criticism to heart and was constantly worrying over what people thought of him. He claimed to be a man of peace but, over Suez, he rejected peace for war. He claimed to be a supporter of the United Nations but largely ignored it because he knew it would not support him. He claimed to be upholding the rule of law but ignored all the legal advice offered by his own legal experts. Eventually he found himself in a situation where his only options were to go

¹¹ FO 800/728

to war or resign. He choose war. As Conservative MP Nigel Nicholson later commented:
'Eden had to prove that he had a real moustache.'¹²

¹² Thomas, 1967, 38

Dramatis Personae

United Kingdom

Aitken, Max, Lord Beaverbrook - Owner of the *Daily* and *Sunday Express*
Alexander, General Harold - British Army
Amery, Julian - Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1966 and from 1969 to 1992
Andrews, Chapman - Diplomat
Astor, David - Editor of *The Observer* from 1948 to 1975
Attlee, Clement - Leader of the Labour Party from 1935 to 1955
Baldwin, Stanley - Prime Minister from 1923 to 1929 and from 1935 to 1937
Balfour, Arthur - Foreign Secretary, 1916 to 1919
Bartlett, Vernon - Independent M.P. from 1938 to 1951
Beckett, Gervase - Newspaper Proprietor and Eden's first Father-in-Law
Bevan, Aneurin - Labour M.P. from 1929 to 1960
Bevins, Reginald - Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1964
Brown, Mervyn - Diplomat
Burgess, Guy - Diplomat from 1944 to 1951, and Soviet spy
Butler, Richard (RAB) - Conservative M.P. from 1929 to 1965 (rival to Eden)
Caccia, Harold - Diplomat from 1929 to 1965
Carrington, Lord - Foreign Secretary from 1979 to 1982
Chamberlain, Neville - Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940
Churchill, Winston - Prime Minister from 1940 to 1945 and from 1951 to 1955
Clark, William - Eden's Press Adviser from 1955 to 1956
Cripps, Stafford - Labour (then Independent) M.P. from 1931 to 1950
Crookshank, Harry - Conservative M.P. from 1924 to 1956
Crowder, Petre - Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1979
Davies, Clement - Liberal M.P. from 1929 to 1962
Dean, Patrick - Diplomat
Dixon, Pierson - Permanent Representative at the United Nations
Domville, Patrick - Traveller and regular correspondent with Julien Amery
Douglas-Home, Alec - Commonwealth Minister from 1955 to 1960
Driberg, Tom - Journalist
Eden, Anthony - Prime Minister
Eden, Beatrice - Eden's first wife
Eden, Clarrisa - Eden's second wife and niece of Winston Churchill

Eden, Nicholas - Eden's younger son

Elliot, Walter - Conservative M.P. from 1918 to 1958

Evans, Dr. Horace - Eden's physician

Fairlie, Henry - Journalist

Fitzmaurice, Gerald - Senior Legal Adviser at the Foreign Office (Civil servant)

Gaitskell, Hugh - Leader of the Opposition Labour Party from 1955 to 1963

Gascoyne-Cecil, Robert (Bobbety), Viscount Cranborne; later Lord Salisbury - Conservative M.P. from 1929 to 1941

Glubb, General John (Glubb Pasha) - Commander of the Arab Legion from 1939 to 1956

Goodhart, Arthur - Emeritus Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford University

Gore-Booth, Paul - Diplomat

Hacking, Douglas - Conservative M.P. from 1918 to 1945

Hailsham, Lord - Conservative M.P. from 1938 to 1950 and from 1963 to 1970

Halifax, Viscount - Foreign Secretary from 1938 to 1940

Harding, General John - Governor of Cyprus from 1955 to 1957

Harvey, Oliver - Principal Private Secretary to Eden (civil servant)

Healy, Denis - Labour M.P. from 1952 to 1992

Henderson, Arthur - Labour politician. Awarded the 1934 Nobel Peace Prize

Herbert, Sidney - Conservative M.P. from 1922 to 1939

Hoare, Samuel - Conservative M.P. from 1910 to 1944. Held various Ministries

Home, Lord - Minister for Commonwealth Relations from 1955 to 1957

Howard, Anthony - Army officer

Howell, Denis - Labour M.P. from 1955 to 1992

Inskip, Thomas - Conservative M.P. from 1918 to 1939

Johnston, Howard - Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1959

Jones, Aubrey - Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1965

Jones, Aubrey - Minister of Fuel & Power from 1955 to 1957

Kerby, Henry - Conservative M.P. from 1954 to 1971

Killearn, Lord, (Miles Lampson) - British Ambassador to Egypt from 1934 to 1946

Kirkpatrick, Ivone - Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1953 to 1957

Law, Bonar - Prime Minister from 1922 to 1923

Law, Richard - Conservative M.P. from 1931 to 1945

Leith Ross, Fredrick - Retired Diplomat

Lennox-Boyd, Alan - Conservative M.P. from 1931 to 1960

Lloyd George, Gwilym - Liberal, then Liberal and Conservative, M.P. from 1929 to 1957

Lloyd, Selwyn - Foreign Secretary from 1955 to 1960

Logan, Donald - Diplomat

Mclachlan, Donald - Journalist

Maclean, Donald - Diplomat from 1934 to 1951, and Soviet spy

Macmillan, Harold - Foreign Secretary then Chancellor of the Exchequer

Makins, Roger - UK Ambassador to Washington

Mallalieu, Lance - Labour M.P. from 1931 to 1935 and from 1948 to 1974

Manningham-Buller, Reginald - Attorney General (Conservative M.P.) The Government's legal advisor

Margaret, Princess - Queen Elizabeth II's younger sister

Maude, Angus Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1958 and from 1963 to 1983

Millard, Guy - Diplomat from 1939 to 1976

Monckton, Walter - Conservative M.P. from 1951 to 1957

Mott-Radclyffe, Charles - Conservative M.P. from 1942 to 1970

Mountbatten, Lord Louis - First Sea Lord from 1955 to 1959

Nabarro, Gerald - Conservative M.P. from 1950 to 1964

Nicolson, Nigel - Conservative M.P. from 1952 to 1959

Nutting, Anthony - Parliamentary Private Secretary to Eden (M.P)

Owen, Dr. David - Medical Practitioner and Foreign Secretary from 1977 to 1979. (the youngest Foreign Secretary since Anthony Eden)

Pickthorn, Kenneth - Conservative M.P. from 1935 to 1966

Poole, Oliver - M.P. and Chairman of the Conservative Party fro 1955 to 1957

Raikes, Victor - Conservative M.P. from 1931 to 1957

Rothschild, Richard - Banker

Shuckburgh, Evelyn - Principal Private Secretary to Eden (civil servant)

Silverman, Sidney - Labour M.P. from 1935 to 1968 and Opponent of Capital Punishment

Simon, John - Foreign Secretary from 1931 to 1935

Somerset de Chair, Lord - Conservative M.P. from 1935 to 1945 and from 1950 to 1951

Spears, Edward - Journalist

Stanley, Oliver - Conservative M.P. from 1924 to 1950

Stevenson, Ralph - UK Ambassador to Cairo 1953 - 1955

Stuart, James - Conservative M.P. from 1923 to 1959

Taylor, George - Correspondent with Julien Amery

Templer, General Gerald - Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1955 to 1958

Thatcher, Margaret - Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990

Trevelyan, Humphrey - Ambassador to Egypt from 1955 to 1956

Troyte, Acland - Conservative M.P. from 1924 to 1945

Vallat, Francis - Legal advisor

Wall, Patrick - Conservative M.P. from 1954 to 1987

Ward, Eric, Earl of Dudley - Conservative M.P. from 1921 to 1924 and from 1931 to 1932

Waterhouse, Charles - Conservative M.P. from 192 to 1945 and from 1950 to 1957

Watkinson, Harold - Minister of Transport from 1955 to 1959

Wavell, General Archibald - Commander in Chief Middle East from 1940 to 1941

Wheeler-Bennett, John - Biographer to George VI

Williams, Herbert - Conservative M.P. 1924-29, 1932-45 & 1950-54

Wood, Kingsley - Conservative M.P. from 1918 to 1943 and Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1940 to 1943

Young, George Kennedy - Director of Middle East Operations for the Secret Intelligence Service in 1956

Zetland, Marquess of - Secretary of State for India from 19345 to 1940

France

Bourges-Manoury, Maurice - Defence Minister from 1956 to 1957

Challe, Maurice - Air Force General

Chauvel, Jean - Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 1955 to 1962

de Gaulle, Charles - President from 1959 to 1969

Gazier, Albert - Minister of Social Affairs from 1956 to 1957

Lacoste, Robert - Resident Minister in Algeria from 1956 to 1957

Laval, Pierre - (Effectively) Prime Minister on four occasions between 1931 and 1944

de Lesseps, Ferdinand - Original Developer of the Suez Canal

Martinet, Gilles, - Journalist on *France Observateur*

Mollett, Guy - Prime Minister from 1956 to 1957

Pineau, Christian - Foreign Minister from 1956 to 1958

Israel

Ben Gurion, David - Prime Minister from 1948 to 1963

Dayan, Moshe - Chief of the General Staff from 1953 to 1958

Egypt

Fawzi, Mahmoud - Foreign Minister from 1952 to 1964

Maher, Ali - Prime Minister of Egypt Four Times between 1936 and 1952

Nahas, Mustapha Pasha - Prime Minister of Egypt from 1950 to 1952

Nasser, Gamal Abdul - President from 1956 to 1970

Sadat, Anwar - Editor of *Al-Gumbouriya* from 1954 to 1959 and eventual successor to

Nasser

USA

Dulles, John Foster - Secretary of State from 1953 to 1959
Eisenhower, Dwight D. (Ike) - President from 1953 to 1961
Eveland, Wilbur - CIA Agent in the Middle East from 1955 to 1959
Foster, Andrew - Diplomat
Hull, Cordell - Secretary of State from 1933 to 1944
Humphrey, George - Treasury Secretary from 1953 to 1957
Kennedy, Joseph - American Ambassador to Britain 1938 to 1940
Murphy, Robert - Diplomat
Roosevelt, Franklin D. - President from 1933 to 1945
Stassen, Harold - Special Assistant to the President from 1955 to 1958
Truman, Harry S. - President from 1945 to 1953
White, Lincoln - American Diplomat from 1933 to 1965
Wilson, Woodrow - President from 1913 to 192

Other

Khan, the Aga - Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Community
Beck, Josef - Polish Foreign Secretary from 1932 to 1939
Bulganin, Nicolai - Premier of the Soviet Union from 1955 to 1958
Franco, Francisco - Spanish Dictator from 1936 to 1975
Grandi, Dina - Italian Fascist Politician
Hitler, Adolf - German Dictator from 1933 to 1945
Hussein, King - King of Jordan from 1952 to 1999
Krushchev, Nikita - First Secretary of the Soviet Union Communist Party
al-Kuwatly, Shikri - President of Syria from 1955 to 1958
Makarios, Archbishop - Leader of the Greek Cypriots from 1950 to 1977
Menzies, Robert - Prime Minister of Australia from 1949 to 1966
Mussolini, Benito - Italian Dictator from 1925 to 1943
Pius XI - Pope from 1922 to 1939
Saud, King - King of Saudi Arabia from 1953 to 1964
Sauser Hall, Georges - Swiss Jurist
Smuts, Jan - Prime Minister of South Africa from 1939 to 1948
William the Silent - Prince of Orange from 1544 to 1584

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12 July 1956

Guardian:

25 March 1968

Manchester Guardian:

6 April 1955

9 January 1956

1 November 1956

Observer:

8 January 1956

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Protocol of Sevres





