

Suez: A Crisis of British Identity

*Interrogating the narrative of British strength in the press coverage during
the 1956 Suez Crisis*

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Abstract: The Suez Crisis in 1956 has been identified as a critical turning point for Britain as the global spheres of powers shifted after the war. Although the crisis marks a deterioration of Britain's geopolitical reputation during the 20th Century, it is not clear that the British population was aware of the severity of the crisis as it unfolded. An interrogation of the newspaper coverage of this event shows that the British were clinging on to a lingering sense of power that was rooted in their declining empire. This collective sense of identity obscured the serious implications of Britain's military failure in the Suez Crisis.

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Suez: A Crisis of British Identity

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Introduction:

1869 – 1956: The Roots of Crisis

In late 1956, the British public watched as their government embarked on an ill-fated military campaign to gain an Anglo-French occupation of the Suez Canal.¹ Britain's failure in the Suez Canal undermined the British geo-political position and confronted a nation whose sense of identity was enmeshed with the strength of their fading empire.² This thesis will revisit the British newspaper coverage of the Suez Crisis during the critical 'military phase' of the conflict. This period spans from the start of Israeli engagement in the region on the 29th of October 1956 to the Anglo-French cease-fire that took effect at midnight on the 6th of November 1956.³ Over the course of this relatively short conflict Britain underwent a seismic change, it led to the resignation of the Prime Minister Anthony Eden, emphasised Britain's weak economic position, showed that their once strong allegiance with the United States had significantly shifted and served a role in the dismantling of the British Empire.⁴ Through revisiting the newspaper coverage of this event, the extent to which the British people were aware that their country was undergoing such a monumental shift on the global stage can be assessed. Returning to the newspaper coverage of the Suez Crisis can also serve as an entry point into understanding the zeitgeist in Britain during this tumultuous period.⁵

In order to revisit the newspaper coverage of the military phase of the Suez Crisis it is crucial to understand the antecedent events that led to the crisis to provide context. Britain and France both played key roles in the building of the Suez Canal, and throughout the 19th century were the primary shareholders in the project. Since its construction in 1869, the canal had a long history of French

¹ Leon D. Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964) p.1; Keith Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: L.B. Tauris, 2003) pp.348-349

² Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) p.4

³ David Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) p.69; Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* pp.39-40

⁴ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* pp.2,40; Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.4-6

⁵ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Newspapermen* (London: Pimlico, 2004) pp.264-265

administration, whilst Egypt itself had a long history as a subject of British colonialism. These entwined factors serve as the long roots of the Suez Crisis.⁶

The Suez Crisis was the result of slow-burning tensions that were ignited by the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal.⁷ Although the crisis was precipitated by an array of intersecting events, one of the central issues at play for Britain that led to the military conflict was a deep sense of history with and partial ownership of the Suez Canal.⁸ Britain's involvement in the Suez Canal predates its construction. In the late 1850s, the French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, formed the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal with the sole objective to build a canal through Egypt's Sinai Peninsula that would connect the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea, by way of the Gulf of Suez.⁹ In 1858 de Lesseps gained a concession from Mohamed Said, then the Viceroy of Egypt, allowing him exclusive land rights to build and operate a canal in the region for 99 years. He then began shopping around for investors for his scheme, and sought capital from the British government. He was met with a poor reception in the House of Commons, where there was a 290 to 62 split against investing in the proposed canal. According to Anthony Gorst and Lewis Johnman, this was because parliament overwhelmingly considered the venture "speculative and organised by a representative of a power with whom Britain had a long history of poor relations."¹⁰ This rejection resulted in the vast majority of the canal's financial backing and operation being French, while Egypt provided significant land grants, custom exemptions and a substantial and largely unpaid work force. During this period Egypt, as part of the Ottoman Empire, was nominally ruled by the Turkish Sultan, who in 1866 sought to alter the terms of the agreement between Egypt and de Lesseps' company. This increased the Egyptian stake in the venture, although the Viceroy's successor, the Khedive Isma'il Pasha, had to substantially compensate the company.¹¹ This new capital allowed the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal to accelerate construction of the canal, which was completed and unveiled on the 17th of November 1869.¹²

Only six years after the triumphant opening of the canal, Egypt found itself in dire financial straits as international creditors began to place enormous pressure on the Khedive to repay the substantial debts he had accrued through his aspirational nation building projects. As it became known that he

⁶ Roy Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* (London: Macmillan, 2003) p.131; Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.7-9

⁷ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.131

⁸ John MacKenzie 'The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture' in Stuart Ward ed. *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.22

⁹ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.1; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.vii-viii; Roger W. M Louis and Roger Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) p.xviii

¹⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.1; J.C. Hurewitz, 'The Historical Context' in Roger W. M Louis and Roger Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) p.1

¹¹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.1

¹² Louis and Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* p.xiv; Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.14

intended to seek a buyer for his 44% stake in the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal, who were the sole administrators of the canal, the prospect of investment in the now completed canal suddenly became much more desirable to some factions in the House of Commons.¹³ The then Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli was of the opinion that there was a need for expansionism and a focus on empire if Britain was to maintain a share of global power in the 20th century that reflected the power they had held in the preceding years.¹⁴ Early into his initial premiership, Disraeli outlined this aspiration in his 1872 Crystal Palace speech, stating that the Conservative party knew “that in the Estates of the Realm and the privileges they enjoy” lay “the best security for public liberty and good government.” He also stated that the British public were “proud of belonging to an Imperial country” and thus his government were “resolved to maintain, if they can, their empire.”¹⁵ It was this sense that Britain would be best served by maintaining and if possible strengthening the empire that ostensibly motivated Disraeli to purchase a lion’s share of the Suez Canal. So, when the opportunity emerged in 1875, despite the fact he was opposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary, Disraeli sourced a loan of £4 million from the Rothschilds and the British government became the largest single stakeholder in the corporation. This left one of Egypt’s most valuable geographic assets almost exclusively in the hands of the British government and French investors.¹⁶ Through this purchase, Disraeli strengthened a softer branch of Empire than Britain’s traditional protectorates and colonies. The Suez Canal was a valuable asset in the Middle East that opened up key shipping routes both for trade and in times of war.¹⁷ David Carlton refers to this concept as the idea of an “informal empire” that could complement Britain’s colonies without having to incur the expense or difficulty of occupying and administering a country.¹⁸ Despite the disagreement of his colleagues in parliament Disraeli’s purchase was met with some acclaim, and according to Keith Kyle “excited the popular imagination”.¹⁹ This is reflected in the reporting of the acquisition, as *The Times* praised the purchase as “An act so prompt and opportune” that it would “gratify the country” and reassures the British people that they have “a Government of spirit and initiative.”²⁰ Despite this relatively enthusiastic reception, the perception that Britain owned, or even that the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal owned the Suez Canal is false. In fact, Britain only had a stake in the Suez Canal as long as the company was able to retain its contract with the Khedive to operate the canal, and following Disraeli’s acquisition only three of the thirty-two board members were British, while the

¹³ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.13

¹⁴ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.10

¹⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, ‘Conservative and Liberal Principles’ in T.E. Kebbel ed. *Selected speeches of the late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield* (London: Longmans, 1882) p.525,528

¹⁶ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.13

¹⁷ John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) pp.1-2

¹⁸ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.8

¹⁹ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.13

²⁰ *The Times* Issue 28484 (27 November 1875) Times Digital Archive 1785-2011, State Library of New South Wales Database p.9

rest were primarily French.²¹ Regardless of any foreign investment in the building or administration of the canal, the Suez Canal runs through sovereign Egyptian territory and thus has been retained as the possession of first the Ottoman Empire, and later Egypt alone²²

The British and French relationship oscillated throughout the century preceding the crisis, although it reached the zenith of hostility in 1882 when the British government began their occupation of Egypt. This occupation also led to animosity between the Egyptian people and these foreign powers who were encroaching on their nation and its government.²³ In the early 1880s, Egypt had become engulfed by the international debt that had precipitated the Khedive's sale of his Suez shares to Disraeli. The financial position Egypt found itself in was so precarious that Isma'il Pasha was deposed from his position as Khedive by Anglo-French forces.²⁴ In 1881, British and French "Financial Controllers" then swiftly assumed far-reaching control, circumventing the traditional Egyptian regime in their acquisition of power.²⁵ They instituted not insignificant economic sanctions over the Egyptian government, which were received badly, provoking what Gorst and Johnman call an "upsurge of Egyptian nationalism."²⁶ Ostensibly concerned by the swell of ill-will towards the European forces who had usurped power, in January of 1882 Britain and France presented a 'Joint Note' to Egyptian revolutionary forces where they showed unilateral support for the Khedive in the face of attempts to overthrow his rule, and displayed concern for their property and the Anglo-French nationals who were in Egypt.²⁷ In March they received a responding ultimatum from the forces led by revolutionary Egyptian Amry officer Ahmad Urabi demanding the resignation and exile of the Khedive, institution of Urabi as an autocratic leader and removal of the Anglo-French presence in Egypt.²⁸ Nationalism also began to seep into the government, as Isma'il Pasha's successor Khedive Tewfiq, appointed a nationalist Prime Minister, Muhammad Sarif Pasha. As this substantial pressure mounted, British forces became uneasy with their precarious position in Egypt. In the first half of 1882, tensions escalated and following Urabi led riots in Alexandria, British Ironclad warships bombarded the region.²⁹ Led by Sir Garnet Wolseley, British forces utilised the Canal to invade Egypt

²¹ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.14

²² Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.2

²³ Hurewitz, 'The Historical Context' p.1

²⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.2-3

²⁵ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.14; A.G. Hopkins 'The Victorians and Africa: A Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt, 1882' *The Journal of African History* Vol. 27 No.2 (1986) p.363

²⁶ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.2

²⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.2-31; Marco Pinfari, 'The Unmaking of a Patriot: Anti-Aran Prejudice in the British Attitude Towards the Urabi Revolt (1882)' *Arab Studies Quarterly* Vol. 34 No.2 (Spring 2012) p.92

²⁸ Pinfari, 'The Unmaking of a Patriot: Anti-Aran Prejudice in the British Attitude Towards the Urabi Revolt (1882)' p.92; Winston Thorson, 'Freycinet's Egyptian Policy in 1882' *The Historian* Vol. 4 No.2 (Spring, 1942) p.172

²⁹ Pinfari, 'The Unmaking of a Patriot: Anti-Aran Prejudice in the British Attitude Towards the Urabi Revolt (1882)' p.92-93

and successfully stage a full-scale occupation of the country.³⁰ Prior to this military action, French Prime Minister Charles de Freycinet declared that any resolution of the Egyptian uprising that required naval force or diplomatic sanction would be impossible.³¹ Accordingly, this military campaign and occupation of Egypt soured relations between Freycinet and his British counterpart, Prime Minister William Gladstone.³²

Britain dismantled what was left of the shared Anglo-French control of Egypt, and although it remained in principle part of the Ottoman Empire, Egyptians found themselves under the informal rule of the British and their empire.³³ The legal status of Britain's subordination of Egypt was continually in flux over the ensuing decades.³⁴ In 1888 Britain gained some formal legitimacy as a signatory of the Convention of Constantinople. Several of the major points that Britain and other major European powers agreed to with Turkey in this convention would later become flash points during the Suez Canal. There was mutual agreement that the canal should ensure free and open passage to ships from all countries, yet also that the Khedive should be able to take any measures to protect Egypt, including obstructing the canal if necessary. The terms of this agreement also clarified that the canal was to be seen as sovereign property of Egypt, although free for use, and that the agreement would continue to be ratified even after the Universal Suez Canal Company ceased to administrate it.³⁵ Despite these negotiations, Britain retained informal control of Egypt and its canal throughout the turn of the century. The soft acquisition of formal power over Egypt continued when, in 1904, Britain and France ended their continued dispute over Egypt. The *Entente Cordiale*, an accord signed by both nations, outlined both party's intentions to preserve an allegiance in the face of the increasing threat of expansionism from other European powers.³⁶ This effectively ended France and Britain's rivalry for governance of Egypt, and reinstated the Anglo-French alliance that later became prominent during the Suez Crisis.³⁷ The First World War then effectively severed Egypt's ties to the Ottoman Empire, and on December 18th 1914 Britain was finally able to elevate the stake Disraeli had purchased in the company administrating the Suez Canal into unequivocal imperial power in the region as Egypt became a legal protectorate of the British empire.³⁸

Egypt under British rule was characterised by the unwillingness of the British to relinquish their tenuous control of the country despite continuous attempts by the Egyptian people to expel them. The uneasy British protectorate of Egypt came to an end in 1922, when Egypt sought independence and

³⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.2

³¹ Thorson, 'Freycinet's Egyptian Policy in 1882' p.175

³² Hurewitz, 'The Historical Context' p.1; Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.14-15

³³ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.3

³⁴ Hurewitz, 'The Historical Context' p.1

³⁵ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.4-6

³⁶ Antoine Capet, "Introduction: 'Britain's most enduring Special Relationship'" in Antoine Capet ed. *Britain, France and the Entente Cordiale since 1904* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) p.3

³⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.6

³⁸ Louis and Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* p.xiv

the Khedive as Sultan Faud, seventh son of the deposed Khedive Isma'il, declared himself the first King of Egypt.³⁹ However, Egypt's independence did not end the role of the British in Egyptian governance. Four branches of governmental power; the protection of the Suez Canal, the defence of Egypt, the ability to protect their own nationals who resided within Egypt and the governance of Sudan all rested with the remaining British presence in Egypt.⁴⁰

Britain once again gained a foothold on Egypt, when the Foreign Secretary, Eden negotiated favourable terms in the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 26 August 1936.⁴¹ The terms of this agreement undermined Egyptian sovereignty in times of war, and treated the Suez Canal as a property of which the British had possession.⁴² Article I of the treaty decrees that the "military occupation of Egypt by the forces of His Majesty The King and Emperor is terminated."⁴³ Although this initially suggests the renegotiation of Britain and Egypt's relationship will shift the balance of power, the articles that follow lend credence to Egypt's tacit role as an ongoing branch of the British empire during this period. Article VII ensures that in the event of war British involvement in Egypt will consist of "furnishing to His Majesty The King and Emperor on Egyptian territory", allowing them general occupancy of the country and use of their geographical assets.⁴⁴ Finally, the treaty concedes a previously non-existent level of ownership of the Suez Canal to the British. Article VIII holds that while the canal is an "integral part of Egypt" it is also "an essential means of communication between the different parts of the British Empire" and thus the British were authorised to "station forces in Egyptian territory in the vicinity of the Canal".⁴⁵ This created a zone in Egypt that was run by British forces for twenty years, as stipulated in the Treaty. Although the treaty unequivocally states that this does not constitute an occupation, in practice this allowed Britain to continue considering Egypt to be a part of their Empire, and this zone had the continued optics of their former occupation.

The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 26 August 1936 also marked Eden's first major foray into the politics of the Suez Canal. Eden became the Foreign Secretary in Stanley Baldwin's government following his service during World War One and his swift rise through the ranks of the Conservative Party. There is some sense among historians that Eden's early experiences influenced his attitude towards the Suez Canal once he was Prime Minister. Kyle characterises a young Eden as the "Tory Crown Prince" during the 1930s.⁴⁶ This proposition by Kyle is not necessarily a flattering one, as he hints at a certain ease to Eden's early career. Although he refers to Eden as a "gallant survivor" of war, he does

³⁹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.6

⁴⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.6-7

⁴¹ 'The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936' *Current History* 22 no.128 (1952) pp.1-9

⁴² Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.9

⁴³ 'The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936' p.1

⁴⁴ 'The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936' p.1

⁴⁵ 'The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936' p.1

⁴⁶ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.9-10

so while suggesting he had a “outward appearance” that was appealing.⁴⁷ Following a turbulent but privileged upbringing, Kyle writes of Eden’s career as though he transitioned between easy tableaux. From his “great house” with his volatile parents, to war and then on to Oxford to attain a First in Oriental Languages, Kyle suggests he is merely “diverted into politics”.⁴⁸ This upwards trajectory of his career is presented almost as though Eden was carried towards success, whilst the valleys in his life and career Kyle appears to attribute to certain personality faults that Eden may have had. He suggests others in the party may have seen Eden as nervous, precocious and an underserving understudy to Winston Churchill.⁴⁹ This sense of great potential that accompanied Eden during this period is echoed by his biographer, Sidney Aster. Aster writes of Eden’s long and promising rise to power, only to become one of the shortest-serving British Prime Ministers, following a swift and “tragic” fall from grace.⁵⁰ However, Aster’s understanding of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty is that it was a substantial “boost” for Eden’s then growing “reputation”.⁵¹ In 1929, whilst still a young member of parliament who was poised to gain a position in the Foreign Office, Eden famously called the Suez Canal “the swing-door of the British Empire which has got to keep continually revolving if our communications are to be what they should.”⁵² This was said in the context of Eden suggesting that the canal was crucial to the strength of British ties to Australia and New Zealand, and were it not for its “imperial” nature he would deem it a “very natural ambition” of the “Egyptian people” to want British troops removed from their soil.⁵³ Certainly Eden had strong political ties to the Suez Canal, even during the earliest years of his career. Upon Churchill’s return to office in 1952, Eden, as a returning Foreign Secretary was able to fully elucidate his views on the matter. In a paper presented to Cabinet advocating for a redistribution of Britain’s international obligations that was proportionate to Britain’s weakened post-War economy Eden argued that assuming “the responsibility” for “the security of the Middle East” was “beyond the resources of the United Kingdom.”⁵⁴ Despite this, Eden continued to prioritise the Suez Canal as an obligation of Britain’s until such time as an international body could ensure free passage through it. This shows that as late as 1952, Eden does not feel that Egypt can be entrusted with it’s own canal, and that the long-arm of the British empire must safe guard it.⁵⁵ It appears that successfully negotiating the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936 was a moment of triumph for the young Eden. This personal moment of triumph appears to have had a

⁴⁷ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.10

⁴⁸ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.9

⁴⁹ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.11

⁵⁰ Sidney Aster, *Anthony Eden* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976) p.1

⁵¹ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.23,43

⁵² A. R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931-1938* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986) pp.13-15; ‘Sitting of 23 December 1929’ *Commons and Lords Hansard* Digitised Editions of Commons and Lord Hansard by The Commons and Lords Libraries <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1929/dec/23>> viewed 4 October 2017 cc.2047-2048

⁵³ ‘Sitting of 23 December 1929’ <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1929/dec/23>> 2017 cc.2047-2048

⁵⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.28-29

⁵⁵ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.29

lasting impact on the statesman, as throughout his career he held that retaining control of the Suez Canal and by extension maintaining a strong empire, were matters of the utmost importance to Britain.

In 1954 Eden came to an agreement with the Egyptian leader, the then Prime Minister Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser that negotiated a British exit from the canal zone, although it did not signal the end of Britain's vested interest in the region. The terms of the 19th of October, 1954 'Suez Canal Base Agreement exchanged Britain's withdrawal from the area within twenty months of signing for a number of crucial arrangements between the nations. The 1936 Treaty was ended, Britain was ensured "facilities as may be necessary in order to place the Base on a war footing" and that freedom of navigation through the canal for all nations would be maintained.⁵⁶ This agreement ensured a swift and secure British exit from the canal, which was in effect by 1956. Another international agreement however, came to be an enormous point of contention throughout the Suez Crisis.⁵⁷ The Tripartite Declaration of 1950 stipulated that Britain, Israel and France were bound in the event of aggression on either the Arab or Israeli side to "take action".⁵⁸ During the 1956 crisis, this agreement would be contended on two fronts, firstly the question of whether Israel's actions constituted an aggression and secondly, whether the declaration was still binding.⁵⁹

A final precipitating event in the slow march towards the Suez Crisis was American and British funding being rescinded from Nasser's High Aswan Dam project.⁶⁰ The project, which was slated to provide water for the Nile valley, produce a huge amount of electricity and generally improve the geographical and economic position of Egypt was being financed through capital from the World Bank and loans from crucial American and British funding.⁶¹ On the 19th of July, 1956, the American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles announced that he would be withdrawing the American offer of funding for this project, and as a result Britain would also be retreating. He did so as a move of economic diplomacy, designed to be a retaliation for Egypt engaging in an arms deal with the adversarial Soviet Union.⁶² This arms deal brought the interests of the Soviet Union into Egypt and the surrounding Middle Eastern nations, and in doing so dismantled the tacit understanding between the crediting nations and Nasser that he would not act out of step with their general economic allegiance. However, Nasser's response to the American withdrawal from the project did not reflect

⁵⁶ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.32-33

⁵⁷ Diane B. Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) pp.118-119; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.61-62

⁵⁸ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.17; Harry Browne, *Suez and Sinai* (London: Longman Group, 1971) p.8

⁵⁹ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.70-71

⁶⁰ Christopher Goldsmith 'In the Know? Sir Gladwyn Jebb, Ambassador to France' in Saul Kelly and Anthony Gorst eds. *Whitehall and the Suez Crisis* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000) p.82

⁶¹ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.131; Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.2; Browne, *Suez and Sinai* p.27

⁶² Browne, *Suez and Sinai* pp.27-30

this justification and as such was less than ideal. Having staked his political reputation on the building of the dam, the move incensed the Egyptian Prime Minister. The act of economic punishment struck the intrinsically nationalist Nasser as being a show of imperial might from the United States.⁶³ In response Nasser announced that he would be nationalising the Suez Canal and using any fiduciary gains from the canal to fund his dam building project.⁶⁴ According to economic historian Diane B. Kuntz it was this move by Dulles that ostensibly “triggered the Suez Crisis.”⁶⁵

Eden’s immediate response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal was to instigate swift military action in the region, as he felt the nationalisation inhibited free navigation through the canal.⁶⁶ An abridged view of the ensuing months of crisis are that as a result of nationalisation, Eden and his cabinet spent the months between late July and October attempting to curry favour with Britain’s allies in order to convince them to join in a military response to Egypt. This period was marred by significant rebukes from Eisenhower who was steadfast in his view that there should be a peaceful resolution, caused partisan tension in the House of Commons and was met with significant retaliatory debate from the United Nations.⁶⁷ The apex of this campaign came on the 13th of October 1956, when France and Britain brought a proposal before the United Nations Security Council. The two nations listed their six principles that would meet the requirements for a peaceful resolution of the “Suez question.”⁶⁸ In their joint proposal they held that the “future” of the canal depended on freedom of navigation, international respect of Egypt’s sovereignty, that the canal operations be insulated from the politics of Egypt, and in the case of disputes between the Suez Canal Company and Egypt there would be fair arbitration.⁶⁹ Although this proposal was well received by Eisenhower, who saw Britain and France’s presentation as bringing an end to the burgeoning crisis, there was no agreement reached regarding which international body would institute these guiding principles. It was following this unresolved proposal, and in the wake of Israel instigating a significant attack on Britain’s ally and Egypt’s neighbour, Jordan, that the French approached Eden with a bilateral proposition.⁷⁰

On the 14th of October, it appears that a clandestine meeting between Eden and two French emissaries took place at Chequers that set the stage for Anglo-French military engagement in Egypt.⁷¹

According to the account by a minister, Anthony Nutting, who would resign in protest midway through the crisis, it was at this meeting that the French government proposed the concept of Israel

⁶³ Robert St. John, *Boss: The Story of Gamal Abdel Nasser* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960) pp.12-21; Browne, *Suez and Sinai* pp.28-30; Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.2

⁶⁴ Browne, *Suez and Sinai* p.34

⁶⁵ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.2

⁶⁶ Terrence Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1965) p.18; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.88

⁶⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp 56-88

⁶⁸ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.88

⁶⁹ Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978) p.276

⁷⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.88-89

⁷¹ Browne, *Suez and Sinai* p.64; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.88

invading Egypt thus spurring an Anglo-French counter move.⁷² According to Maurice Vaisse, the motivation behind France's desire to engage in Egypt was a complex interaction between their interest in securing the use of the Canal in the contemporaneous Algerian War and lingering anti-dictatorial sentiments from the Second World War.⁷³ Nevertheless, the French government was highly motivated to instigate conflict in Egypt, and following Eden's positive reception of their covert plan the Protocol of Sèvres was established.

The agreement reached at Sèvres by the 24th of October set the stage for the ensuing conflict. Over several days of meetings, Eden and the French Prime Minister Guy Mollet negotiated with Israel the terms of an agreement that would have them invade Egypt, precipitating a response from the two nations.⁷⁴ The terms of the Sèvres Protocol were that on the evening of the 29th of October Israeli forces would invade the Sinai Peninsula and make a concerted effort to reach the canal zone the following day. In response to this the British and French governments would issue an ultimatum on the 30th of October to the Israeli and Egyptian governments with the aim of either getting an acquiescence from Egypt or invading the following day. The established terms of these ultimatums were that both governments would cease all acts of war and that the ten miles surrounding the canal would be placed under Anglo-French occupation.⁷⁵ This agreement was signed by the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and an Assistant Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, Patrick Dean.⁷⁶ This protocol would serve as the outline for the military stage of the Suez Crisis and underpin an enormous amount of damage that would be sustained by the British government.⁷⁷

Britain and France's military entry into Egypt was a result of a century of building tensions and overlapping national interests staked on the building and administration of the Suez Canal. In the 19th century the French-built canal served as a means by which Britain could occupy sovereign Egyptian land and exert colonial power over the Egyptian people. The slow push towards self-administration of the canal by Egypt left Britain with a lingering sense of ownership and entitlement to the Suez Canal. When Nasser opted to nationalise the canal rather than bend to economic pressure from the United States, he did so following a century of economic colonialism. The history of both Britain and France in the region no doubt influenced their decision to stage a military action against Egypt rather than rescind total control of the Suez Canal to the Egyptian government.

⁷² Browne, *Suez and Sinai* p.64; Lloyd, *Suez 1956* p.204

⁷³ Maurice Vaisse 'France and the Suez Crisis' in Roger W. M Louis and Roger Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) pp.134-135

⁷⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.90-91

⁷⁵ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.100

⁷⁶ Chris Brady, 'In the Company of Policy Makers: Sir Donald Logan, Assistant Private Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs' in Saul Kelly and Anthony Gorst eds. *Whitehall and the Suez Crisis* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000) p.151

⁷⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.101, Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* pp.4-5

Chapter One:

29th October 1956 – 31st October 1956: Early Delusions of British Power

The outbreak of military conflict on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt was an undeniably significant moment in post-war British history. A British and French military engagement that did not carry the sanction of the United Nations or America would have captivated the British public and demanded their attention.⁷⁸ However, the first three days of the military phase of the Suez Crisis was also a disastrous time for British international relations and threatened their long-standing allegiances.⁷⁹ This period has also been characterised as heralding a significant “decline” for Britain.⁸⁰ Through assessment of the media coverage from the 29th to the 31st of October, 1956 one can see that this decline is not immediately anticipated by the British press.⁸¹ The four major British newspapers that have been considered in this thesis all begin their coverage of the outbreak of conflict with a cautiously optimistic tone. The language used in these news articles initially minimises Anglo-French involvement and downplays the serious implications of Eden’s antagonistic approach to the United States⁸². Although there is some sense among papers of the gravity of the situation brewing in Egypt and at home, there is no clear indication that Britain is heading towards a significant failure.

Within the vast existing historiography, the Suez Crisis often serves a linchpin to connect or explain one of the substantial changes that had taken place in British society and politics by the end of the 1950s. One prominent debate is, as Gorst and Johnman identify, whether the crisis precipitated a perceived “British decline” or simply “reflected” that one had taken place.⁸³ The term “decline” is typically used in order to group together several co-morbid factors that are perceived as worsening Britain’s general geo-political position.⁸⁴ One relatively uncontentious aspect of this was that the crisis brought into sharp relief the fact that post-war Britain was essentially reliant on the support of the United States if the government wished to sustain a measure of international power that was commensurate with the position they had been in prior to the wars at the height of their empire.⁸⁵ Bill Schwars identifies November 6th 1956, the day Britain conceded to a cease-fire under pressure from the United States, as bring “the single day which marked the collapse of Britain’s imperial

⁷⁸ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.1

⁷⁹ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* pp.2,40; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.4-6;

⁸⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

⁸¹ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18827 (29 October 1956) Daily Mail Historical Archive, State Library of New South Wales Database pp.1-12.

⁸² Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.70

⁸³ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

⁸⁴ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* pp.1-2; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

⁸⁵ MacKenzie ‘The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture’ pp.21-22

ambitions.”⁸⁶ This sentiment is reflected in Kyle’s overarching argument that Britain and France “as colonial powers on the way down” could not, in 1956, engage in a military conquest of a Middle Eastern nation without facing enormous international outcry.⁸⁷ However, as he elucidates, both the United States and the Soviet Union were engaging in comparable conflicts, and had Britain had the support of the United States the pressure they ultimately faced from the United Nations may have been substantially lessened.⁸⁸ These arguments primarily rely on the Suez Crisis as a key moment through which one can come to understand Britain losing sway with the United States and the wider international community.

Another significant decline that the Suez Crisis is employed to explain is the fracturing of the once close “special relationship” between Britain and the United States during this era.⁸⁹ Carlton argues that the Suez Crisis constituted a “humiliation” of Britain on the world stage by the United States, and identified to the British that President Eisenhower was not compelled to continue the close allegiance that the two nations had shared during, and ostensibly since the war.⁹⁰ However, Carlton contends that the loss of good standing was due to Britain’s engagement in the “Sèvres conspiracy.”⁹¹ This is a clear example of the school of thought that suggests Suez caused an aspect of decline. However, even when discussing the breakdown of the Anglo-American relationship post-Suez, Terrence Robertson suggests that the poor diplomatic relations are the result of the lifting of a veil of misplaced trust that Britain had in America during this era, and thus Suez “reflected” a pre-existing decline.⁹²

Although the contention regarding the cause and effect of Suez re-emerges throughout the historiography, the nature of the “decline” that is focused on significantly changes. Kuntz merges the two ideas, through identifying that Britain’s economic position had been substantially weakened by the end of the Second World War, which became apparent during the crisis yet also observing that Suez dealt the British economy a further enormous blow.⁹³ One of the most prominent causal linchpin arguments, however, is that the Suez Crisis precipitated monumental changes in the British political establishment. Leon D. Epstein charges the event with causing a lasting “decline” in the “Conservative party’s appeal”, alongside a shakeup of the cabinet, an increasingly partisan House of Commons and the end of Eden’s leadership and political career.⁹⁴ He also identifies it as the clear

⁸⁶ Bill Schwarz ‘Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment’ in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters eds. *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999) p.189

⁸⁷ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.570

⁸⁸ Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.568-570

⁸⁹ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.6; Carlton, Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.82-83; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.387

⁹⁰ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.82-87

⁹¹ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.85

⁹² Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* pp.337-338

⁹³ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.6-11

⁹⁴ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.201

“end of a political era”, where lofty ideals of colonialism and British identity could no longer be used as tangible political ammunition.⁹⁵ Ultimately, throughout the historiography there is a significant focus on both perceived and actual damage being identifiable because of the Suez Crisis.

What this thesis will inject into the significant existing body of work that has been undertaken on the Suez Crisis is to return to primary sources and attempt to identify strains of these now established beliefs that already existed during the critical military stage of the crisis. Through returning to and analysing the press coverage of the Suez Crisis on the key days of conflict, one can see whether a substantial shift of perspective that would allude to the contemporary understanding of “decline” took place.⁹⁶ The other key benefits of this methodology are that a revisiting of the newspaper coverage on this scale is relatively untrodden ground and allows an assessment of the potentially evocative nature of these sources. The two key contributions to an assessment of the media coverage of Suez have been done by Epstein and Roy Greenslade. Epstein identifies the importance of revisiting this coverage as it is a key forum in which “partisan division of opinion” can be seen and understood.⁹⁷ As this is his aim, he focuses on instances of partisan reporting in the press, as well as drawing a broad outline of the coverage. This thesis is distinct from his work as it is a narrower look at a specific time frame within the crisis and is mining the sources for signs of a contemporary understanding of the Suez Crisis existing during the conflict, which is frequently identified as a critical turning point.⁹⁸ Greenslade has also written a short history of coverage from the perspective of the press, interrogating the narrative that the press wholeheartedly supported Britain’s entry into Suez, except for *The Observer* and *The Manchester Guardian*, who accordingly “suffered” from having not.⁹⁹ Although Greenslade’s work provides a useful revision of the coverage, it provides room for further analysis of the editorial narratives that appeared in the newspapers throughout the crisis. Secondly, a monumental world event occurs, there is a collective public experience of the event. Rapt audiences come to understand that event through the lens of the media coverage they are consuming, and so if one returns to the coverage of an unfolding event they gain a small sense of what it was to observe the event at the time.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the evocative nature of these sources justifies revisiting and re-contextualising them, as we can gain insight into the experience the British public may have had over the course of the military stage of the Suez Crisis.

In order to understand whether a significant ideological shift took place during the Suez Crisis, something must be said about the collective sense of national identity that existed in post-War Britain prior to the event. The Suez Crisis took place only three years into the second Elizabethan age. The

⁹⁵ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* pp.92,93-199-210

⁹⁶ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

⁹⁷ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.153

⁹⁸ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.151-154

⁹⁹ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.130

¹⁰⁰ Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p.12

early years following the coronation were marked by a narrative of renewed optimism in Britain and her empire which was actively promoted by the government and the monarchy, amid the backdrop of significant declines to that empire.¹⁰¹ The mid-1950s were an intermission in the trajectory of decolonisation, as although India's 1947 independence loomed in the collective consciousness, the major push towards independence for the majority of British colonies still lay in the future.¹⁰² Jordanna Bailkin notes how misguided, in hindsight, this emphasis on empire seems given how precarious these colonial ties were during this era. Although she also argues that this spectre of decolonisation actively impacted the perception of ordinary Britons in so far as it was forcing the structures of government and institutions of tradition to be "rearticulated" in a way that was highly visible to them.¹⁰³ However, the 1953 televised coronation of Queen Elizabeth II had been rife with the imagery of empire and a presentation of British majesty, presented for public consumption.¹⁰⁴ Schwars contends that any internal conception of Britain, by the British, in the 1950s would have been innately tied to the long history of Britain that this coronation sought to celebrate. However, Britain was also facing the rise of American geo-political might and the mass consumption of American culture and so, he argues, the British must have been aware on some level that the tectonic plates of power had irreparably shifted away from Britain.¹⁰⁵

The first three days of active conflict during the Suez Crisis consisted of the British, French and Israeli forces acting upon the previously agreed upon Sèvres Protocol.¹⁰⁶ The conflict began on the 29th of October, 1956, when Israel, in a show of military aggression designed to set in motion the Anglo-French ultimatum, deployed paratroopers onto the border between Jordan and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.¹⁰⁷ The defining moment of this phase of the conflict came when Britain and France presented their ultimatum to Egypt and Israel. On the morning of the 30th of October, the British Cabinet met and agreed that later in the day they would present the pre-approved ultimatum.¹⁰⁸ The terms of this ultimatum were, in accordance with those agreed in the Sèvres Protocol, that both the Egyptian and Israeli government had to "halt all acts of war" and withdraw their "troops ten miles" from the canal within twelve hours.¹⁰⁹ The one amendment for the Egyptian Government was that they had to accept temporary occupation by Anglo-French forces.¹¹⁰ Pineau and Mollet flew into London from Paris, to give the appearance that they had no forewarning of the Israeli invasion and

¹⁰¹ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* p.4

¹⁰² MacKenzie 'The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture' p.22

¹⁰³ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* p.4-6

¹⁰⁴ Peter Hansen, 'Coronation Everest: the Empire and Commonwealth in the 'second Elizabethan age'' in Stuart Ward ed. *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) pp.57-59

¹⁰⁵ Schwars 'Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment' p.189

¹⁰⁶ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.100

¹⁰⁷ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.348-349

¹⁰⁸ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.69

¹⁰⁹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.100

¹¹⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.100; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.69

were consulting with the British government on the best course of action.¹¹¹ Mid-afternoon the same day, Eden put the motion that the two nations would be issuing this ultimatum to the House of Commons where he was met with incredulity by Hugh Gaitskell, the Leader of the Opposition, and the wider Labour party.¹¹² The motion passed with a majority of 52, leaving the House of Commons formally divided on the issue. The hostility was not limited to Labour, however, as Eden also failed to notify Eisenhower in a prompt fashion and foolishly attempted to deceive the American Ambassador Winthrop Aldrich, who accordingly suspected a degree of collusion between France and Britain.¹¹³ Eisenhower retaliated to this slight from the British Prime Minister by sending a letter cautioning against the ultimatum that Carlton regards as “cold and formal”.¹¹⁴ At this point in time a number of concerns were raised about Britain, France and the United States being bound by the Tripartite Declaration of 1950. In the House of Commons Gaitskell raised the issue that Egypt’s “attitude” to the Tripartite Declaration had been “equivocal” as there was some indication, according to the Leader of the Opposition, that they did not wish to have it “invoked” on their behalf.¹¹⁵ The previous day Eisenhower and Dulles had also been incensed when the British Ambassador Sir Pierson Dixon had told his American counterpart that the declaration had no current validity.¹¹⁶ The United States responded to the Israeli invasion and Anglo-French ultimatum by proposing a resolution to the United Nations Security Council which called for an immediate cease-fire, retreat from the region and implored “all members” to “refrain from giving any military, economic or financial assistance to Israel so long as it has not complied with this resolution.”¹¹⁷ This resolution was vetoed by both the British and French delegates on the Security Council.¹¹⁸ On the 31st of November tensions between the United States and Britain reached new heights when the Secretary of State John Dulles described the ultimatum as “pretty brutal” and alluded to a conspiracy between the three governments to justify Anglo-French forces entering the region.¹¹⁹ The first three days of military action in Egypt already signalled that British and French engagement in the region was to be met with significant international admonishment. There were also a number of clear indications that it could lead to a serious breakdown of the crucial relationship between Britain and the United States.

The pool of newspapers that will be used to assess the British experience of the military stage of the Suez Crisis have been selected because they represent a cross-section of the various political and

¹¹¹ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.69

¹¹² ‘Sitting of 30 October 1956’ *Commons and Lords Hansard* Digitised Editions of Commons and Lord Hansard by The Commons and Lords Libraries < <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/oct/30>> viewed 4 October 2017 cc.1274-1277; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.60

¹¹³ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.69

¹¹⁴ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.70

¹¹⁵ ‘Sitting of 30 October 1956’ Libraries < <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/oct/30>> c.1277

¹¹⁶ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.70-71

¹¹⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.106

¹¹⁸ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.106

¹¹⁹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.107

geographical alignments, whilst reaching a large proportion of the market. Narrowing the scope of newspapers that have been considered allows for a more exhaustive consideration of the ongoing editorial narratives that the papers presented. The two “London dailies” that will be focused on are *The Daily Mail* and *The Times*. They have been chosen due to their specific political allegiances, substantial reach and proximity to the state’s capital, where they had a dense audience. Although, in 1956, Colin Seymour-Ure argues that the concept of “national circulation” was something of a myth, *The Daily Mail* was printing both for its large London audience, but also was being printed in Scotland, giving it a presence across Britain, if not a true modern national circulation. It is also of note that in 1955, *The Daily Mail* had a circulation of well over two million, rendering it one of the most widely read papers of this era.¹²⁰ As a traditionally Conservative paper, the paper adopted a pro-Suez approach in the lead up to, and during the conflict, albeit one that was tacitly included within their news reporting rather than in an overt editorial stance.¹²¹ *The Times* also reached a Northern readership through their printing press in Manchester. Although they had a much smaller readership, with a circulation of 222,000 in 1955, *The Times* was regarded as a different calibre of newspaper to *The Daily Mail* and as such captured the readership of a different audience with different concerns. They are also an interesting paper to consider as they adopted a broadly neutral approach throughout the conflict.¹²² As London is both the capital and a political hub, the news from London is in some ways indistinguishable from the national news. The proximity to Westminster, and the relative geographic ease with which a scoop could then make that evening’s press render these two papers vital in any assessment of the coverage of an unfolding event during this era.¹²³ The national paper that will be looked at is *The Daily Telegraph* which is notable for its circulation of over a million in 1955 and reputation as a “quality” newspaper.¹²⁴ According to Epstein, the paper was staunchly pro-Suez in the weeks preceding the military stage of the crisis.¹²⁵ Finally, *The Manchester Guardian*’s coverage will also be re-examined. The *Manchester Guardian* was, in 1956, a phoenix rising from the ashes of the long yet declining tradition of in-depth, widely read regional news coverage. It was only a matter of years away from becoming a national newspaper, and its circulation at the time was nearing 300,000 which rivalled some major national papers.¹²⁶ It had the distinction of being one of the few overtly pro-Labour, anti-Suez popular newspapers during this era.¹²⁷

The Daily Mail opted, on the first day of conflict to focus on Ben-Gurion as an aggressor in Egypt and the possible American concerns with Israeli actions. Although their coverage primarily focused on the

¹²⁰ Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* p.19, 28-29

¹²¹ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.156

¹²² Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.157, Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* p.19-20, 28-29

¹²³ Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* p.19-20, 28-29

¹²⁴ Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* p.28-29

¹²⁵ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.155

¹²⁶ Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* p.37;

¹²⁷ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.156

concurrent Hungarian Revolution, Suez received the second largest headline and significant coverage. “Now Israel Mobilises” was both their headline and the main proposition of their front-page article. Their correspondent Richard Greenough notes that while the narrative being presented by Ben-Gurion and his military is that of “partial mobilisation”, the entirety of Israel had spent the preceding weekend in a “state of alert”, hinting at the fact that they were prepared for acts of retaliation by Egypt or her allies in the Middle East.¹²⁸ Their treatment of the day’s events also focuses heavily on the United States’ response to the heightening conflict. President Eisenhower’s reprimanding of Ben-Gurion and reluctance to sanctioning the conflict are given substantial column inches, suggesting that *The Daily Mail* considers that their reader is primarily interested in the American perspective on the conflict. Britain’s involvement with the Israeli instigated deployment of troops is relegated to the fifth page, where the Israeli calls on Britain to denounce the Anglo-Jordanian treaty and join their air force deployment are finally discussed without giving much weight to their implications. *The Daily Mail* presents this interaction as broadly one sided, and despite Britain’s decade long struggle for control of the Suez Canal, their relatively reductive assessment is that if Britain is to engage in the conflict it would be to protect the agreement that French and British ships which pass through the canal pay their dues in Paris and London respectively, and not whilst they are in Egyptian waters. It is on these grounds that Walter Farr claims that Britain and France “may be preparing for joint action to bring new and more direct pressure” on Nasser. However, it is interesting to note that Farr refers to the situation on the Sinai Peninsula as the “Suez Crisis” suggesting that prior to Anglo-French involvement or any meaningful conflict, there was already some sense that it was a situation that was certainly reaching boiling point and thus deserving of the term crisis.¹²⁹ The impression that one is left with upon reading *The Daily Mail*’s coverage on the first day of conflict is that while there is a substantial military action taking place, it is a peripheral one involving Israel, the United States and other key actors in the Middle East. There is a sense of the potentiality for French and British involvement, but that it is speculative, and were they to do so it would most likely strengthen Israel’s military action.

The pro-Suez editorial tone of *The Daily Mail* that Epstein identifies is clearly identifiable on the 30th of October. Their Tuesday edition hit newsstands with an unequivocally Suez-centric front page. The headline “Israel Invades Egypt” prefaced an issue of the paper that teetered between alarmism and patriotism in tone. The graphics printed in the paper imbued the conflict a sense of movement and urgency. Their foreign editor Farr announces the influx of Israeli forces on the Jordanian-Egyptian border alongside a text box reading “War comes to Nasser”.¹³⁰ It would be difficult to argue that the paper’s editorial team were attempting to circumvent panic, or actively criticise the antagonistic

¹²⁸ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18827 (29 October 1956) p.1

¹²⁹ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18827 (29 October 1956) p.5

¹³⁰ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18828 (30 October 1956) Daily Mail Historical Archive, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

parties when considering these editorial choices. This tendency towards a positive tone is again reflected in their relatively salient article “Will British Forces Go Back to Suez?” which extolls the might of the “most powerful” Royal Navy “task force since the war”, that sailed from a Maltese port towards Egypt a day prior to the Israeli air raid.¹³¹ Where Eisenhower had dominated the conversation the morning before, his warnings are relegated to a single headline, while the tone taken towards Eden’s then anticipated address to the parliament reflects a substantial editorial shift. Instead, Geoffrey Wakeford engages with what he takes to be a real concern that Britain and France have a tangible stake in the Suez Canal that must be protected. Tellingly, *The Daily Mail* runs an article in the body of the paper that argues that Britain, the United States and France are all likely to “declare war on Israel and to rush air, ground and naval forces to help Egypt.”¹³² This claim creates an overt sense that Britain and the United States were steadfast allies in all matters, in spite of Eisenhower’s clear statements against joining the conflict only the day before.¹³³ This editorial line clearly reflects a certain misconception as to Britain’s capability to engage in and emerge successfully from conflict in Egypt.

The Times ventured into the day of military conflict during the Suez Crisis with a rumination on Israel’s newfound geopolitical position. Their headline reads, not dissimilarly to the other major newspapers “Gen. Eisenhower’s Call to Mr. Ben-Gurion” followed a quotation from Eisenhower, “No forcible action which would endanger peace.”¹³⁴ However, the first impression that the paper is in support of Eisenhower’s public intimidation of the Israeli Prime Minister is a mistaken one. *The Times* goes on to present Eisenhower as out of step with the unfolding situation, relaying an interaction from the White House Press Room, where the Press Secretary James Hagerty is forced to defend Eisenhower’s statements against the suggestion that Ben-Gurion has “ignored” him.¹³⁵ Although this is in and of itself not outright support for the military engagement, *The Times* diplomatic correspondent also presents the opinion that the alliance between Egypt, Syria and Jordan does constitute “good grounds” for the “three Western Powers” of the 1950 tripartite, Britain, France and the United States to mobilise and join Israel.¹³⁶ There is also a display of tacit support for the potentiality of increased British involvement, when their correspondent writes “It seems to be realised that Britain, in common with other western Powers, has given up” on the possibility of armistice between Israel and its neighbouring countries. *The Times* coverage leaves the reader with a nuanced picture of events, where it characterises intersecting pressures at play as ostensibly forcing Britain’s

¹³¹ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18828 (30 October 1956) p.1

¹³² *The Daily Mail* Issue 18828 (30 October 1956) p.2

¹³³ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.104-105; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.70

¹³⁴ *The Times* Issue 53674 (29 October 1956) Times Digital Archive 1785-2011, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

¹³⁵ *The Times* Issue 53674 (29 October 1956) p.1

¹³⁶ *The Times* Issue 53674 (29 October 1956) p.1

hand.¹³⁷ It suggests that the pressure from the United States, as presented through Eisenhower's public reprimand of Israeli troops deploying, is in some sense less compelling than the combined pressure of the tripartite agreement, or of lone Israeli military engagement without Western support on the ground.

During this period, *The Daily Telegraph* is the first paper of those being considered to meaningfully hint at the possibility of British collusion with the Israeli government. They present this alongside their coverage of Eisenhower's call to Israel to quell military activity. This sense of possible collusion is seen in their article "Israel Begins to Mobilise Reservists" which ends with a discussion of the British Ambassador John Nicholls meeting with Ben-Gurion and the Israeli Defence Minister, for a "two-hour" long talk covering the "Middle East trouble spots".¹³⁸ John Whittler, the Telegraph Special Correspondent, highlights the significance of Nicholls "presence" in Jerusalem at this "critical time".¹³⁹ He suggests that there are rumours of the British intention to either "seek" or provide military bases to Israel.¹⁴⁰ On the 30th of October, *The Daily Telegraph* adopts a slightly more cautious approach to the conflict, with their special correspondent Whittles focusing primarily on the Israeli troops on the ground in Egypt. Their caution is seen in their treatment of the news of Israel's deployment into Egypt. They lean on the ambiguity of "unofficial reports" in order to say that there was an "attack" launched at "4.30pm local time" on the "Sinai Peninsula after the advance from Negev." They do identify a clear collusion between France and Britain that does not necessarily ensure they will have the support of the United States, nor the United Nations. Whilst *The Daily Telegraph* identifies that the "British view was that the three powers should be ready to act outside the United Nations", the United States would not be willing to circumvent the United Nations to do so. They also report on the French Ambassador meeting with Eden at Downing Street.¹⁴¹ Thus, the overall tone of their paper for the day suggests a lack of confidence in Eden's ability to gain the Eisenhower's support. In this sense, *The Daily Telegraph* both has more foresight in its coverage of the first two days of military action than other papers, but also renders itself more alarmist. Whittler attempts to distance himself and his paper from the rumours he is reporting, although certainly the average reader would have been aware of this tactic, and still engaged with the claim itself rather than its distant source.

On the 31st of October, however, *The Daily Telegraph* presented the opposition in parliament as weak, and minimised the threat of American non-cooperation. This is seen in Marin Moore's argument that

¹³⁷ *The Times* Issue 53674 (29 October 1956) p.1

¹³⁸ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31584 (29 October 1956) The Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

¹³⁹ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31584 (29 October 1956) p.1

¹⁴⁰ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31584 (29 October 1956) p.1

¹⁴¹ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31585 (30 October 1956) The Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

Britain had “the general obligation” to act in “the national interest” by “protecting the freedom of the canal”.¹⁴² This is mirrored once again in their article “Law and the Canal” where their correspondent writes that the United Nations intervening in the conflict between Israel and Egypt would be “in Britain’s interest”, but that given their refusal to do so “Britain must act the policeman as best she can.”¹⁴³ This does not reflect the serious threat that Britain and France were facing by alienating the United Nations. This veto of the American resolution at the Security Council that they champion was, in fact, was contributing to a serious dispute between the United States and Britain.¹⁴⁴

The tone that emerges in *The Manchester Guardian* on the 30th of October is that of measured concern as to the actions most likely to be undertaken by the United States and Israel.¹⁴⁵ Their foreign correspondent extrapolates from the United States advisory for all American citizens to leave Egypt that the American’s may be considering honouring the 1950 Tripartite Declaration and “come into line with the British and French in their approach to the Suez question.”¹⁴⁶ The paper presents a measured response, arguing that while “the more logical reaction would be a stern restatement of the American determination to fulfil its obligations under the Tripartite Pact” there is also “the ever-cogent fact” that the Gaza Strip was an “inflammable boarder” where it was “impossible to decide” who had instigated the conflict.¹⁴⁷ This hints at a general sense that the United States could be poised to respect the terms of the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 and extend their allegiance to Britain and France in regards to Israel.¹⁴⁸ Whilst there is a sense of uncertainty it does not reflect the precarious situation that the British government find themselves in, but rather that the editorial team feared a heightened conflict in Egypt. There is an ongoing sense in their headlining article that Israel may attempt to use the impending war to achieve a “swift victory over the Arabs”.¹⁴⁹ The narrative *The Manchester Guardian* presents for the second day of conflict is one of quiet fear, but on behalf of the Egyptians rather than the British.

¹⁴² *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31585 (30 October 1956) p.6

¹⁴³ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31586 (31 October 1956) The Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000, State Library of New South Wales Database p.6

¹⁴⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.104-105; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.70

¹⁴⁵ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18828 (30 October 1956) Daily Mail Historical Archive, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1; *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (30 October 1956) ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer hosted by ProQuest

<<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/480088218?accountid=14757>> viewed 5 October 2017 p.1

¹⁴⁶ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (30 October 1956)

<<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/480088218?accountid=14757>> p.1

¹⁴⁷ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (30 October 1956)

<<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/480088218?accountid=14757>> p.1

¹⁴⁸ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.70-71 c

¹⁴⁹ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.70-71

The newspaper coverage on the first days of the military phase of the Suez Crisis reflects that there was a subtle sense of concern in Britain following Israel's invasion of Egypt. Despite Robertson characterising the Anglo-French actions in this period in the conflict as having been "condemned overwhelmingly by the bulk of world opinion" British newspapers did not reflect the gravity of this condemnation on Britain's ability to successfully engage in a military conflict.¹⁵⁰ The sincerity of Eisenhower's conviction to not engage in a war alongside Britain and France had not, ostensibly, dawned on the British press during the first three days of the crisis. Ultimately, the overwhelming sense in the press was that Britain would be unhindered in engaging in a military campaign even in publications that felt to do so was ill-advised.

¹⁵⁰Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.204

Chapter Two:

1st of November 1956 – 3rd of November 1956: An Unstable Entry into Egypt

The first three days of November 1956, were characterised by a distinct crescendo of tensions between the global actors involved in the Suez Crisis. Meanwhile, in Britain, the partisan dissension in parliament as to Britain's engagement in the conflict was heightening. Amid these swelling pressures, the British press continued to publish news coverage that was rife with misconceptions about the increasingly precarious international position Eden and the British government were in. Through looking at the progressively more serious military actions taking place in Egypt as the days of conflict progressed, the vitriolic dissent from the Opposition Leader, Hugh Gaitskell, in parliament and the serious international sanctions that Britain was facing, the unsound nature of some British newspaper coverage can be seen. Between the 1st and 3rd of November, Britain engaged in a number of perilous geo-political actions, despite this, major newspapers persisted in publishing articles that supported British military actions on the Sinai Peninsula. This reflects that the general public may not have accepted the gravity of Britain's international position.

The military actions that took place in these first few days of conflict were marred by practical failures and significantly damaged Eden's international standing as a corollary of their mishandling. November began with the first evening of British and French air force bombings of Egyptian airfields. The operation that took place overnight on the 31st of October was an unmitigated disaster for the joint forces, as their first missiles hit the wrong target.¹⁵¹ As there were American citizens still being evacuated on the day of the 31st, the planned attack was postponed for twelve hours.¹⁵² This violated the understanding between the three colluding forces, and there was a major breakdown in communication between Israel, and Britain and France. Due to this Ben-Gurion spent these twelve hours incensed at the behaviour of his allies in the conflict and in fear for his unprotected troops on the ground in Sinai.¹⁵³ The weight of his anger is seen in his telegram to prominent French minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury an hour before the allied air-attack, in which he said he was "cast down and confused" by "the fact that at this hour we are still without news of an Anglo-French operation."¹⁵⁴ It was amid this confusion and internal discord that the initial attack took place, and although the French successfully targeted and hit Egyptian airfields in West Cairo, seven English

¹⁵¹ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.383-384

¹⁵² Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.71

¹⁵³ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.71; Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.383

¹⁵⁴ André Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* trans. Richard Barry (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) p.36; Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p. 382

Canberra Air Craft abandoned their original target as it was still in the proximity of some evacuating American citizens and they were approached by oncoming Egyptian planes.¹⁵⁵ This led to them inadvertently bombing Cairo International airport rather than their new target of airfields in Almaza. The next evening operations continued to be relatively unsuccessful, as although 1962 bombs were dropped, none of Egypt's targeted airfields suffered any substantial damage and all were serviceable. As Kyle argues, however, in terms of military action the British and French operation was not a failure by all measures. For Israel, their collusion in the Protocol of Sèvres may have paid off during these few days, as no counter-operations against the Israelis on the ground had taken place, and two-hundred grounded Egyptian planes had been destroyed.¹⁵⁶ However, this military action provoked the might of the international community and damaged bi-partisan relations in the British parliament. It also took a toll on Eden and his cabinet, as the then Secretary for State for Foreign Affairs, Selwyn Lloyd, writes in his autobiography, they found the lack of success of their military campaign "strenuous" at a time when they should have been best placed to engage with their political advisories. Lloyd articulates feeling "like a juggler" at this time, attempting to manage "the House of Commons, the United Nations, the military operation, public relations and intensive negotiations with other governments."¹⁵⁷ So, along with the ineffectiveness of the mounting military campaign that Britain was facing threats of international sanction for, their government was facing serious internal, allied and external pressures.

In addition to their military problems, the position that the government faced in parliament was also extremely tenuous, and quite probably politically detrimental for Eden's premiership. On the 1st of November, the debate over the prior evening's military campaign was an enormous partisan win for the Labour Party. In response to the Minister of Defence Antony Head's report on the "bombing results", Gaitskell was able to rouse significant support from within and outside his party in the House of Commons.¹⁵⁸ Asking Head "Is the Minister aware that millions of British people are profoundly shocked" by the bombing of Egypt "in clear defiance of the United Nations Charter?", Gaitskell successfully wove the heightening international and military situations that the government faced into political fodder.¹⁵⁹ Throughout Gaitskell's berating in parliament, Eden failed to respond in a manner that suggested strong resolve, or a principled justification for Britain's involvement in overseas military action. In fact, the Prime Minister opted primarily for single sentence deflection.¹⁶⁰ During this period, Lloyd characterises Eden as being under "considerable strain" in parliament, in the face of

¹⁵⁵ Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* pp.95-96

¹⁵⁶ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.383-384

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd, *Suez 1956* p.196

¹⁵⁸ 'Sitting of 1 November 1956' *Commons and Lords Hansard* Digitised Editions of Commons and Lord Hansard by The Commons and Lords Libraries <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/nov/01>> c.1619; Lloyd, *Suez 1956* p.72

¹⁵⁹ 'Sitting of 1 November 1956' <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/nov/01>> cc.1620-1621

¹⁶⁰ 'Sitting of 1 November 1956' <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/nov/01>> c.1620

unilateral assault from the opposition.¹⁶¹ It was also during this period that one of the Ministers of State at the Foreign Office, Nutting, who had been close to both Lloyd and Eden and had been tipped to ascend to the highest ranks in the Conservative government, publicly resigned in protest.¹⁶² Thus, from a domestic political standpoint, the halfway mark of the military engagement in Suez was a bleak period for the standing British government. The pressures of the international community and actively engaging in a military campaign appeared to take priority for Eden and his government, leaving the political security of the incumbent Prime Minister vulnerable.

The first air-attacks on Egypt also stimulated the efforts of the international community, as this particular epoch in the Suez Crisis is when the United Nations and the United States mutually called for a cease fire. On the 2nd of November, the General Assembly of the United Nations met to discuss what they en masse perceived to be the precarious and unsubstantiated military action that France and Britain had joined Israel in undertaking.¹⁶³ At this meeting a resolution was produced which “urges as a matter of priority that all parties now involved in hostilities in the area agree to an immediate cease-fire”, “withdraw all forces” and refrain from acts which would hinder “the implementation of this resolution”.¹⁶⁴ During this general assembly John Dulles, the Secretary for State, led the assembly in moving the resolution. This appears to have been a poignant personal difficulty for Eden, as he notes in his biography that it was Dulles and “not Soviet Russia, or any Arab state” who spoke out against him.¹⁶⁵ This note of betrayal in Eden’s memoir emerges even at this late stage in the crisis, despite clear indications for many weeks before this that the United States would not consent to support nor join in Israel’s attack on Egypt.¹⁶⁶ This supports Gorst and Johnman’s claim that during this middle stage of the military crisis Eden was “increasingly beleaguered” by his lack of support from the United States as the crisis continued.¹⁶⁷ Eden, himself, argues that “had the United States been willing to play a part” in supporting, or at very least not condemning, Britain in this assembly, “the course of history would have been different.”¹⁶⁸ It appears that the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 3rd of November had been overtly destabilising for the British government in a way that the previous meetings of the United Nations during the military engagement had not quite been.

Amid these not insignificant troubles that the British government was facing, *The Daily Mail* published a number of articles that did not necessarily reflect the reality of the position Britain found itself in. On the 1st of November, following the initial unsuccessful air mission launched by Britain

¹⁶¹ Lloyd, *Suez* 1956 p.196

¹⁶² Lloyd, *Suez* 1956 p.204

¹⁶³ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.104-105; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.115; Anthony Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* (London: Cassell, 1960) p.540

¹⁶⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.115

¹⁶⁵ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.540

¹⁶⁶ Keith Kyle ‘Britain and the Crisis 1955-1956’ in Roger W. M Louis and Roger Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).113

¹⁶⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.115

¹⁶⁸ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.541

and France, *The Daily Mail* ran with several articles lauding the Royal Air Force for a job well done. The headline “Midnight communique – All our aircraft returned safely”, whilst not untrue, sells an immediate image of an effective entry into aerial combat to the casual viewer, when the British merely embarked on a somewhat unsuccessful attack from the air. Similarly, their front-page article on the first reports from returned bomber pilots claims “The bombing was jolly smooth” and that “Our objective in Egypt was an airfield. We were due on target at 6.50. We were 30 seconds late.”¹⁶⁹ Given that, in fact, British and French pilots left twelve hours after their original target time, without informing Ben-Gurion and thus leaving Israeli forces exposed on the ground, which Carlton contends betrayed Israeli trust so substantially that for the rest of the military campaign they were exclusively self-interested and unreliable, the positive tone of these articles appears misleading. *The Daily Mail* also evokes imagery that would have, for an audience in this era, harked back to the war, with Noel Monks and Farr writing that “the R.A.F. had blitzed four Egyptian airfields.”¹⁷⁰ This use of the word “blitzed” would have suggested to the audience reading it a total obliteration of these airfields, akin to their experiences in the war. This, juxtaposed to the mostly insignificant damage that was done to Egyptian airfields on the first night of bombing, would have imbued a false sense of confidence in the might of the Royal Air Force in Egypt.

The Daily Mail's predictions for the day's political outcomes are also out of step with what ultimately took place. They identify Gaitskell's anticipated response as “The Socialist motion”, which is not in line with the substantially positive reception it ultimately received in the House of Commons, from even the centre-right of the Labour party.¹⁷¹ Although the paper acknowledges the severity of the United States position towards the military action in Egypt, saying they have taken “bitter vengeance for Britain and France's defiance of President Eisenhower's request to keep troops out of Suez” the paper still takes opts to criticise the United States position.¹⁷² Their Washington correspondent Christopher Lucas argues the “irony of it” is that “both the United States and Russia supported the resolution” to hold an emergency meeting to discuss Suez, whilst Russia started and engaged in an “arms race” in the Middle East.¹⁷³ In adopting this standpoint Lucas minimises the threat to British geo-political security that being admonished before the United Nations General Assembly by the two growing Cold War-era world leaders presents. Ultimately, several articles in *The Daily Mail* appear woefully unaware of the diminishing position of power British leaders have found themselves in by disregarding the sentiments of a large number of world leaders, including the United States.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18830 (1 November 1956) Daily Mail Historical Archive, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

¹⁷⁰ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18830 (1 November 1956) p.1

¹⁷¹ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18830 (1 November 1956) p.1

¹⁷² *The Daily Mail* Issue 18830 (1 November 1956) p.1

¹⁷³ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18830 (1 November 1956) p.1

¹⁷⁴ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*; *Full Circle* pp.540-541, *The Daily Mail* Issue 18830 (1 November 1956) p.1

The coverage of these initial days of Anglo-French conflict in *The Times* reveals an increasing endorsement of militancy in the paper's editorial line.¹⁷⁵ In their "Imperial and Foreign" section on November 1st, the paper presents several articles that support the narrative that Britain and France had not colluded with Israel in order to instigate a conflict. Although they do show an array of Commonwealth responses of varying levels of support in regards to Suez, there is a unilateral reassurance throughout the paper that Israel acted alone, forcing the hand of the British and French due to the terms of the tripartite agreement. This is shown in the selected quotes from the former Israel Foreign Minister, when discussing the possibility of a war impacting then newly independent India. Moshe Sharrett's claim "that the Israeli Government had decided on its own initiative", appears to be included to assure the reader that British involvement was necessary, even if it produces undesirable results in the Commonwealth.¹⁷⁶ In the article from their Washington Correspondent, "Anglo-French Action Seen as a "Desperate Gamble", there is an appeal for an "austere view", as the "first flush of anger in the White House", as the correspondent argues that the "grand alliance" in fact, remains steadily intact and any perception otherwise is due it being the final days of election campaigning for Eisenhower and his government.¹⁷⁷ However, this statement is not commensurate with the resolute calls not to engage in non-United Nations sanctioned military action that the White House had issued in the days and weeks leading up to conflict.¹⁷⁸ The sense that Eisenhower had been swayed by the nearing election is also not reflected in private correspondence between himself and Eden in the months prior, and so it is clear that Eisenhower had ongoing political interests in not engaging in conflict which he was unlikely to revise even following successful re-election. On the 31st of July Eisenhower wrote "I cannot over-emphasise the strength of my conviction" that non-military action should be taken.¹⁷⁹ However, here was *The Times*, mid-conflict, suggesting to their audience that he was likely to waver on his resolve following the general election in the United States. This minimises the severity of the United States' disapproval of the joint entry into Suez, and suggests that recovery of Britain's international position would not be reliant on an exit from the conflict.

Although *The Daily Telegraph* had been critical of the entry into Suez in the lead up to the military engagement, by the 3rd of November the paper had realigned itself with the government.¹⁸⁰ They led the day's news with the late-night announcement from 10 Downing Street, following the United Nations General Assembly meeting on the 2nd, that Britain and France would be deploying troops on the ground in Egypt immediately.¹⁸¹ Michael Hilton, their diplomatic reporter, argued in favour of this

¹⁷⁵ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* pp.131-132

¹⁷⁶ *The Times* Issue 53677 (1 November 1956) Times Digital Archive 1785-2011, State Library of New South Wales Database p.9

¹⁷⁷ *The Times* Issue 53677 (1 November 1956) p.10

¹⁷⁸ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.272-275

¹⁷⁹ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.115

¹⁸⁰ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* pp.134-135

¹⁸¹ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31589 (3 November 1956) The Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

deployment on the grounds that to not do so would be “leaving a vacuum” that would render Israeli troops vulnerable and would inevitably result in losing control of free passage through the Suez Canal.¹⁸² His article recasts the United Nations as uncooperative rather than aggrieved, as the motions put forward by the Permanent Representative for the United Kingdom, Pierson Dixon, that urged for the formation and implementation of a United Nations “police force” that would quell fighting on the ground and end the Egyptian blockade of the canal, had gone unmet.¹⁸³ This frames the General Assembly as being in opposition to a reasonable proposition, rather than Britain and France attempting through a moderated proposal to gain the support of the same nations that had been unequivocally warning Britain that they would not have their cooperation in the lead up to military action in Egypt. In his support of the need for immediate action, Hilton sanctioned Eden’s announcement and attempted to justify it to his readers. Eden’s response to the United Nations Resolution in the House of Commons was mirrored in the line of argumentation used in *The Daily Telegraph*. Eden argued that “detachments of Anglo-French troops” were being deployed because “police action must be carried through urgently to stop the hostilities which are now threatening the Suez Canal.”¹⁸⁴ This made it appear as though Britain and France were engaging in a proportional response to the inactivity of the United Nations. However, there was still no international consensus that Israel’s initial invasion of Egypt was warranted, nor engaged in without the tacit support of the British and French. Ultimately *The Daily Telegraph* approached the decision to deploy troops into Egypt as a moment of British triumph, taking action in spite of the protests of a global community that they characterised as ineffective and inactive.

The Manchester Guardian was unambiguous in its condemnation of Britain’s military engagement, however, there was still no clear sense within the paper that Britain may be forced to disengage from the conflict. Instead, on the 2nd of November, the paper focused on the defeat of a Labour “censure” in parliament that would have had Eden’s government withdraw their troops voluntarily for moral reasons.¹⁸⁵ Their correspondent recounts a “regrettable episode” in parliament due to the “high-wrought explosive feelings of the House” that lead to an unprecedented suspension because of the “disorder”.¹⁸⁶ The correspondent argues that a “moderate” speech by Shadow Foreign Minister

¹⁸² *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31589 (3 November 1956) p.1

¹⁸³ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31589 (3 November 1956) p.1 Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.125; Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*, Full p.542

¹⁸⁴ ‘Sitting of 3 November 1956’ *Commons and Lords Hansard* Digitised Editions of Commons and Lord Hansard by The Commons and Lords Libraries < <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/nov/03>> viewed 5 October 2017 c.1857

¹⁸⁵ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (November 2, 1956) ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer hosted by ProQuest <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/480046142?accountid=1475>> , viewed 5 October 2017 p.1

¹⁸⁶ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (November 2, 1956) <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/480046142?accountid=1475>> p.1

Aneurin Bevan construed a “penetrating attack on the Government.”¹⁸⁷ The central argument of Bevan’s criticism of Eden in the House was the United Nations condemnation of war, and the ethical concerns of this condemnation. He contended that there was no justification for Britain to “take action ourselves”, and that to do so would not be in the best interest of keeping “peace” in the country.¹⁸⁸ This toed the party line established by Gaitskell, and ostensibly constituted a political win in the eyes of *The Manchester Guardian*.¹⁸⁹ However, this reporting of the fracas in parliament did hint at the dire straits that the government found themselves in, as when chaos breaks out in the House of Commons it reflects much more poorly on the sitting government than the opposition, as it suggests they are failing to adequately maintain the order expected of the House. Whilst the opposition instigated the quarrel, as *The Manchester Guardian* suggests, it was in response to the actions of the government, and as the opposition they are not subject to the same levels of public scrutiny.¹⁹⁰

The Manchester Guardian also discussed the possibility of a “cease-fire” being instituted due to pressure from the United States, but dismissed the idea. The newspaper characterised the United Nations resolution that was presented at the assembly on the 2nd of November as toothless. This resolution which was led by the American Ambassador to the United Nations, Henry Lodge, was described as the “American resolution” and the correspondent suggests that it would “not” be capable of “adequately” improving the armistice situation.¹⁹¹ This claim suggests that whilst the newspaper is politically opposed to the actions of Eden’s government in Egypt, and sees being out of step with the United Nations as less than ideal, they do not believe that there is a genuine chance of the United States being able to take action that would effectively force a cease-fire. The description of the United States “merely” passing a resolution, diminishes the sense of power *The Manchester Guardian* is ascribing to the United States and supports the optics that Britain and France would be able to continue their mission in Egypt, even if censured by other major global players. Thus, in the middle stage of the military conflict in Suez, *The Manchester Guardian* was still presenting an image of the British military as more unencumbered than they were in actuality.

¹⁸⁷ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (November 2, 1956) <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/480046142?accountid=1475>> p.1; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.119

¹⁸⁸ Sitting of 2 November 1956’ *Commons and Lords Hansard* Digitised Editions of Commons and Lord Hansard by The Commons and Lords Libraries < <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/sittings/1956/nov/02>> viewed 5 October 2017 c.1761; *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (November 2, 1956) ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer hosted by ProQuest <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/480046142?accountid=1475>> viewed 5 October 2017 p.1

¹⁸⁹ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (November 2, 1956) <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/480046142?accountid=1475>> p.1

¹⁹⁰ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.547

¹⁹¹ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (November 2, 1956) <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/480046142?accountid=1475>> p.16

The prospects for a successful Anglo-French mission to occupy the Suez Canal were limited in the first three days of November 1956. The British Prime Minister was facing substantial political pressure from Gaitskell and the opposition to revise the terms of engagement, whilst also facing dissent from within his party with the resignation of Nutting. Simultaneously with this domestic strife, the United Nations was mounting a substantial campaign to impede the military actions taking place on the Sinai Peninsula by Israel, France and Britain. On top of these mounting geo-political tensions, the initial air-attacks had not gone to plan, and the relationship between the Anglo-French militaries and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion was deteriorating. During this unstable time, the British Press, in spite of their respective political allegiances, were reporting events in a manner that was not commensurate with the strain Eden and his government found themselves under. Although the coverage did include a number of view points, including harsh criticism from *The Manchester Guardian*, over this three-day period, it did not reflect the catastrophe that would mark the coming days for Britain.

Chapter Three:

3rd of November 1956 – 7th of November 1956: The Slow Dawning of Defeat

The final days of the military phase of the Suez Crisis comprised of two distinct stages for the British, the stoic military push into Egypt in the face of serious criticism swiftly followed by a humiliating forced cease-fire.¹⁹² On the 5th of November, Anglo-French troops invaded the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt through paratrooper deployment only to be forced into ending the military campaign a day later under fiduciary pressure from the government of the United States.¹⁹³ The British newspaper coverage of the end of the crisis reflects this shift, as it was in these final days that a sense of impending defeat emanated from the broadsheet pages. In these final days the media slowly began to adopt editorial positions that were commensurate with the alarming events Eden and his cabinet were facing. The unfortunate position that the government found itself in the beginning of the week was primarily an overwhelming lack of domestic support, partially from the British people but primarily in the House of Commons. Then, as Britain and France landed at Port Said, the value of the pound sterling began to plummet, which served as fodder for the United States who had been attempting to enforce a cease-fire since the beginning of the conflict in Egypt.¹⁹⁴ As the government's attempt to occupy the Suez Canal collapsed, the media gradually began to oppose and condemn Eden's actions.¹⁹⁵ Within the newspapers that have been analysed, there appears to be a significant change in British sentiment over the final few days of the conflict, however this is obviously not a universal claim. Even as late as the 6th of November, 10 Downing Street was still receiving overwhelmingly supportive letters and telegrams.¹⁹⁶ However there does appear to have been a clear change in the overall mood of the country, that one can see in the newspaper coverage, as Britain was forced to retreat from the Suez Canal and the government began to disintegrate.

Gaitskell's television and radio broadcast on the 4th of November, and the weekend of public anti-war demonstrations that accompanied it weakened the optics of Britain's renewed engagement in the conflict in Egypt.¹⁹⁷ On the 3rd of November, Eden had addressed the public through a joint radio and television broadcast. He claimed, amid mounting international sentiments that Britain and France had self-interestedly entered a military action for their own gain, "All of my life I have been a man of peace", a "League of Nations man and a United Nations man".¹⁹⁸ The broadcast had been a marketing attempt by Eden to sell himself, the motives of his party and the heightening military campaign to

¹⁹² Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.432; Carlton p.100

¹⁹³ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.162

¹⁹⁴ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.162

¹⁹⁵ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.135

¹⁹⁶ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.432

¹⁹⁷ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.432; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.119

¹⁹⁸ Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* pp.250-251; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.116

regain the Suez Canal to the British people. Whilst he was facing pushback from the international community as there was a sense that Britain, France and Israel had colluded in producing the situation that had led to conflict, Eden was attempting to implore the British people to support him using the weight of his own personal political reputation.¹⁹⁹ Unfortunately this was attempt undermined by the political manoeuvring of the Opposition Leader, Gaitskell, who was emboldened by his finding allies within Eden's own party. Gaitskell immediately, upon the airing of Eden's broadcast, claimed the right, as Leader of the Opposition, to reply.²⁰⁰ Aired the next evening, Gaitskell gained a political advantage both through what he was able to say on air, but also through the act of being broadcast itself.²⁰¹ The commitment of British forces to a conflict zone is typically considered to warrant a standalone broadcast from the Prime Minister. Gaitskell was able to spin the contentious nature of engaging in the conflict in the Suez into a partisan issue, suggesting it was so significantly controversial and with such split support that it would be suppression of the Opposition to not air his counter-speech.²⁰² In his broadcast he was able to argue that Britain faced certain looming isolation if they did not back down from the conflict. He opened by informing the public that "this is war" and that it was "except for France: opposed by the world."²⁰³ This speech was notable as, at the time it was given, British troops were poised to enter conflict, and so in some ways it was unprecedented for a member of parliament, even in opposition, to criticise the military action taking place on such a scale. Gaitskell's broadcast was not the only prominent domestic pushback that Eden received as Britain went into battle, as the weekend was also marked by two days of not insignificant anti-war protests in Trafalgar square.²⁰⁴ On the 4th of November, Shadow Foreign Minister Bevan addressed this crowd, and in doing so he elevated the clout their presence had and legitimised their criticism of the government.²⁰⁵ Another significant blow to Eden's political standing came when another prominent figure attempting to resign in protest, with the First Sea Lord of the Navy, Admiral Louis Mountbatten unsuccessfully tendering his resignation.²⁰⁶ This substantial opposition from Labour disrupted the momentum of Eden's attempts to convince the public of the merits of the Suez campaign.

The deployment of Anglo-French troops into the Sinai Peninsula was hindered by international pushback and Israel being strongarmed into a ceasefire, thus harming the only compelling

¹⁹⁹ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.9-10; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* pp.250-251

²⁰⁰ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* p.432

²⁰¹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.119-120

²⁰² Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* pp.432-433

²⁰³ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.119

²⁰⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.119, Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.546

²⁰⁵ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.119; Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* pp.546-547; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.259

²⁰⁶ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.73

international justification for Britain and France to engage in the conflict. During the final days of conflict, pressure from a number of key international figures began to mount. One notable reprimand came from the Canadian Prime Minister, Louis St. Laurent, who informed Eden that not even the bonds of the Commonwealth would guarantee “wholehearted Canadian support.”²⁰⁷ In his note to the British Prime Minister, he compared Britain and France’s actions with the contemporaneous behaviour of the Soviet Union in Hungary. He criticised Eden for claiming the Anglo-French military action was supposed to restore peace between Israel and Egypt whilst distracting from the brutality of Soviet forces invading and attacking Budapest.²⁰⁸ This crushing dissent from a close member of the Commonwealth was presumably dwarfed by the intimidation Britain, France and Israel received from the Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin.²⁰⁹ Both Mollet and Eden received notes from Bulganin threatening “serious consequences”, which was an implicit reference to Soviet missile capabilities.²¹⁰ Although the messages alarmed both premiers, on a telephone call in the early hours of Tuesday morning both resolved not to bow to Soviet intimidation.²¹¹ Ben-Gurion received a much more severe message from Bulganin, however, which stated that “Israel is acting as a tool of foreign imperialist forces” and that in the opinion of Bulganin, Ben-Gurion was “playing with the destiny of your country.”²¹² This, along with a pressure from the United Nations appears to have prompted Israel, and as a result Egypt, to submit to a ceasefire on the 5th of November. Under the terms of this ceasefire, there was agreement between Canada and the United Nations that the Secretary-General would produce a swift plan to set up “an emergency international United Nations force” that would ensure peace in the region.²¹³ This agreement was in line with Britain’s earlier calls for a “police force” in the region, although the cabinet were unmoved by Israel’s decision to end the conflict, and British military plans continued.²¹⁴ Although the exact reasons Ben-Gurion agreed to this ceasefire are unknown, no doubt the earlier quarrel regarding deploying the Air Force on time, where he lost his confidence in the allegiance between the three nations did not aid Britain and France.²¹⁵

²⁰⁷ Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.250

²⁰⁸ Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* pp.250-251; Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.437

²⁰⁹ Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* pp.251

²¹⁰ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.122-123; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.252

²¹¹ Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.252; Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.131

²¹² Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.252

²¹³ D.C. Watt. ‘Retrospect and Some Conclusions’ in D.C. Watt, ed. *Documents on the Suez Crisis 26 July to 6 November 1956* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957) p.28

²¹⁴ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31593 (7 November 1956) The Telegraph Historical Archive, 1855-2000, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1; Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.125, Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.542

²¹⁵ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* 73-74, 162; Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* p.36; Kyle, *Suez Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* p.382

Although Britain and French paratroopers and naval ships did invade Egypt on the 5th and 6th of November, British financial pressures led to a swift ceasefire being called at midnight on the 6th of November, 1956.²¹⁶ Then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan, announced at the House of Commons sitting on the 6th that in the first two days of November the Bank of England had lost £50 million and that the losses had worsened over the ensuing days of the conflict.²¹⁷ Macmillan was of the opinion at the time that the losses were due to the fact the Pound Sterling was in freefall in international currency markets, and had been since the beginning of the conflict.²¹⁸ So, with the information he received from the Treasury, he announced that Britain's gold reserves had fallen by £100 million which constituted more than an eighth of the nation's worth.²¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, this alarmed Macmillan such that he was convinced the conflict in the Suez had to end.²²⁰ Similarly Eden and Lloyd were sufficiently panicked that Eden described "a run on the pound" as "a more formidable threat than Marshal Bulganin's."²²¹ Eden's primary concern upon learning of the precarious position of the British economy was the cost of the war. In his memoir, he describes calculating how much they had, and would, be spending on a continued presence in Egypt. This, and not the international perception of Britain that was ostensibly causing the fall of the pound, he claims influenced his decision to acquiesce to a cease-fire.²²² Lloyd, for his part, asks "whether any of the members of the Cabinet" with Macmillan's responsibilities could have advocated anything but a cease-fire in those economic circumstances.²²³ A contentious issue is that Macmillan's stated losses for Britain could not have possibly reflected the actual financial position of the Treasury. Economic historian Kuntz outlines this when she argues that his purported loss of £100 million on the 6th of November was an "erroneous figure", because on the 7th of November the Treasury reported a loss of £30.4 million to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.²²⁴ There was also a rumour emanating from the office of the Chancellor that run on the Pound was an American scheme, precipitated by enormous selling of the pound in New York. This, Kuntz contends, could not have been known by Macmillan at the time as, although the reserve loss was largely influenced by sales in America, this wasn't known to anyone in Britain until the 20th of November, 1956. Furthermore, there was some sense amongst Lloyd, Eden and other British ministers of the era that it was a calculated plan by the United States government to bring about the circumstances under which Britain would need to withdraw capital from the International Monetary Fund, and then refuse to allow them to do so unless they agreed to a cease-

²¹⁶ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.162

²¹⁷ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.131; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.76-77

²¹⁸ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.76

²¹⁹ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.131

²²⁰ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.76-77

²²¹ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.556

²²² Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* pp.556-557

²²³ Lloyd, *Suez 1956* pp.210-211

²²⁴ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.132

fire.²²⁵ Kuntz contends this is most likely not the case, as there is no substantiating evidence that anyone in the American government mentioned the possibility of the British retrieving funds from the International Monetary Fund prior to the cease-fire.²²⁶ Despite this, the perception at the time was that Macmillan was well informed and factual in his information, and it thoroughly convinced the majority of the Cabinet that fighting a war of any sort on the Sinai Peninsula was no longer financially feasible.²²⁷ The anticlimactic end to the military stage of the Suez Crisis came on the 6th of November, 1956.²²⁸ Despite French reluctance, Eden secured the agreement of Mollet to seek a ceasefire, as French forces in the region were not adequately protected without British cooperation.²²⁹ Although fighting continued throughout the day, as British and French troops advanced towards the Canal, at 6pm Eden announced in a cabinet meeting in the House of Commons that, if Egypt and Israel agreed to an unconditional ceasefire, one would be in operation at midnight.²³⁰ Thus, after nine days of combat on the Sinai Peninsula, the British government faced the unsavoury prospect that in embarking on a military action in Suez they had seriously damaged the British economy, they had circumvented the United Nations and had damaged their close allegiance to the United States.

The Times coverage of the Suez Crisis had been erratic, vacillating between criticism and overt support up until the final days of the military campaign, however the paper lauded the announcement of a cease-fire and thus condemned the government's prior activities. In their article 'Anglo-French Order for Cease-Fire' on the 7th of November, *The Times* parliamentary correspondent focuses on describing the mood in the House of Commons as Eden announced Britain's intentions to implement a cease-fire. According to the correspondent this announcement took place "In an atmosphere almost unbearably charged with expectation" and was met with "profound silence" that erupted into primarily Labour applause.²³¹ There is also a focus on the cease-fire constituting a huge win for Gaitskell and Labour, with a discussion of Eden's assurances to Gaitskell that "there would be no movement" from the existing forces in Egypt.²³² This characterisation of Eden as being forced to defer to the Opposition Leader effectively deflates any power that Eden has as Prime Minister and highlights how, immediately after calling a cease-fire, he suffered an enormous political loss in the eyes of many of the public, including this particular *Times* correspondent. Ultimately, the ceasefire was such an enormous loss to Eden and his government because, as seen in this article in *The Times*

²²⁵ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.132, Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.76-77, Lloyd, *Suez 1956* pp.210-211; 556-557 eden

²²⁶ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.132

²²⁷ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.133; Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*; *Full Circle* p.557

²²⁸ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.76, 162;

²²⁹ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.133

²³⁰ Watt. 'Retrospect and Some Conclusions' p.30; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.76; ; Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*; *Full Circle* p.557

²³¹ *The Times* Issue 53683 (7 November 1956) Times Digital Archive 1785-2011, State Library of New South Wales Database p.10

²³² *The Times* Issue 53683 (7 November 1956) p.10

the following day, it alienated those who had supported military action, whilst not ostensibly doing anything to recover the support of those who had opposed entering the conflict in Egypt.

The coverage of the final three days of conflict over the Suez Canal in *The Daily Mail* overwhelmingly supports British operations in Egypt before presenting a swift loss of confidence in the government following the cease-fire. On the 4th of November the paper was exalting the virtues of the “Bronzed Britons” aboard “invasion ships” heading from a Cypriot port towards Alexandria.²³³ T.F. Thompson dismissed the growing pressure to disengage from military action by saying people “may be split on the Suez issue, but that has no effect on the morale of these boys”, and in doing so promoted a potentially embellished image of British military might and courage in the face of adversity.²³⁴ This image of heroic British troops going into battle continued on the 5th, when Monks of *The Daily Mail* presented an image of a “calculated risk” paying off, as Anglo-French forces successfully stormed Port Said, which Monk describes as “Egypt’s most heavily defended area outside Cairo.” Monk’s narrative of a strong and successful British military operation continued to be published on the 7th of November, as he initially presented it as “race against time” in which the allied troops successfully “captured” Ismailia.²³⁵ This is mirrored in other articles exclaiming that the “objective” of Eden’s “Egyptian crisis” had been “achieved.”²³⁶ However, even the reliable support of the editorial team at *The Daily Mail* came to an end on the 8th of November as the dust settled following the cease-fire. The paper ran with a photograph and caption regarding the “First Suez Victim”, Corporal John M. Ward, accompanying reports of allied casualties.²³⁷ Along with this, and details of the enormous rebuilding effort that Egypt required, the international fallout of Eden’s actions began to be seen. The paper writes of the United Nations force that was already being established in light of their agreement with Israel that would have forced the end to Anglo-French troops continuing their campaign in the region.²³⁸ Thus, even in *The Daily Mail* which had supported British involvement in the region throughout the military phase of the Suez Crisis, there was a substantial shift in tone in the days following cease-fire. In 1956, *The Daily Mail* was a primarily conservative and not particularly investigative newspaper, and yet by the end of military action in Suez, their editorial staff were disenchanted enough with the prevailing actions of the government to highlight some of the coercive factors that had led to the cease-fire.²³⁹

²³³ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18833 (4 November 1956) Daily Mail Historical Archive, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

²³⁴ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18836 (7 November 1956) Daily Mail Historical Archive, State Library of New South Wales Database p.1

²³⁵ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18836 (7 November 1956) p.1

²³⁶ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18836 (7 November 1956) p.1

²³⁷ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18836 (7 November 1956) p.1

²³⁸ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18836 (7 November 1956) p.1; Watt. ‘Retrospect and Some Conclusions’ p.28

²³⁹ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* pp.69-70, 134

A relatively staunch pro-Eden newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* adopted a new perspective following the government's announcement of a cease-fire in Egypt. The editor of *The Daily Telegraph* during this era, Colin Coote, identified the paper's editorial perspective following the Suez Crisis as being "that armed intervention could be justified in principle but had been hopelessly bungled in practice."²⁴⁰ The early rumblings of this position were seen in the paper on the 7th of November, 1956. The narrative of the paper on the day after the cease-fire was that there was a distinct sense that Britain would be at the mercy of the whims of the Soviet Union, the United States and to a lesser extent Egypt following their retreat and thus, loss, in the Suez Crisis. The article "Egypt Opposed to Cease-Fire Terms" highlights this, as it argues that Eden had negotiated a United Nations force to be on the ground in Egypt as a condition of his cease-fire with the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, but had capitulated without this condition being certain.²⁴¹ Similarly, there is discussion of the lasting impact of the "Soviet threat" by the Diplomatic Correspondent, Hilton. Hilton argues that although "official quarters in London last night discounted the part played in the British decision by threats of Russian action" that the threat still had serious implications for Britain. He claims they "must have carried significant weight with cabinet" due to the severity of the threat.²⁴² This suggests that, deviating from the traditionally pro-Conservative tone of the paper, Hilton felt that Britain had been successfully bullied by the Soviet Leader. Thus, *The Daily Telegraph* began their increasingly sceptical Suez outlook immediately following Eden's call for a cease-fire.

Throughout the military stage of the Suez Crisis, *The Manchester Guardian* adopted a measured but critical approach to Britain's military engagement in Egypt which intensified upon the end to the fighting.²⁴³ *The Manchester Guardian* was one of the few papers to immediately engage with the precarious position that the Prime Minister found himself in politically following the government's retreat from their ultimately disastrous mission. The article 'Premier's Position Hazardous' aptly identifies the strains that Eden would find himself under post-Suez. It argues that he would have to recognise "the decisions he announced" would lead to his "leadership" being challenged. It notes that in parliament a number of "Tories, and not all of them Suez rebels, remained ostentatiously seated" during the applause *The Times* reported on.²⁴⁴ Their political correspondent also warned that "No one would prophesy last night how long it might be before the full effect of Tory reaction to the Government's new decision made itself felt" but that there would be "no doubt" that the "Government's activities of the past week" would ultimately lead to severe and far reaching political

²⁴⁰ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.135

²⁴¹ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31593 (7 November 1956) p.1

²⁴² *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31593 (7 November 1956) p.1

²⁴³ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.135

²⁴⁴ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (7 November 1956) ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer hosted by ProQuest <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/480065989?accountid=14757>>, viewed 5 October 2017 p.1; *The Times* Issue 53682 (6 November 1956) Times Digital Archive 1785-2011, State Library of New South Wales Database p.10

consequences.²⁴⁵ In this, *The Manchester Guardian's* political correspondent adeptly warns his readership of the incoming resignation of Eden and substantial cabinet reshuffle that Britain faced as they weathered the geo-political fallout that awaited them post-Suez.

The Observer was a progressive left-leaning Sunday newspaper which had opposed Eden's entry into Egypt throughout the Suez Crisis and was published only once during the military phase of Suez. When it finally got an opportunity to comment on this stage of the crisis on the 4th of November 1956, it used it to lambast the government's invasion of the Sinai Peninsula.²⁴⁶ As Greenslade draws attention to, the entirety of the front page of *The Observer's* November 4th issue wages a "damning" attack on Eden, his government and their entry into Egypt.²⁴⁷ The salient image on the front page is the then resigned Nutting with Eden which is an editorial decision that centres the internal strife of the Conservative government within their overall narrative. The accompanying article from their political correspondent is a disapproving account of Eden as a man who is acting against the will of his own party. Their political correspondent characterises this loss as adding to the sense of "uneasiness" that he perceives as brewing within the party over this time. Although Eden does not mention Nutting's resignation specifically, he was experiencing a distinct sense of uneasiness in the party in the final days of military engagement in Egypt. Eden states that during this period the combination of dissent in the party and building financial concerns imbued in him a sense of "gloomy foreboding".²⁴⁸ *The Observer* also discusses the substantial repercussions that the conflict is producing in the Middle East, with a focus on the lack of oil supply in the region, as the Iraq Petroleum Company was unable to supply to the war zone. The correspondent fears that the tensions produced by this lack of oil could lead to a spread of fighting along the Arab-Israeli borders.²⁴⁹ These practical concerns contrast substantially with some of the other coverage of the final days of the Crisis, such as that of *The Daily Mail*. *The Observer's* coverage reflects that there was, in the final days of Anglo-French military action along the Suez Canal, some apt understanding among the British public of the significant penalties, both material and geo-political, that Britain would face in the immediate aftermath of the Suez Crisis.

²⁴⁵ *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* (7 November 1956)

<<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/480065989?accountid=14757>> p.1;

²⁴⁶ Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945* p.120; Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.135

²⁴⁷ Greenslade, *Press Gang: How Newspapers Make Profits From Propaganda* p.135

²⁴⁸ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.,: Full Circle* p.557; *The Observer (1901-2003)* (4 November 1956) ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer hosted by ProQuest <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/475299674?accountid=14757>>, viewed 5 October 2017 p.1

²⁴⁹ *The Observer (1901-2003)* (4 November 1956) <<http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/475299674?accountid=14757>> p.1

The final days of the military stage of the Suez Crisis were characterised by rapidly heightening international and financial pressures for Britain, which the majority of British print journalists slowly but surely began to adequately cover irrespective of political allegiance. While Sunday the 4th of November 1956 was heralded in by the bleak outlook of *The Observer*, some continuing delusion as to the true nature of Britain's international standing could still be seen on the pages of centrist and right-leaning papers throughout the final week of the military action in Egypt. *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* both diverted from their relatively positive viewpoints by the end of the week. On Wednesday the 7th, *The Times* was critiquing the complete lack of political success that the Prime Minister could expect following his capitulation to the United Nations cease-fire. Similarly, by mid-week *The Daily Telegraph* was analysing the treacherous new waters of international diplomacy that Britain would face having alienated many of its allies over the course of the Suez Crisis. *The Daily Mail* slowly began to reflect this increasing awareness that the military campaign to occupy the Suez Canal may not have gone to plan, as demonstrated through their assessment of the role of the international community in forcing a cease-fire upon Britain and France on Thursday the 8th of November, 1956.

Post-Script

The practical aftermath of the Suez Crisis was difficult for the British government, and especially for Eden as leader. The period between the end of active fighting at midnight on the 6th of November and Eden's resignation on the 9th of January 1957, was a political purgatory of sorts.²⁵⁰ There were still inactive Anglo-French troops in the Sinai Peninsula and the ongoing negotiations with the United States to liquidate capital from the International Monetary Fund proved to be humiliating for Britain.²⁵¹ This period also coincided with the further deterioration of Eden's health which unexpectedly accelerated the conclusion of his premiership.²⁵² In the days following the cessation of conflict, Eisenhower, emboldened by re-election, set his mind to the quick removal of Anglo-French troops in the region. This went actively against the will of Eden and his cabinet who had thought that the United Nations Emergency Force that was set to descend on the country could co-exist and be helped by the in-situ troops.²⁵³ The British government wished to make use of the existing troops in an attempt to salvage any possible political or military capital out of the aborted mission. However, the British were coerced by Eisenhower to remove all remaining British troops from the canal zone on the 22nd of December, as the United States made a full exit by Britain a requirement of their much needed economic assistance.²⁵⁴ This meant that any hope of recovering a tangible military gain from the Suez Crisis was lost, as restoration of free passage through the Suez Canal was restored some months later. This was ostensibly aided by the United Nations Emergency Force who contained, at Eisenhower's urging, none of the Big Five nations on the Security Council.²⁵⁵ The economic turmoil that Britain found themselves in rendered the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Macmillan, the new face of the Conservative party.²⁵⁶ This coincided with the reforming of the Conservative Party following the crisis, during which Eden's premiership became a necessary sacrifice in order to weather the fallout.²⁵⁷ Thus, when Eden's health, which had been a problem throughout the final decade of his political career, declined further, he easily submitted to a resignation and Macmillan became Prime Minister.²⁵⁸ Although the Suez Crisis was relatively easy to recover from in terms of party politics and by the end of the 1950s Britain's economy had improved, it had a lasting international impact in terms

²⁵⁰ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*,: Full Circle p.560,

²⁵¹ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* pp.82-87; Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* pp.194-198 Kuntz

²⁵² Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*,: Full Circle pp.582-583

²⁵³ Kyle, *Suez Britain's End of Empire in the Middle* p.478-481

²⁵⁴ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.146-148

²⁵⁵ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp.480-483; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.163

²⁵⁶ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.131; ²⁵⁶ Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* p.77

²⁵⁷ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.147

²⁵⁸ Eden, *The Memoirs of The Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden K.G., P.C., M.C.*,: Full Circle pp.582-583

of the global redistribution of power.²⁵⁹ This is seen in the French army general André Beaufre saying that, in the years following the Suez Crisis “British prestige” was “in ruins”.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* pp.93-94, 172

²⁶⁰ Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* p.145

Conclusion:

1956 Onwards: A Revised Perspective for Britain

Throughout the ‘military phase’ of the Suez Crisis the British press consistently overestimated the security of Britain’s position on the world stage. As the possibility of a dignified end to the Suez Crisis diminished for Britain, newspapers continued to report stories glorifying the British troops and supporting Eden’s engagement in military action. It was only upon the confirmation of a cease-fire that the majority of newspapers began to approach the Suez Crisis with a level of criticism that finally reflected the loss Britain had endured. These editorial decisions by British publications suggest an unwillingness to accept the declining military and diplomatic strength of their nation. Over the course of this relatively short conflict in Egypt, Britain’s post-war weaknesses were exposed and exploited by the United States in order to bring a swift end to their Suez military campaign. The overarching themes within the media coverage that has been assessed demonstrates that there was a propensity to privilege a traditional sense of British identity over clear indications that the sentiments of other, more powerful, world leaders were against Eden’s action in Suez. This suggests that in post-war British thought there was a trend towards a lack of awareness of Britain’s declining geo-political capital. The ‘military stage’ of the Suez Crisis marked a turning point in this stasis of Britain’s collective identity, as the failure of the military campaign to occupy the Suez Canal brought Britain’s decline into clear relief.

A crucial argument that was identified within the historiography of the Suez Crisis was that a mythologised sense of identity dominated British cultural thought during this period which was reflected in the newspaper coverage that was examined.²⁶¹ Throughout the news coverage of the military phase of the Suez Crisis British publications implicitly and explicitly employed ideas that had their roots in an understanding of Britain at the height of its empire. One crucial example of this early in the conflict was *The Daily Mail’s* characterisation of the might of the British military going “back to Suez”.²⁶² The paper characterised the British army as a paternalistic force that, by virtue of Egypt once being a protectorate of Britain, was aptly placed to reinstate its authority over the region.²⁶³ This line of reasoning was mirrored in *The Daily Telegraph* justifying British engagement in Egypt to its readership by suggesting that the absence of a United Nations force obligated them to take action.²⁶⁴ This narrative of Britain as a global protector was grounded in an understanding of Britain that had been developed over the 19th century and during war-time. It’s presence in the coverage of the

²⁶¹ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* p.4-6; MacKenzie ‘The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture’ p.22;

²⁶² *The Daily Mail* Issue 18828 (30 October 1956) p.1

²⁶³ Louis and Owen eds., *Suez 1956 The Crisis and its Consequences* p.xiv

²⁶⁴ *The Daily Telegraph* Issue 31589 (3 November 1956) p.1

military action over the Suez Canal by these publication reflects that the looming spectre of Britain's imperial past was, as Bailkin suggests, alive in the collective imagination of the British in the lead up to and during the military phase of the Suez Crisis.²⁶⁵

The renewed sense of optimism regarding Britain's prospects in the 20th century following Queen Elizabeth's ascension to the throne that Peter Hansen identifies is clearly seen throughout the coverage of first two stages of military engagement.²⁶⁶ The clear sense that permeates the newspaper reporting of Britain's initial entry into the fray is that Britain is well equipped to engage. This sense is borne from the narrative that was being promoted of Britain as a mighty and noble country, continuing in its long tradition of global dominance, that was being disseminated by the monarchy and government at this time.²⁶⁷ This is seen in *The Manchester Guardian's* fears that Britain's entry would be detrimental for Egypt.²⁶⁸ One of the clearest examples of this line of thinking is in *The Daily Mail's* coverage on the morning of the cease-fire.²⁶⁹ The paper depicted imagery of British troops entering battle that would not have been out of place in a military novel. Their discussion of handsome British soldiers heading, by ship, to conquer a Middle Eastern nation reflected an understanding of British identity that was clearly established during the height of Empire and had not been influenced by the grave international consequences that Britain was hours from conceding due to.²⁷⁰ Throughout the media coverage of the military phase of the Suez Crisis, a British identity that is founded in a flawed and outdated understanding of British spheres of power continues to reappear. Although there is no sense that the journalists in question were aware of this spectre of history influencing their analysis of events, there it is clearly represented within the coverage.

Conversely, there is some limited indication that there was an awareness during the active military period of the Suez Crisis that the British people were aware of the "decline" that has come to define a contemporary understanding of the crisis.²⁷¹ The substantive change that supposedly took place in Britain over the course of the Crisis is only hinted at in the newspapers who were writing about Suez at the time. Although historians have established that the United States dwarfed Britain in terms of political capital by 1956, and British publications were aware of their position as a super power at the time, the lack of seriousness with which Eisenhower's remarks were taken suggests this shift in power had yet to be internalised by the British public.²⁷² The slow dawning of the failure of the Suez Crisis

²⁶⁵ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* p.4

²⁶⁶ Hansen, 'Coronation Everest: the Empire and Commonwealth in the 'second Elizabethan age'' p.57

²⁶⁷ Hansen, 'Coronation Everest: the Empire and Commonwealth in the 'second Elizabethan age'' pp.57-58

²⁶⁸ *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) (30 October 1956)

<<http://ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/docview/480088218?accountid=14757>> p.1

²⁶⁹ *The Daily Mail* Issue 18833 (4 November 1956) p.1

²⁷⁰ Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* p.4; Robertson, *Crisis: The Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy* p.252, Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.131; Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis* 162

²⁷¹ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

²⁷² Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* pp 56-88

that took place on the final days of military engagement in most news outlets came with no indication that Suez would be a lasting blemish on Britain's international reputation.²⁷³ The impact that the Suez Crisis had on Britain's economy is also woefully absent from the unfolding coverage of the event, suggesting that it was only in the distinct aftermath of the crisis that it truly dawned on the British how significantly the tables of economic power had turned against their favour.²⁷⁴ Whether the "decline" that Britain experienced post-Suez was merely a realisation of their long slipping position or was caused by the failure of the campaign, it is not apparent from newspaper coverage of the military engagement that the British press were aware of the ideological linchpin Suez was soon to become.²⁷⁵ There is no sense in the coverage of the military phase of the Suez Crisis that it was immediately regarded as a watershed moment for Britain. It was over the months and years following the Suez Crisis that it dawned within the collective consciousness of Britain what a significant shift in global position the Suez Crisis had ushered in.

Britain's long history with Egypt's Suez Canal came to a disastrous end in the final months of 1956.²⁷⁶ Since then, the Suez Crisis has come to represent a moment in British history where the government of the day mistakenly overestimated their residual military and international strength.²⁷⁷ During the first days of the conflict a conspiracy between Britain, France and Israel to instigate fighting in Egypt so that Anglo-French forces could occupy the canal zone was met with near-universal suspicion and denunciation from the United States and the United Nations. In spite of this the British press continued to promote an image of Britain that reflected an antiquated understanding of Britain's global capital. As the conflict intensified the British press did not substantially revise their respective opinions. It was only after the United States forced Anglo-French troops to consent to a cease-fire and exit from Egypt through economic penalty that some awareness dawned on Britain that they had been misguided about the potential success they could expect from this overtly imperialist mission.²⁷⁸ However, there is little sense of this awareness that is detectable in the press coverage from the military phase of the Suez Crisis.

²⁷³ Beaufre, *The Suez Expedition 1956* p.145

²⁷⁴ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.186

²⁷⁵ Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

²⁷⁶ Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* p.1

²⁷⁷ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* pp.1-2; Gorst and Johnman, *The Suez Crisis* p.166

²⁷⁸ Kuntz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* p.1-4

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