

CLASH OF INTERESTS OVER SUEZ: REVIEW OF LITERATURE BASED ON ARCHIVAL AND ORIGINAL SOURCES ON SUEZ CRISIS

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Abstract

The Suez crisis of 1956 opened a new chapter in the global political history of the post second world war period. It was for the first time that the fire of the hardly a decade old world war would take a shape of new turmoil of sourness and distrust among the victorious great powers of the second world war over the Suez crisis 1956. The Suez Crisis turned the entire region of the Middle East into an area of vital interest for both super powers of the Cold war. The Suez Crisis intensified struggle among the super powers to maintain influence over geostrategic locations of the Middle East region. The crisis also surfaced the differences between the leaders of United States and Great Britain. The Suez crisis set the trends of global diplomacy in the initial phases of cold war in the region. Its diverse impact invited scholars to research the issue from different dimensions. There are so many important aspects attached with the Suez crisis that sparked our interests to review the literature published on this issue. For example it was the very first issue since the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, when the two trusted friends United States and Great Britain diverged in their opinions. The second reason is that the Suez crisis remained neglected in historical research work on Eisenhower's era. Historians' studies on president Eisenhower mostly focused Vietnam. However the Eisenhower period is discussed with considerable length. Thirdly, this issue provides best case study of the pattern of pursuing national interests among the members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), United States, Great Britain and France. Fourthly, it was the first issue on which the main adversaries of the Cold war, America and USSR had identical views. This paper presents a critical review of the published material on the Suez crisis in the decade of 1990s. This study also offers a survey of archival sources that could help the students as a source of inspiration for further research and will help to understand the current complexities of Middle Eastern politics.

Key Words: Suez War, US diplomacy, British Policies, International Politics, Middle East

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The Suez Canal possess a great value in water communication linkage as it connects the Mediterranean and the Arabian seas for a shorter, safe and smooth passage to the Indian Ocean. Its construction involved the French and British supremacy for financial and political strength in the early twentieth century during the reign of Mehmet Pasha of Egypt. From the very beginning, both France and Great Britain had realized the importance of the Canal for their trade, commerce and naval activities. Russia, as an emerging power in the same period was also interested in the matter of water communication that could open the door for her to the Indian Ocean. During the course of the Second World War, Suez Canal emerged as a vital strategic link between Europe and Asia and one of the important routes of commercial interests. United States, with her emerging interest in the Middle East after the World War II, was also keen to have its influence in the region particularly in the tense environment of the Cold War.

The Suez Crisis

The origin of the Suez Crisis can be seen through the plan ALPHA that aimed to resolve Arab-Israeli confrontation. In December 1945, Dulles and Eden agreed to attempt a solution to the long running Arab Israeli confrontation that they considered to be at the root of the instability in the Middle East that raised the specter of Soviet penetration of an area still held to be vital to western interests. What emerged was the product of a joint Anglo-American team of senior officials who attempted to formulate proposals that were acceptable to both Israel and Egypt. These complex and delicate negotiations Known as Plan ALPHA.

This ALPHA plan carried the historical legacy of the twentieth century and was prepared amidst the new hostility of the cold war. The beginning of twentieth century introduced a new political consciousness of self-determination in most of parts of world. Disintegration of Ottoman Empire and dooming colonial control of Great Britain, unleashed the forces of nationalism in the Middle East. Jamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt was one of the most influential and prominent figures who stirred the nationalistic fervor in Arabian Peninsula. The Suez crisis of 1956 was the hallmark of his political career that turned him into a vocal demagogue of Arab Nationalism.

In order to build the Egyptian economy, Nasser dreamed for constructing a high Aswan Dam. To see the country's deteriorating economic situation it was right dream what Nasser perceived in his mind. However, country's inadequate funds for this project forced Nasser to look towards foreign assistance. The issue of Aswan Dam precipitated the crisis over Suez Canal.

The original Aswan Dam was built by British engineers in 1898 that had served the country well, but it was too small to store the excess water which flooded down from the Ethiopian Highlands and ran to waste into the Sea. This new dam, to be built four miles upstream of the other, was to hold 26 times more water and increased by sixth the patch of green earth that fed Egypt's proliferating population. This dam would serve new industries by making Egypt self-sufficient in electrical power, and it would also remove

the ever-present threat that an enemy in control of Uganda's lake Victoria could cut off Egypt's water.

Not too enthusiastically the American and British Governments agreed to pay the foreign exchange costs. As the detailed bargaining proceeded, the Egyptians became alarmed that the budgetary conditions of the loan would put the Egypt's economy once again under western control. At the same time Eisenhower Administration was being pressed to drop the scheme. There was annoyance in US administration that Nasser seemed to be playing off the West against Russia, apparently to obtain a better offer. Above all, Congress had recently cut the foreign aid appropriation, and with Eisenhower seeking a second term in November 1956 it was hardly advisable for him to ask for a big loan to aid a country which looked as if it was veering rather to close to the Eastern bloc.

President Eisenhower showed his displeasure upon the congressional cuts of foreign aid appropriation and marked it as a "sorry situation". Eisenhower and Secretary John Foster Dullas believed that there was a fundamental threat from increasing Soviet involvement and influence in the region. To stop this, they devised a multifaceted strategy: i.e. (1) the British could no longer be trusted to protect US interests in the area, so the United States would have to assume direct responsibility for the Middle East; (2) the United States would encourage a group of states in the area to organize a mini NATO later known as the Baghdad Pact; (3) arms sales to the Arabs (especially Iraq and hopefully Egypt) would be stepped up ; (4) the United States would keep its distance from Israel and try to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute. As it began to implement this strategy, the United States expanded its instruments of involvement to include both diplomatic and military policy, although the military implements largely consisted of arm transfers and the use of intelligence operations.¹

American support was withdrawn and the following day British Prime Minister Anthony Eden followed suit. This should have dealt a crushing blow to Nasser's prestige. This humiliating decision of the west was reciprocated by Nassir in a manner beyond the expectation of the western leaderships. Speaking on 26 July from the same balcony in Alexandria from which he had escaped death two years before, he announced to an exultant crowd that the Suez Canal was to be nationalized and that its 35,000,000 pound annual revenue would be devoted to building the High Dam. It was a speech in which Nasser revealed new and more powerful skills in demagogic oratory than he had before displayed, and in which he spelt out once again every wrong that the West had committed over the years. Even his enemies in Egypt greeted the speech with rapture.

The Suez crisis of 1956 was one of the major episodes in the history of American foreign policy during the Cold War. During the crisis Eisenhower administration faced sharp differences with its European allies. Despite burgeoning literature on the Eisenhower period, the American role in the Suez crisis, has escaped from historians' scrutiny².

¹ Foreign Relations United States, 1988, DOCs. p.187.

² The topic of Eisenhower and his period is discussed with burdensome length. In the publication of Society for Historian of American Foreign Relations, *Guide to Diplomatic History since 1700*, no less than 42 percent of its pages (514 out of 1213) covered this period. And the first six volume of *Diplomatic History*

Historians arrived at various sets of conclusion about Eisenhower's role in the crisis. Some argue that the president's efforts in managing the crisis met with partial success while others consider his role the most intelligent one in his career. The work done so far offered a substantial debate over controversial questions; that why was Eisenhower not in favor of military action? Did the US really contribute to the origin of crisis? Was Eisenhower capable of deterring his western allies from the use of force? And did Eisenhower bring the crisis to a satisfactory conclusion?

To examine above questions, one must understand the international scenario of the time. The end of the Second World War witnessed a new global tension between the forces of Communism and Capitalism. This tension soon turned into an intense Cold War which loomed over the world for forty five years. The former allies of the Second World War, Russia and United States became antagonistic and involved in creating their zones of influence in terms of strategy and ideology. Tension had already escalated in Europe and the Far East where both irreconcilable antagonists were involved in a direct clash. The Suez crisis occurred in such a tense atmosphere of the Cold War.

Scholars have debated the Suez issue with disagreement. Besides authors' own choice of selecting sources, one of the important reasons of this disagreement could have been the missing of archival sources and inaccessible sources in countries other than United States and Great Britain, that is, France, Israel and Egypt³. For example the files of M16, Britain's foreign intelligence service still guarded by authorities. Kermit Roosevelt and Allen Dulles attended a state Department meeting about the Suez Crisis, held at Foster Dulles's home on 4th August 1956, but no account of this conversation has been found in the Department of State Files. In another place state Department policy paper declares that the US must reduce Nasser's power, but the proposed means to this end are sanitized. Some sources are still unused that could help to find out more important aspects of Suez crisis. For example, historians pointed out the economic factors are not fully researched that shaped the Suez crisis to its final settlement. But their studies are not benefited from the sources like Bank of England and the US Treasury. Further intense research might be possible if the sources in France, Israel and Egypt are accessible to historians. The records of the French government are still not yet public and important sources in many Israeli archives are available to selected researchers.

Studies done in the 90s were greatly benefited by the British documents which were released in 1987 by the government and the regular declassification of American memoranda have offered even more opportunities for more intense investigation.

Historians investigated United States' role in the Suez crisis with greater length. Their studies debated over some crucial questions: why did the United States and Britain co-operate on some issues in the Middle East but disagree on others, For example, it is an

contain 130 articles of which 47 (36 percent) focused on this period. See Gaddis' article in *Diplomatic History*, 1983. On the contrary, Suez crisis was neglected by historians. From 1990 to 96, in *Diplomatic History* and in *The International History Review*, only three articles appeared on the subject.

³ For detail study see Peter L. Hahn's article "Glasnost in America: Foreign Relations of the United States and the Middle East" in *Diplomatic History*, Washington D.C., 1992, vol. 16, no. 4.

undeniable fact that the two countries had agreed in March 1956 to remove Nasser from power, yet the Americans refused to support the use of force under what circumstances U.S Secretary of State John Foster Dulles announced the withdrawal of loan for the construction of Aswan Dam in Egypt in most undiplomatic manner what were the issues that precipitated evident misunderstanding between Secretary of State Dulles and president Eisenhower?

Dulles's role in the Suez crisis was first time thoroughly discussed by Herman Finer in his book *Dulles Over Suez* published in 1960s. Finer finds Dulles responsible for Nasser's pro-Russian arms deal with Czechoslovakia. He believes that Dulles did not respond firmly against this arms deal and permitted Nasser to open to Russia a foothold in the Arab and African nations. Further, Dulles' withdrawal of the Aswan Dam loan in a brusque and insulting manner provoked Nasser for the nationalization of Canal. Finer also criticizes Dulles vague statement regarding US role in the issue. He never informed allies that what is the exact America's policy on Suez? Dulles, throughout the crisis, persistently gave a wrong impression to Britain and France that America would favor the use of force as a last resort⁴. Finer's this assessment seems true if we see the state of relationship between US secretary of state and British Prime Minister. Dulles and Eden did not find it easy to understand one another. Their mind worked in different way. When they met each other in conferences or in private meetings, their opinion differed and their attitudes clashed. Dulles was a man of strange duplicity. He left quite a wrong impression on Britain and France. Dulles stated:

A way had to found to make Nasser disgorge what he had attempted to swallow... We must make a genuine effort to bring world opinion to favor the international control of the canal.... It should be possible to create a world opinion so adverse to Nasser that he would be isolated. Then if a military operation had to be undertaken it would be more apt to succeed and have less grave repercussions than if it had been undertaken precipitately.

Finer's arguments establish the theory that vague diplomatic attitude was also one of the reasons of Anglo-French attack on Egypt.

Another study published in 1981, focused on this issue from countries' perspectives involved in the crisis. Neff differs on several points with Finer. On the role of Dulles in the Suez crisis Donald Neff differs with Finer's conclusion. For example Finer sees Dulles as the principal US policy maker instead of Eisenhower especially in the Suez crisis. While Neff in his book *Warrior at Suez*, asserts that President Eisenhower had full command over the policy making. Neff rejects the point that Dulles gave a vague statement about American support in case of British attack on Egypt. Neff assumes that it was Eden's fault if he misled by the Dulles's statements. Neff's assumption was based on Eisenhower letter written to Eden 31 July 1956.

⁴ Finer Herman, *Dulles Over Suez: The Theory and Practice of his Diplomacy*, Chicago; Quadrangle Books, 1964, pp.492-493.

President Eisenhower describes America's point of view on Suez crisis in following words:

We recognize the transcendent worth of the Canal to the free world and the possibility that eventually the use of force might become necessary in order to protect international rights. But we have been hopeful that through a conference in which would be represented the signatories to the (Suez Canal) Convention of 1888, as well as other maritime nations, there would be brought about such pressures on the Egyptian government that the efficient operation of the Canal could be assured for the future.

For my part, I cannot over-emphasize the strength of my conviction that some such method must be attempted before action such as you contemplate should be undertaken. If unfortunately the situation can finally be resolved only by drastic means, there should be no grounds for belief anywhere that corrective measures were under-taken merely to protect national or individual investors, or the legal rights of a sovereign nation were ruthlessly flouted. A conference, at the very least, should have a great educational effect throughout the world. Public opinion here and, I am convinced, in most of the world, would be outraged should there be a failure to make such efforts. Moreover, initial military successes might be easy, but the eventual price might become too heavy.

America's approach and President Eisenhower's message in this letter was quite clear that America would not support any use of force to resolve Suez crisis. Second and third line "... eventually the use of force might become necessary in order to protect international rights", which might be taken as plea for ambiguity, may also seem as decent way of writing in official correspondence. Nationalization of Suez Canal by Jamal Abul Nassir caused embarrassment for British government at home and abroad. President Eisenhower's opening of the letter can also be seen as his diplomatic sagacity not to offend its European allies. Furthermore, the remoteness of the probability of use of force in Eisenhower letter is organically attached with detail "buts" and "ifs" which indicate the America's future role in the settlement of Suez issue.

Both, President and the Secretary worked in a complete harmony. Neff praised Eisenhower's policy of diverting public attention from the Suez crisis onto the Soviet's cruel behavior in Hungary. Neff states that the period is still thought of in the United States primarily as the time of the Hungarian uprising.

Neff proceeds a more favorable assessment of US policy arguing that the US stance not to use force was justifiable and correct. Neff's central justification of this assessment was the Soviet threat on the issue of Suez. He says that Eisenhower and Dulles were rightly worried about Soviet threat of attack on aggressor powers in the Middle East. He praises the Eisenhower's firm stand against Soviet threat to attack on Britain and France⁵.

⁵ Neff, Donald, *Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower takes America into the Middle East*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1981. pp.403-404.

Neff defends Eisenhower's policy of refraining from selling weapons to any of the Middle Eastern countries, including Israel, however the sale of token amounts of arms to Egypt, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, Neff argues, was the policy of limited appeasement that strengthened American position in the region.

With the release of the unpublished documents of British government in 1987, new interpretations appeared on the Eisenhower's role in the Suez crisis. Lucas W. Scott's *Divided We Stand*, Peter L. Hahn's *The United States, Great Britain and Egypt, 1945-1956*; Diane B. Kunz's *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez crisis*; and Keith Kyle's *The Suez Crisis*, published in the year 1991.

These studies greatly benefited from the release of unpublished documents, but some researchers expressed their concern over the deliberate removal of facts. Hahn and Scott point out some grave errors in the systematic arrangement of historical document. Hahn indicates deliberate attempt to sanitize the covert operation against Mohammed Mossadegh of Iran. He quotes historian Warren I. Cohen, chairman of the State Department advisory committee on historical documentation, who called this volume "a Fraud, a gross distortion". Should we spend time and money publishing historical jokes, sly evasions that are even self-serving? Blanche Wiesen Cooke, advisory committee member questioned⁶.

Hahn wrote the book *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt 1945-1956*, in which he examines the strategic, political and economic interests and imperatives that guided American officials who were responsible for policy formulation for Egypt. Hahn's account suggested that United States intended to replace British ascendancy in the Middle East and sought stability in the region to preserve American and Western interests. He attributes American failure to achieve stability in the Middle East to its pursuit of conflicting objectives in the region.

In previous confrontations over the Canal Zone base and Sudan, the United States had consistently sided with the British because the maintenance of British base rights in the Canal Zone and the Anglo-American alliance were imperative for the strategy of containing Soviet influence. But in late 1956, the situation was altogether different which posed a dilemma for United States. Eisenhower feared that America's support to Britain in Suez Crisis would open Egypt and other Middle Eastern States to Soviet infiltration. US arms' offers to Egypt had been formulated as a ploy to mollify its nationalism and an attempt to influence Egyptian foreign policy. But continued Egypt-Israel hostility and Egyptian nationalist zeal deterred US from arms supply to Egypt. This withdrawal further exacerbated Egyptian nationalism and neutralism.

Scott, like Hahn, notes the removal of information in the 1987 British government release. He points out the destruction of information about the secret meeting between Britain, France and Israel, held in Severs where the attack upon Egypt was agreed upon.⁷

⁶ Op.cit., Hahn's, 1992

⁷ Lucas, W. Scott, *Divided We Stand*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1991, p.2.

Scott suggests that the knowledge of dynastic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the monarchies of Iraq and Jordan, Baghdad's vision of federation with Syria, and the recurrent efforts for an Arab-Israeli peace settlement- are essentials to understand the evolution of British and American policies in the region. He rejects the pattern of evaluating any historical crisis with comparison to present events. Scott claims that *Divided We Stand* examines Anglo-American policies towards Suez crisis in a regional context; however the length of his discussion of regional politics related to Suez was too small.

In *Divide We Stand*, Scott maintains that Eisenhower did not take the crisis so serious⁸. He even refused to condemn the nationalization as illegal and distinguished the Suez crisis from the case of Iran in 1953⁹. Scott argues that Eisenhower desired the removal of Nasser from power as much as Britain did, but that the military assault upon Egypt endangered American relations with the Arab States. Thus the policy coordination with Great Britain in the Middle East was no longer beneficial for America in Eisenhower's view. America did not equate the NATO alliance with unconditional cooperation outside Europe. Cooperation with its NATO allies in the third world would be evaluated on case to case basis¹⁰.

The National Security Council approved the policy of support to those leadership groups in the region which offered the greatest prospect of establishing pro-western political stability. In continuation of this policy America suggested the scheme of a supervisory board of five persons designated by such countries as Egypt, France, India and Sweden who would have a voice in the selection of a general manager who would be in charge of Canal operations¹¹.

Ideological reasons played an important role in the Anglo-American rift over Suez in Scott's view. Anti colonialism and the policy of containment were the two principles of American foreign policy after the Second World War. Eisenhower firmly refused to go along with Britain's efforts to maintain its colonial possessions. He believed that the peace and security of the world could only be guaranteed by American leadership and ideals, based on religion and independence, throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In containment of Communism this ideological warfare gained some ground in Muslim world.

On the subject of Nasser's relations with the west, Scott concedes that rumors generated feelings of distrust. He supports his argument by explaining the environment in Bundung

⁸ Eisenhower even did not call back Dulles who was in Peru.

⁹ In Eisenhower's view nationalization of Suez Canal Company was not the same as nationalization oil wells. Scott sees this logic spurious but it established that President would not sponsor force against Nasser just to regain the control of transit through the Canal. See Scott, *Op. cit.*, p.145.

¹⁰ It seems also true in the Indochina crisis. America took a different line from its allies in Geneva Conference and wanted to reduce French influence in the region. Although France was her ally in NATO.

¹¹ Scott, *Op. cit.*, p.168.

Conference where Nasser perceived that Britain and America attempted to isolate Egypt in the Middle East¹².

The United States did not see any alternate leadership in Egypt in case of Nasser's removal. On the other hand Nasser's cooperation in ALPHA plan refrained America going against him. The other ways to control Nasser were: the provision of Aswan Dam funds that could persuade Nasser to cooperate with US and Britain; Support of Baghdad Pact could also isolate Cairo in the Arab World; and destabilization of pro-Nasser regimes in the Arab world such as Syria. Dulles thought that in constructing the High Dam, engineers, technicians, and other people from the Free world in Egypt would constitute a strong influence in keeping Egypt on the side of the Free world. But all efforts went into vain to bring the Nasser to the desired position.

Dulles and Lloyd, before official announcement, were agreed to cancel the offer of financial support for the Dam¹³. Both leaders tried to detach King Saud from Nasser and supported Israel from third party to improve its army in order to check Nasser. The Most striking feature of this pressure politics was that Policy makers never considered the possible retaliation from Nasser to the extent of nationalization of Suez. Only the French Ambassador to the US, Maurice Couve de Murville, warned about nationalization of Suez.

Eden's decision to act with France and Israel in late October 1956 arose out of total frustration. Eden was well aware of oriental studies at Oxford and his subsequent work in the Arab World turned him sympathetic towards the Arabs. The miseries of Palestinian refugees further shocked him. Unlike Churchill he never supported Zionism. Even the Egyptain-Zech arms deal and violent protest of Jordanian nationalist against Britain attempt to induce King Hussein to join the Baghdad Pact did not affect his early support with Eisenhower for Egypt's Aswan Dam project¹⁴.

The turning-point in the Prime Minister's attitude towards Nasser was King Hussein's dismissal at twenty-four hours notice of General Glubb from his post as commander of the Arab Legion. In 1956 it was not customary for British advisers to be dismissed in this summary fashion, and the blow to prestige was unpleasant. Eden immediately blamed Nasser, ignoring the evidence which indicated that the dismissal was primarily an attempt by a young King to assert himself against an altogether too experienced counselor¹⁵.

In London when Nutting tried to defend Nasser's conduct, Eden retorted: "I say he is our enemy, and he shall be treated as such"¹⁶. Another occasion he shouted at Nutting over

¹² Nasser believed that British embassy was spreading anti-Egyptian propaganda. He blamed that "United States personnel in Egypt and Arab States were spreading rumors about the revolutionary command council's instability, the American representative in the Sudan was conspiring against Egypt, the Eisenhower administration was sabotaging foreign support for the Aswan High Dam and undermining the Egyptian economy through its cotton policy". See Scott, *Op. cit.*, p.47.

¹³ On 3rd May, in Karachi, Lloyd and Dulles agreed to let the project languish but without giving Nasser any excuse for saying that it was their fault.

¹⁴ Danial F. Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez, 1956: An exploration of who Makes History*, University Press of America, New York, 1991, pp.33-37.

¹⁵ Fullick and Powell, *Suez: The Double War*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1979, pp.4-5.

¹⁶ Nutting, Anthony, *No End of Lesson, The Story of Suez*, C.N Potter, London, 1967, p.29.

the telephone “I want him destroyed, can’t you understand? I want him removed ...” To Nutting’s reply that Nasser’s removal might produce anarchy and chaos in Egypt, Eden retorted “I don’t give a damn if there’s anarchy and chaos in Egypt”¹⁷.

The reasons for the American opposition to the French and British plans were complex indeed and have still to be properly unraveled. The obvious reasons were primarily concerned throughout the crisis with winning or retaining the goodwill of the Third World countries—a vital aspect of the Cold War. Reinforcing this pragmatic approach were the remnants of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s dogma that Britain and France, together with the rest of the colonial powers, should divest themselves of their remaining colonial possessions without further delay, and attitude irritating indeed to many western Europeans who detected in the United States itself many of the characteristics of an imperial power.

Eden and Dulles did not find it easy to understand one another. Their minds worked in different ways, and when they met either around a conference table or in private discussion, their opinions differed and their attitudes clashed. Although he had decided that British dominance in the Middle East was near its end and despite his determination that his country would be on good terms with those on whom power was about to devolve, he left Eden with quite wrong impression of the support Britain and France might expect, encouraging him with the statement:

A way had to be found to make Nasser disgorge what he had attempted to swallow... we must make a genuine effort to bring world opinion to favour the international control of the canal ... It should be possible to create a world opinion so adverse to Nasser that he would be isolated. Then if a military operation had to be undertaken it would be more apt to succeed and have less grave repercussions than if it had been undertaken precipitately¹⁸.

Eden’s intuitions and feeling had decisive role in the political decision making¹⁹. Nigel Nicolson wrote that Eden was an emotionally unstable man, restless, mercurial, irritable, and often explosive²⁰.

Anthony Eden was not a healthy man. He had undergone three operations to remove off bile duct problem. He was subject to occasional high fever and continued to have sleep problems. French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau once said “I often saw him so tired, it seemed shameful to me to prolong our talks”²¹. He was stern Prime Minister, a heavy-handed disciplinarian and forbidding authoritarian rather than an accessible colleague. He took an inordinate interest even in the petty details of their departments, and woe to the

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.34-35.

¹⁸ Eden Anthony, *Full Circle*, Houghton Mifflin, London, 1960, p.435.

¹⁹ Russal Braddon, *Suez: Splitting of a nation* (London: Collins, 1973), pp.5-13.

²⁰ Nigel Nicolson, *Sunday Times*, 30 August, 1981.

²¹ Christian Pineau, *1956/suez* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976), p.46.

minister who failed to meet his expectations in every particular²². No government department was exempted from Eden's personal scrutiny; he made the Foreign Office the subject of his most meticulous solicitude. He wanted to have a foreign secretary he could control. Harold Macmillan did not meet this criterion but by of 1955, Eden had managed to move Macmillan over to the Exchequer, and install the docile Selwyn Lloyd in his place, Lloyd ran the department, but Eden himself made the foreign policy.

Great Britain was regarded as victor of the Second World War, however its greater role in world politics was perilously reduced. Eden could not swallow this bitter fact. Speaking at Columbia University in 1952, he said: "Our interests extended far beyond Europe, across the sea to the many communities in which our people play their part, in every corner of the world. The Empire was the very basis of the British claim to Great Power status. Without it we should be no more than some millions of people living on an island off the coast of Europe, in which nobody wants to take any particular interest"²³.

Suez was the unavoidable link for Eden anachronistic dream of upholding the imperial status of Britain. He did not consider President Eisenhower was not the problem in achieving this target. He was an old friend, with whom Eden had worked very closely in the war years. But Eisenhower's selection of John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State was the worst possible choice for Eden. Eden had expressed his distaste about Dulles even before the 1952 Presidential elections by saying "anybody but John Foster Dulles. Eisenhower told Eden he "knew of no other American so well qualified as Foster" for that particular office"²⁴.

Britain, for Dulles, was an unreliable ally. For example, in 1954, on the issue of French Indo-China, Dulles proposed a plan to contain the communist threat in the region, but it was coolly rejected by Britain. Dulles was already bitter on the subject of the British Foreign Secretary. He wrote to his sister "Eden has double-crossed me. He lied to me"²⁵. At the conference the British delegation stood silently by, while representative from communist countries poured invective on the United States²⁶. The relationship between Dulles and Eden had deteriorated so badly that Churchill and Eisenhower had to intervene personally to try to affect reconciliation²⁷.

Not only Sir Anthony Eden, other politicians also unleashed an irrational rhetoric against Jamal Abdul Nasser. Colonial Secretary, Lennox Boyd said: I remain firmly convinced that if Nasser wins or even appears to win we might as well as a government and indeed as a country go out of business. the commonwealth Secretary, Lord Home said, I am convinced that we are finished if the Middle East goes, Kirkpatrick said: If we sit back while Nasser consolidates his position and gradually acquires control of the oil-bearing

²² *The Times*, 5th November 1980.

²³ Eden, Full Circle, p.36.

²⁴ Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for change, 1953-1956* (London: Willian Heinemann Ltd, 1963), p.142.

²⁵ Carlton david, *Anthony Eden: A biography* (London: Allen lane,1981) p.344.

²⁶ Eisenhower, Op. cit, p.355.

²⁷ Moran, Churchill, *The Struggle for Survival, 1940-1965*, (London: Constable and Company, 1966) pp.364, 508, 545.

countries, he can and is according to our information, resolved to wreck us . I doubt whether we shall be able to pay for the bare minimum necessary for our defense. And a country that cannot provide for its defense is finished”²⁸.

Another work by Gorst & Johnson evaluated cause and effect of the Suez crisis. Both authors argue that the Suez war exposed the strength of British economy which clearly reflected that British economy could not sustain a great power role without the support of the United States. All governments after 1945 were aware about the fragility of British economy; however they were reluctant to accept this fact²⁹. This duplicity between awareness and acceptance of weak British economy and unwillingness to see the disqualification of Great Britain for world leadership can be seen in Selwyn Lloyd’s account in his memoir of Suez published in 1978. He wrote:

At the latter stage it was alleged that one result of Suez was to make us realize that we could not act independently. The fact was that we knew that all the time. We were very well aware of our economic weakness and of the strain on our resources of expenditure overseas affecting our balance of payments. We had, however, to conceal that knowledge³⁰.

Gorst & Johnson, raised important question that why there was little or no consideration of the economic impact of Suez until it was too late? They argued that the issue was not discussed in the Cabinet or in the Egypt Committee meetings, and the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary appear to have been blissfully unaware of the possible impact on Britain’s precarious financial position until that impact duly arrived³¹.

Scott argues that it was a final attempt to maintain the British position in the region and to demonstrate that Britain is not dependent on Washington to defend her interests in the Middle East. But the outcome of the Suez War was not in favor of Britain.

To restore the Anglo-American alliance after Suez, Britain paid the price of permanent subservience to American policy. The Eisenhower doctrine established that now the United States would act unilaterally to defend the Middle East from Communism. Macmillan expected US dominance. Britain would no longer base her position on the Iraqi-Jordanian axis and Baghdad Pact. Scott highlights Britain’s weaknesses in the system of policy making. Eden deceived not only the US parliament and the British public but also his own officials about invasion plans. Few in the cabinet knew anything about such plans.

Another important work, Diane B. Kunz’s *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* appeared, in 1991. The central assumption of Kunz’s book is that ‘the economic

²⁸ See Keith Kyle chapter in Louis and Owen(ed) *Suez 1956: the crisis and its consequences*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989 p.123.

²⁹ Gorst & Johnson, *The Suez Crisis*, Routledge, New York, 1997, pp.28-30.

³⁰ Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956: A Person Account*, Cape, London, 1978, pp.36-37.

³¹ Gorst and Johnson, *Op. cit.* p.88.

diplomacy defined the course of the Suez Crisis from beginning to end³². Kunz's analysis of the Suez crisis becomes primarily an examination of Anglo-American relations. She argues that Britain's relative decline meant financial dependence on the US and need for financial American assistance meant the loss of policy autonomy for Britain. Kunz sets out the technical features of economic diplomacy: what role they played in British and American policy calculations and in their bargaining and negotiations with Nasser.

Kunz argues that American use of economic pressure was effective against Britain, ineffectual against Egypt and partially successful in case of France and Israel. Britain had created its own vulnerability by placing so much reliance on the importance of sterling and in this way ultimately succumbed to American economic pressure.

Kunz describes the mistakes and miscalculation of statesmen to the course of events and their misjudgment about each other. They never imagined nationalization of Suez in retaliation from Nasser. On hearing the news of nationalization of Suez Canal, British leaders decided upon a military response. French leaders thought 'one blow against Nasser would be worth a thousand in North Africa. These decisions later on could not be considered meritorious.

Kunz points out a set of miscalculations among the parties involved in the crisis. The British government misjudged the response of United States in case of its invasion against Egypt. Eden thought that Britain through its diplomacy did not leave any option open for America but to support it. Eisenhower's loose stand against the war causing more European hostility than a direct warning could ever be done. Nasser expected neither a world crisis nor a military response to the nationalization of the canal. Israel never expected such massive American economic pressure.

Kunz rejects the notion that American pressure forced Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to agree to the withdrawal of Israeli forces behind the 1949 armistice lines on March 1, 1957. New researches reject this conventional wisdom of US scholarship. The settlement of the future of Gaza and Sharm-el-Sheikh was a triumph for French diplomacy, not American power, Kunz argues³³.

Nasser greatly benefited from the Eisenhower's reaction against the Anglo-French and Israeli invasion. His position in the Arab world was boosted by his symbolic victory over the British and French government. This triumph together with Nasser's successful nationalization of the Canal completely overshadowed the humiliation of the Egyptian army by smaller Israeli forces.

Keith Kyle, a student of A.J.P. Taylor in Oxford and a journalist, restudied the issue of Suez in its historical context. His book *The Suez* is based primarily on unpublished sources. Kyle also notes the removal of facts from British official sources. He indicates

³² Kunz Diane B., *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, p.2.

³³ She indicates strong relationship between France and Israel. She quotes Ben Gurion, from his diary, that "in this world, at this time, we have no more faithful and outstanding friends than the French".

that some British material has been held back. 'In the most crucial period of the Suez crisis', Kyle found, the key meetings were held either with no civil servants at all or on the basis that no written record should be kept and systematic destruction of the most important records. The most notorious instance was the documentation about secret meetings at Sevres between Israel, France and Britain. Another level of censorship, Kyle indicates, is the normal weeding that occurs before each annual release of papers. There are quite a number of omissions for 1956, including the minutes of one whole cabinet meeting and all but two of the operational files concerning psychological warfare against Nasser.

Kyle highlights the significance of the Anglo-French and Israeli attack on Egypt in American public opinion by occasional media coverage. He mentions two items that preoccupied most people in America at the time of attack on Egypt: the last stages of American presidential election, and the epic story of the Hungarian revolution.

Kyle believes that Eisenhower had a choice between building on his new credibility in the Afro-Asian world following his stand over Suez or seeking to force Middle East issues into the thought patterns of the Cold War.

Kyle concedes that there was no real Soviet threat in the region, despite the Eisenhower's administration obsession with such a threat. He quotes, liberal senator, Hubert Humphery, that there was no real Russian threat in the region and the justification that Eisenhower gave was solely based on power politics. Robert Bowie, head of policy planning at the State Department opined that the 'Eisenhower doctrine needs considerable revision. In its total effects it over-stressed the Soviet military threat, which most people would not consider the imminent danger and relied too much on military cures'. Kyle argues that Congress seemed to authorize the use of force only against communist aggression thus determining other existing undertakings. In this way doctrine converted the Middle East into an area of the Cold War³⁴.

The subsequent American role in Suez Crisis is treated in Steven Z. Freiburger's *Dawn Over Suez*, where he argues that America had its own agenda in Middle East that clashed with its European allies. Eisenhower's anger with Eden on invasion of Egypt primarily based on the fact that he had thwarted the CIA operation in Syria and ruined Washington's own plans to eliminate Nasser. America never treated the Suez crisis separately from Middle East as a whole. Freiburger traces the roots of the Suez crisis to the Truman administration. Truman realized that British imperial policies were hindering an improvement in the Arab perceptions of the West. Washington began to pursue London to relax its policies³⁵. The rift between America and its European allies appeared in May 1953 when Eisenhower developed anti-colonial policies toward France and Great Britain and favored Arabs' national aspiration. It favored American policy of reducing tension between Arabs and Israel and replacing British influence in the region.

³⁴ Keith Kyle, *The Suez*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, pp.528-529.

³⁵ Freiburger Steven Z., *Dawn Over Suez*, pub. Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 1992. p.21.

United States and Great Britain shared similar concerns about communist infiltration in the Middle East, but their motivations and strategies were decidedly different. America was interested in its policy of containment and concerned about oil resources in areas where a Cold War vacuum existed, that is, the outer ring countries Iran, Turkey along the north, and Saudi Arabia. While Britain was concerned with the inner ring' of the area: Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq.

The Eisenhower administration's policies for Middle East were based upon counter revolutionary, anti-colonialist and anti-Communist stances. However America's middle-of-the-road policy between Great Britain and France and continuous moral, material and military support of Israel, weakened its influence in the Muslim world³⁶.

In tracing the United States role in Suez crisis Freiburger mentions two failures: the Anderson mission and the withdrawal of the Aswan loan, which led to the eventual outcome of Nationalization of Suez. The Israeli Prime Minister considered Anderson's mission injurious for Israel as it provided time for Egypt to absorb Soviet weapons. The Anderson mission could not bridge the gap between the Egyptian and Israeli position.

Freiburger opines that the Suez crisis was the outcome of misunderstanding between Eisenhower, Dulles and Eden. Dulles pursued a purposefully ambiguous policy and in many instances a duplicitous one, by delaying the crisis as long as possible, hoping it would solve itself or at least not result in war till the time of American elections in which Eisenhower was presenting himself as a peace candidate.

Freiburger agrees with Hahn that from the beginning of the Suez crisis, Eisenhower intended to avoid acting through the big three club fearing association with British and French colonialism.

Freiburger and Kyle are of the view that American perception of a Soviet threat at the time of Suez crisis. Washington worked to implement its program amidst growing fears that Soviet Union would gain a foothold in the Middle East, threatening Western oil sources and the stability of Western economies. He argues that since 1953 to 1957 Russia was grappling with domestic and foreign problem of its own and any major Soviet move in the Middle East was unlikely. Even the indigenous forces of the region did not recognize Soviet threat. In fact, the Soviet Union and Nasser were poles apart ideologically. Moscow and Cairo forged a relationship based upon their mutual hostility towards Western attempts to develop a Middle East Defense Organization, which each regarded as dangerous to their interests.

Freiburger reinforces his argument by quoting historian Thomas Paterson, who points out about the congressional hearings on the Eisenhower Doctrine that no American official provided a detailed substantiated account of Soviet intentions, activities, or capabilities. Freiburger contends that Labor riots in Poland and East Germany in 1953 and a movement for political liberalization in Poland and Hungary in 1956, make it difficult to

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.33.

believe that Moscow planned a major drive to control the Middle East in the 1950s. Furthermore, the internal politics in Kremlin following the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's "de-stalinization" were so intense; it could hardly allow Russia to involve itself in the Middle East.

Frieberger finally concludes that American goals for the Arab World, set forth in 1953, were not achieved. He mentions that far from stabilizing the Middle East, American military aid intensified rivalries between Washington's client states. For example Iraq and Turkey, pressed Syria toward a stronger pro-western stance but only succeeded in pushing Damascus further into the Soviet orbit. The Eisenhower doctrine, in most of the Arab world was interpreted as an American version of British colonialism. Instead of engaging Arab nationalism, the Eisenhower Doctrine contested it, and got entangled with communism. The British realization that they could never resort to military action without American consent led London to reassess its interests and relative position in the world. The French felt betrayed by the Anglo-Saxons and ultimately Charles de Gaulle developed an independent nuclear deterrent, withdrew France from NATO, and blocked British membership in the Common Market. Frieberger argued that these actions were the results of American policy towards Suez.

Kingseed considers Suez Crisis as a valuable case for the examination of Presidential decision making and crisis management capabilities. In his book *Eisenhower and The Suez Crisis of 1956*, through primary evidences Kingseed reveals that Eisenhower was not the passive chief executive as his contemporaries labeled him, but an extraordinarily active president. He created an effective order and organization in White house and all other important department. The President skillfully linked his 'New Look' with the curtailment of the cost of the defense establishment. His active involvement in the Middle East politics was an outcome of the global policy of containment. In describing Eisenhower activities regarding his office management, the author depends upon secondary sources³⁷.

Kingseed's study reveals that the Suez crisis had its roots in the context of Republican foreign policy and Eisenhower's personal desire to exclude Soviet influence from the Middle East. Eisenhower's goals were based on his own Cold War ideology and included promoting regional stability, guaranteeing the free flow of Middle East oil to Western Europe, supporting Arab Nationalism and Israeli independence, improving relations with Arab states, fostering the decline of the European colonial empires, maintaining the solidarity of the Western alliance, and avoiding an arms race between Israel and its Arab neighbors, with the United States and Russia the principal arms suppliers³⁸.

Kingseed argues that Eisenhower achieved his short term goals of halting foreign aggression against Egypt, but he failed to obtain his ultimate objective of lasting regional stability to prevent Soviet incursion in Middle East. However, he disagrees with the view that the events that led to the Anglo-French invasion on Egypt, were beyond Eisenhower's control but he concedes the ending hostility was clearly within his power.

³⁷ Kingseed, Cole C., *Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956*, Louisiana State University, Press, 1995. p.9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

Kingseed opines that irrespective of withdrawing the offer of financial support, Nasser had long decided on a policy to remove all vestiges of Egypt's colonial heritage³⁹.

His findings reinforce the revisionist view that Eisenhower did not delegate major foreign policy decisions to his subordinates. Eisenhower maintained tight control over decision making process by organizing the natural security department; however, he could not always control his secretary of state's sympathy for Great Britain's diplomatic position during the crisis.

Author agrees with Townsend Hoopes, the most comprehensive critics of Dulles, that Dulles widened and institutionalized the attitudes and structure of the Cold War in American life. Because of his commitment to internationalism Eisenhower selected him for secretary of state. Kingseed describes Eisenhower-Dulles relationship as considerably warmed as both grew more accustomed and have same point of view of the US role in global affairs. Author concludes that Eisenhower met the crises with clearly established leadership role, capable subordinates, a definite policy framework, and an efficient system for responding to foreign policy problems⁴⁰.

Both Dulles and Eisenhower could not see any good reason to alienate Egypt and Israel by joining the Baghdad pact. Both countries viewed Baghdad Pact against them. Egypt believed that Baghdad Pact's real purpose was to preserve British Colonial power in the Middle East, and Israel viewed the pact as an attempt to form a unified Arab front against the Jewish State⁴¹.

Kingseed concedes that when Nasser countered Western proposal for Aswan Dam with new demands that were unacceptable to the United States, Great Britain and the World Bank, Eisenhower considered the matter dead for all practical purposes. Kingseed's this account based on Eisenhower's memoir *Waging peace*; however Scott differs with this argument. He says that Nasser was agreed with World Bank director Eugene Black, who advised him to discuss the operational plan with US and Great Britain. Both countries did not even response Egypt to discuss the matter and neither informs their intentions to World Bank⁴².

In defining the Anglo-French policy on Suez issue, Kingseeds finds that both countries had broader agenda. The French viewed Nasser as the instigator of Algerian resistance, and the British considered Nasser's action as a threat to their vital national interests in the Middle East. In the author's view, neither government fully comprehended the twin concepts of Arab Nationalism and Pan Arabism, nor was either willing to relinquish the last vestiges of their Colonial empires.

Eisenhower wanted to evolve a reasonable course during the Suez crisis that would achieve near-term goals without sacrificing long term. Eisenhower believed that in case of war initial success might be easy, but the eventual price might become too far. His

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁴² Scott, *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

methodology for making critical decisions in response to the Suez crisis was virtually identical to any number of his military campaigns.

Conclusion

Suez Crisis offers a wide range of debate among the historians. From the earliest account of Bromberger's *Secrets of Suez*⁴³ published in 1957 to the recent work of Gorst and Johnson in 1997. Historical accounts largely based on personal accounts, memos, and official files. However, minutes of important meetings have not made public.

The literature reviewed in this paper reveals a great miscalculations among the major stakeholders of the conflict, that were, United States, Britain, France, Israel and Egypt. Scholars differ in their opinion about fear of Soviet intervention in case the Suez war prolonged. Review suggests that soviet threat cannot rule out but it chances of Soviet military intervention were slim.

If the Suez crisis be judged on what Britain had aimed through attack on Egypt, results were totally opposite. An operation designed to internationalize the canal, reduce the power of Nasser, stabilize the Middle East and reassert British power and prestige; nothing was achieved in the end. Why it happened or in crude way who is responsible for this? The literature review clearly suggests three major reasons: 1) American opposition and its economic pressure; 2) Britain's own economic fragility; 3) threat of Soviet involvement in the crisis if it prolongs.

There is one important question this study poses. Why did Eisenhower fail to assert America's full pressure on her European allies before the war broke out? Perhaps this question and many others which are still shrouded in secrecy can be investigated, when declassification of official papers will be arranged without the removal of facts which were deemed controversial in the past.

⁴³ See Bromberger's *Secrets of Suez*, Pan Books, London, 1957