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# Suez: A Turning Point?

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**T**he Suez Crisis, also known as the Sinai Campaign, was arguably one of the most surprising and shocking events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the notion of Britain and France allying with Israel to jointly attack Egypt was completely unfathomable to the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet, shortly after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956, this unlikely pairing came to fruition and war with Egypt would ensue.

Considerable debate exists as to whether the Suez Crisis marked a genuine turning point in the history of the Middle East. It most certainly did. The more difficult question is, to what extent? In answering this question, I will examine the causes and consequences of the war while attempting to prove the following four arguments: 1) Suez was a war of choice for Israel; 2) Nasser, foolishly and perhaps unknowingly, increased the likelihood of war between Israel and Egypt; 3) War between Israel and Egypt was inevitable; and 4) Suez marked a genuine turning point in the Middle East externally, but it was nothing more than a hiccup in the history of Egypt and Israel's internal politics.

## **A Brief Background: The Way to Suez**

**I**srael's declaration of statehood and its success in the 1948 War of Independence were both met with great embarrassment and shame in the Arab world, and came to be known as *Al Nakba* (the catastrophe).<sup>1</sup> Popular sentiment throughout the Arab world reflected a desire to remedy the situation quickly and to remove any Jewish presence from the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> Thus, following the

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1948 war, there was a near continuous cycle of violence between Israel and its Arab neighbors.<sup>3</sup>

In 1954, the situation was exacerbated as Gamel Abdel Nasser ascended to power in Egypt. The Western world feared Nasser could pose a serious threat to its influence in the region, as Nasser preached a powerful brand of national independence and Pan Arabism.<sup>4</sup> Though Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, initially viewed Nasser as someone he could work with, he would shortly conclude that Nasser represented a major threat to the stability of the Middle East and to the security of his country.<sup>5</sup>

The Lavon Affair of February 1955 further increased tensions and all but eliminated any hope of peace talks between Nasser and Israel. The Israeli secret service, acting without approval from then Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, attempted a series of bombings of British institutions within Egypt.<sup>6</sup> The failed bombings were intended to sabotage Egypt and enrage the Western world. Factions within Israel feared that the British were planning to withdraw from their positions in Egypt, and they felt the bombings could persuade Britain to stay.<sup>7</sup>

Following the Lavon Affair, perhaps to divert attention from the scandal within Israel, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) engaged in "massive" reprisal raids against the *Fedayeen* militia in Gaza (the Gaza strip was then under the influence of Egypt and Nasser). Peter Mansfield argues this was a major turning point in the conflict, as Nasser felt humiliated by the grave loss of life and could no longer sit on his hands.<sup>8</sup> Nasser responded by increasing his support of the *Fedayeen*, much to the delight of the Egyptian public.

Laura James argues that the February 1955 raids confirmed for Nasser that Israel was an aggressive actor.<sup>9</sup> Following the raids, Nasser claimed he lived in constant fear of an Israeli attack.<sup>10</sup> While such words from Nasser were clearly hyperbole, one thing was certain: the events of February 1955 led Nasser to seek arms from the Soviet bloc, which ultimately resulted in what would be known as the Czech Arms Deal in September of 1955.<sup>11</sup>

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While Nasser defended the arms acquisition on the grounds that the weapons would be used strictly for defense, Israel viewed the Soviet-sponsored deal as a direct threat to its military superiority and security in the region. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, an ardent supporter of war with Egypt, finally convinced Ben Gurion to announce a policy of confrontation on 2 November 1955.<sup>12</sup>

Henceforward, it was not a question of if, but rather of when and under what circumstances Israel would go to war with Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Ben Gurion believed Nasser would attack Israel once Egypt's army became stronger than the IDF.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it was the belief of Dayan and Ben Gurion that it was in Israel's best interest to strike first and to strike before Egypt's army could pose a serious challenge to Israel.<sup>15</sup> To that end, Dayan further increased Israel's reprisal raids into Gaza, hoping to provoke a full-scale war. Still, Ben Gurion wavered for the better part of the next year in his opinion towards being perceived an aggressor.<sup>16</sup> It was not until Britain and France entered the picture that Ben Gurion embraced Dayan's vision.

The turning point came on 26 July 1956 when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, bringing it back under Egyptian sovereignty. Nasser intended to use revenue from the canal to fund the construction of the Aswan Dam (Nasser had been trying to build such a dam for years in hopes of mitigating or preventing flooding from the Nile River). Britain and France construed Nasser's actions differently.<sup>17</sup> Nasser's actions were a direct blow to Britain and France's economic and oil interests in the region—a blow neither was willing to accept.<sup>18</sup> Though diplomatic routes were explored, neither France nor Britain had any genuine interest in diplomacy; rather, they wanted to topple Nasser's regime and regain control of the Suez Canal.<sup>19</sup>

On 27 July 1956, the French conducted a secret meeting with high-ranking Israeli official Shimon Peres expressing their interest in a joint attack against Egypt. When Ben Gurion heard of this meeting, he exclaimed enthusiastically: "This changes everything"—realizing Israel's international

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image would not be damaged by a joint attack.<sup>20</sup> Britain later joined the alliance, and each state's role in the affair was affirmed with the Treaty of Sèvres. Alas, the Suez campaign would begin on 29 October 1956.

### **A War of Choice**

**A**vi Shlaim contends the Suez War was a war of choice for Israel.<sup>21</sup> Technically, Shlaim is correct in asserting that the war was a war of choice, but this argument is somewhat misleading.

It is easy to misconstrue the meanings of pre-emptive strikes and preventive wars. Therefore, it is important to properly understand and use each term, as each is unique in that one is a defensive action and one is offensive. John Lewis Gaddis defines a pre-emptive strike as: “a military action [taken] against a state that [is] about to launch an attack” against the acting state, while a preventive war is “a war against a state that might, at some future point, pose risks” to the acting state's security.<sup>22</sup>

On 29 October 1956, Israel still maintained a decisive military advantage over Egypt. Additionally, an Egyptian attack on Israeli soil was not imminent.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Israel's war against Egypt was a preventive war and not a pre-emptive strike. Israel “engaged in the direct use of force as part of an offensive strategy” to maintain the status quo in its favor.<sup>24</sup> Thomas Schelling further defines forcible offense as “taking something, occupying a place, or disarming an enemy...by some direct action that the enemy is unable to block.”<sup>25</sup> Disarming the enemy is exactly what Israel sought to achieve in Suez.

Shlaim correctly argues that Suez was a war of choice because Israel did not *have* to go to war with Egypt at that exact moment in time. He argues that the balance of power, especially with newly acquired French arms, still favored Israel, and that “pre-emptive” war was unnecessary for this reason.<sup>26</sup> While Shlaim technically is correct in asserting that Israel did not have to go to war, his argument is somewhat misleading. As Shlaim himself points out, the only way Israel was going to acquire French arms was in exchange for killing Egyptians. Shlaim explains, “The French military had three priorities: Algeria,

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Algeria, and Algeria”—France incorrectly believed that Nasser was fueling the resistance movement in Algeria, and believed that if it could topple Nasser, it could win in Algeria.<sup>27</sup> Shlaim quotes Dayan telling Ben Gurion: “France will give us arms only if we give it serious help in the Algerian matter. Serious helps means killing Egyptians, nothing less.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, Shlaim’s argument that Israel’s need for a preventive war was eliminated by France’s supply of arms is erroneous—Israel would have never received arms had it not been for its commitment to collude with France against Egypt in the first place.

### **Nasser the Fool**

**N**asser sympathizers revere him as a bold and independent leader who held the best interests of Egypt in the forefront of his mind and was open to peace and opposed to war with Israel. In the face of Suez, some portray Nasser as an innocent victim, yet it would be more appropriate to label him a foolish antagonist.

When Nasser came to power in 1954, he had no interest in Israel, and instead wanted to focus on domestic politics and on reviving Egypt’s economy.<sup>29</sup> Mansfield furthermore argues that Nasser wanted to avoid the issue of Israel, and others have pointed to the fact that Israel was not even mentioned in Nasser’s first speech as president.<sup>30</sup> This briefly led many in Israel to believe peace was possible. This much is indisputable—initially, Nasser did not want to deal with the issue of Israel; rather, he wanted to focus on reforming his own country.

James furthermore argues that Nasser had no intention of invading Israel, and that he instead sought to maintain the status quo, which was at the time, neither peace nor war.<sup>31</sup> James quotes a Nasser aide explaining that Nasser wanted to maintain the status quo in hope that future generations could solve the Arab-Israeli problem because he thought the current generation, having lived through the crisis, could not come to terms with Israel.<sup>32</sup> James further argues that Nasser was open to peace and was “flexible” on the Israel issue, pointing to the fact that Nasser himself claimed to be open to peace, but feared

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he could make peace with Israel one day and be assassinated by his own people the next.<sup>33</sup>

However, the argument that Nasser wanted to avoid war and invited peace is completely baseless for three reasons. First, why did Nasser continually threaten the annihilation of the Jewish state in his speeches and proclaim that the Jews would be thrown into the Mediterranean Sea? Second, if Nasser wanted peace, why did he not only refuse to make any attempt to thwart the *Fedayeen*, but continue to support them enthusiastically? And third, if Nasser really wanted peace, why did he refuse to make a genuine peace offer to Israel?

In response to the first criticism, Nasser sympathizers will point to the fact that even Nasser admitted the idea of throwing the Jews into the sea was propaganda.<sup>34</sup> Egypt's army did not have and likely never would have the capacity to exterminate the Jewish state anyway. Yet if Nasser truly invited peace, why would he spread anti-Semitism so liberally? Nasser's aide claimed Nasser thought peace could be reached in future generations, but how did he think that could happen if he only further damaged Egyptians' image of Israel by spreading anti-Semitic propaganda? Would future generations simply choose to forget this propaganda? Furthermore, Nasser's threats to annihilate the Jewish state came less than a decade after the end of the Holocaust. Did he honestly expect the Jewish state, with such horrors fresh in its mind, to react any differently than it did in the face of such threats?

Nasser's consistent reliance on anti-Semitic propaganda throughout his rule can be attributed to one factor: self-preservation.<sup>35</sup> Nasser knew the Israel card was popular with the Egyptian public, and when his domestic reforms slowly proved to be failing, he relied on anti-Semitism to regain legitimacy.<sup>36</sup> Yet in doing so Nasser compromised Egypt's long-term interests by increasing the likelihood of a major confrontation with Israel. Some conclude from this that Nasser intelligently employed anti-Semitic propaganda to strengthen his power, but the more apt conclusion to be reached is that Nasser acted foolishly and imprudently, unknowingly endangering his power and his people.

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In response to the second criticism, supporters of Nasser would argue that he was left with no choice but to support the *Fedayeen*. After the embarrassment Egypt suffered from the “massive raids” in February 1955, Nasser had to respond by more actively supporting the *Fedayeen* or his power would be compromised.<sup>37</sup> Again, this argument lacks validity. Although Nasser’s support at home would have decreased temporarily had he not responded in the way he did, he would not have been assassinated or forced to leave office had he shown restraint—by 1955 Nasser was already on his way to becoming a hero of Arab nationalism.<sup>38</sup> The incident quickly could have been glossed over as another example of Zionist aggression. Increased support of the *Fedayeen* was not a necessary response.

In response to the third criticism, James and other Nasser sympathizers will point to the fact that Nasser offered a peace deal to Ben Gurion and that he tried to work toward peace while Sharett was prime minister. Yet even James admits the peace deal offered to Ben Gurion had no chance of being accepted.<sup>39</sup> Through secret channels, Nasser offered to make peace with Israel if Israel agreed to cede almost the entire Negev desert to within a few miles of Beersheba. Even Moshe Sharett, the leader of the dovish faction of the Israeli government, was averse to relinquishing even a portion of the Negev.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Ben Gurion concluded from Nasser’s offer that Nasser was not genuine about making peace.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, with respect to Nasser’s overtures to Sharett, Nasser never made a sincere attempt to negotiate or confront Sharett, knowing Sharett lacked legitimacy within the Israeli government.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, while it may be true Nasser initially did not want war with Israel, his actions proved to be quite foolish as they increased the likelihood of an eventual conflict.

### **An Inevitable War**

Inherent in Shlaim’s argument that Suez was a war of choice and in James’ argument that Nasser did not want war with Israel is the idea that Suez was the fault of Zionist aggression coupled with British and French opportunism.

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This argument, however, is unfair and overly simplistic, as increasing tensions between Israel and Egypt would have eventually led to full-scale war regardless of Suez.

Following Israel's victory in 1948, none of the Arab countries in the region were willing to recognize Israel. Israel was viewed as an illegitimate country, and the Arab world sought to rectify *Al Nakba* as quickly as possible.<sup>43</sup> Ben Gurion had no doubt in his mind that Egypt would look to reverse the results of the 1948 war the instant the chance presented itself.<sup>44</sup>

As previously noted, Nasser made little attempt to make peace with Israel, and his actions only increased the likelihood of an eventual war. The excessive and continued use of anti-Semitism in his speeches and his support of the *Fedayeen* only acted to further promote a cycle of violence between Egypt and Israel and increase popular support within Egypt for war. Additionally, though Nasser offered peace to Israel, his offer was disingenuous and unrealistic.

The continuous *Fedayeen* raids from Egypt into Israel slowly escalated tensions between the two countries.<sup>45</sup> Though Nasser believed this would result in a war of limited scope, Israel understood it to mean one thing: full-scale war was inevitable.<sup>46</sup> Such raids were simply unacceptable to Israel and full-scale war was deemed the most effective means of countering the *Fedayeen*. Shimon Peres further explains that the constant *Fedayeen* raids removed any question in Israel that war would eventually break out. He explains it was not a question of if, but rather a question of when.<sup>47</sup> Nasser's inability to comprehend Israel's psyche just a decade after the Holocaust is only further evidence of his naïveté.

To make matters worse, Egypt initiated an economic boycott of Israel, hoping to make it impossible for the state to sustain itself.<sup>48</sup> Egypt conducted a primary and secondary boycott of Israel: they refused to buy goods directly from Israel and refused to do business with any other country or business that dealt directly with Israel. Egypt's economic boycott of Israel only increased tensions between the two countries and made peace less feasible and war more

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likely.

It is hard to fault Israeli aggression alone for the Suez War of 1956. Both Israel and Egypt contributed to the increasing tensions in the region, and both states should be held responsible for the eventual war. Shlaim argues correctly that an Egyptian attack against Israel was not imminent in 1956, yet the escalation of violence between each side guaranteed a larger conflict would break out at some later date. Ben Gurion articulated Israel's position in a letter to President Eisenhower in the spring of 1956:

Egyptian authorities [have] sent gangs of murderers from Gaza to murder innocent citizens, to destroy installations and to spread fear among peaceful villagers...I cannot imagine that in the case of continual Egyptian attacks you would assume that we would abandon our country and people to the dangers and bloody consequences of a perpetual campaign of terror by the terrorist gangs of the Egyptian government. I am certain that no other country would surrender to such a situation without appropriate action.<sup>49</sup>

Still, Ben Gurion did not want to be seen as the aggressor in the conflict for fear of negative international reaction and further enraging the Arab world. Mordechai Bar-On, who attended the meetings at Sèvres, argues Ben Gurion overcame his fears due to French pressure and his desire to consolidate a strong relationship with France, in hopes of continued arms supplies.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in the face of continued *Fedayeen* raids and the recent Czech Arms Deal, Israel, after being approached by France and Britain, decided that the time was ripe for war in hopes to ensure the continued safety and security of its people.<sup>51</sup>

### **What Did They Want?**

**I**n order to analyze the successes and failures of Suez it is important to note what Britain, France, and Israel hoped to accomplish by going to war. Britain and France chiefly sought to topple Nasser's regime in order to retain

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their economic integrity and influence in the region.<sup>52</sup> Britain and France relied heavily on access to the Suez Canal for oil, and Suez was deemed an absolutely imperative source of their economic integrity.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, France, as has been previously noted, believed Nasser played a crucial role in Algeria.

Israel's aims in Suez, however, differed dramatically from that of its new European allies. Israel's aims can be broken down into two categories: political and military. Militarily, Israel sought to achieve the following: 1) Neutralize the Egyptian army's threat to Israel; 2) End the *Fedayeen* raids into Israel; and 3) Open the Straits of Tiran to facilitate freedom of passage for Israeli ships.<sup>54</sup> Politically, Israel and specifically Ben Gurion sought to: 1) Topple Nasser; 2) Establish a new order in the Middle East; and 3) Expand Israel's borders.<sup>55</sup>

Speaking at Sèvres, Ben Gurion unveiled his "fantastic" plan to reorganize the landscape of the Middle East. Ben Gurion, among other things, hoped to create a Christianized Lebanese state friendly to Israel, and wanted to split the state of Jordan between Iraq and Israel. Though few people took Ben Gurion's plans seriously, he most certainly did.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, contrary to popular belief, Ben Gurion did in fact seek to extend Israel's borders. Shimon Peres argues Ben Gurion was not interested in grand territorial expansion, but in only a small strip of land stretching from Eilat to Sharm El Sheik.<sup>57</sup> The facts, however, prove Peres was either misinformed or lying. On his way to Sèvres, Ben Gurion had yet to embrace Britain and France's desire for Israel to be the aggressor in their joint campaign. Defense Minister Dayan knew this and feared Ben Gurion would refuse the British and French proposal. Dayan presented Ben Gurion with an old book asserting Israel's historic right to the Straits of Tiran and Sinai, to which Ben Gurion responded enthusiastically.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, directly following the end of the war, Ben Gurion arrogantly declared that Israel would not forfeit its gains in the Sinai, which further proves his aspirations to expand Israel's borders.<sup>59</sup>

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## What Did They Get?

Shortly after the Suez campaign began, Britain and France were forced to withdraw their forces from Egypt due to increasing pressure from the United States. President Eisenhower was furious that he had not been notified of the planned attack on Egypt and feared the conflict could erupt into a wide-scale war involving the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> He sought to defuse tensions as quickly as possible and forced Britain to withdraw its forces by making a run on the British pound.<sup>61</sup> With Britain out of the picture, France had little choice but to follow, as it did not feel it could successfully confront Nasser without the British army.<sup>62</sup> The chief political aim of Suez, toppling Nasser's regime, not only failed, but rather increased Nasser's prestige and power—as Nasser capitalized on “British folly” by portraying himself as a hero who had triumphed over European imperialism.<sup>63</sup>

Israel's experience in Suez was somewhat different than its European counterparts. Its military campaign was a smashing success, achieving all three of its objectives thanks to the great surprise and speed employed by the IDF.<sup>64</sup> The operation furthermore increased the prestige of the IDF and supposedly bolstered Israel's deterrence.<sup>65</sup> Yet, as previously mentioned, Israel failed to topple Nasser due to Britain and France withdrawal; Ben Gurion's fantastic plan was left unrealized; and Israel eventually was compelled to relinquish all of its territorial gains.

## Conclusions: A Turning Point or Not?

*UK Says Goodbye, US Says Hello*

The most significant and lasting consequence of the Suez War was the respective entrance and exit of the United States and European powers to and from the Middle East. While it seems obvious to point to Suez as the cause of this re-ordering of the Middle East, others argue Suez had little impact on Britain's withdrawal from the region; it only accelerated changes that were already happening.

Keith Kyle argues that Suez illustrated and confirmed to the world that

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Britain was no longer a superpower.<sup>66</sup> Following the Second World War, many members of the British government still assumed Britain was a great power and continued acting in international affairs as if it possessed comparable power to the US and USSR. Suez, however, demonstrated that Britain no longer could stand toe-to-toe with the United States, a fact that agonized those in Whitehall who were still in denial of Britain's diminishing role in the world.<sup>67</sup>

Detractors of this argument make several points contradicting Kyle's claims. Most importantly, they note that Britain began its decolonization of Africa and the Middle East well before the Suez Crisis occurred.<sup>68</sup> They argue that extensive plans had been adopted within the British government to withdraw from Malaya and the Gold Coast prior to Suez, and that Britain's withdrawal from these territories went on as planned, irrespective of its failures in Suez (why this is important is somewhat unclear, since neither territory was important to the Middle East).<sup>69</sup> Finally, they argue that a close examination of events in the 1950s and 1960s proves that the majority of Britain's withdrawals from the Middle East and Africa occurred after the 1959 election.<sup>70</sup> They point to this fact as evidence that Suez was not the proximate cause for Britain relinquishing its vast empire. This argument, however, holds little merit: just because it took Britain three years to withdraw from the majority of the Middle East following Suez does not mean that Suez was not the proximate cause for its decisions. Indeed, closer examination of the evidence reveals that Suez had a tremendous impact on Britain's foreign policy.

Duncan Sandys's White Paper released in April 1957 is perhaps the greatest indication of Britain's shift in foreign policy following Suez. Sandys wrote: "The time has now come to revise not merely the size, but the whole character of the defense plan...The new defense policy set out in this paper involves the biggest change in military policy ever made in normal times."<sup>71</sup> Britain realized that if it wanted to sustain a strong economy, it would have to make severe cuts in its military spending and withdraw from its commitments overseas.<sup>72</sup> With this in mind, Sandys proposed a sharp reduction in the size

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of Britain's conventional forces and a heavier reliance on nuclear deterrence. Thereafter, Britain also acknowledged it no longer could afford to "go it alone" in a war in the Middle or Far East without the cooperation of the United States.<sup>73</sup> Anthony Gorst notes that Suez was the catalyst for these ideas becoming official policy, as the ideas outlined in Sandys' paper had long been discussed in British defense circles since the end of World War II.<sup>74</sup>

With respect to nuclear deterrence, Avery Goldstein eloquently illustrates how Suez marked a major turning point in Britain's nuclear doctrine and how Suez rudely awoke Britain to the anarchic realm of international politics. Britain now feared that the United States, possessing a much larger nuclear arsenal than Britain, might not be willing to sacrifice "New York for London" in the face of a Soviet nuclear attack.<sup>75</sup> Goldstein argues Suez prompted Britain to invest in a small but robust nuclear deterrent consisting of Submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and bombers.<sup>76</sup> In doing so, Britain hoped to achieve nuclear independence from the United States and instill first-strike uncertainty in the Soviet Union (meaning the USSR could not definitively neutralize Britain's nuclear arsenal by striking first).<sup>77</sup>

While Britain left the Suez crisis embarrassed and ashamed, the United States seemingly became the war's greatest beneficiary without even firing a shot.<sup>78</sup> Following Suez, it became clear that the US would now fill the shoes left void by Britain's withdrawal from the region.<sup>79</sup> Eisenhower understood this to mean that the Middle East would become an extension of the Cold War, and he sought to contain Soviet influence in the region. (After the war, the Soviet Union ironically began to fund the Aswan Dam, which was Nasser's reason for nationalizing the Canal in the first place.) Eisenhower explained that as a result of Suez, "The Middle East, which has always been coveted by Russia, [will] today be prized more than ever by international communism."<sup>80</sup> Still incensed with Israel for colluding with Britain and France, Eisenhower turned to moderate Arab states in his quest to contain communism. The Eisenhower Doctrine offered economic aid and military protection to those states that

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agreed to reject communism.<sup>81</sup>

It is important to understand that Suez marked a major turning point in the role of external powers in the Middle East. The United States likely would have become the great force it eventually became in the Middle East regardless of Britain's foolish actions in 1956, but Suez most certainly accelerated this transition and created a new political order in the Middle East that would last until the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991.

### **Israel & Egypt: The Song Remains the Same**

**T**he internal politics of the Middle East were affected much less significantly than its external politics by the events of 1956. Essentially, Suez was as an overture to the eventual War of 1967—before Suez, war between Egypt and Israel was inevitable; following Suez, a second war remained inevitable.

While Israel achieved the vast majority of its goals during the Suez campaign, most of its gains proved to be short-lived. Although the Straits of Tiran were opened to Israeli ships, and Israel's border with Egypt enjoyed relative tranquility for eleven years following Suez, both of these gains were reversed in 1967 when Nasser blocked the straits and ordered the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to withdraw from their positions in Gaza.<sup>82</sup> Israel's territorial gains were negated after Israel's ambassador to the United States, Abba Eban, was admonished. Israel would lose all American aid and potentially be expelled from the United Nations if it did not withdraw from Sinai and Gaza; thus, Nasser additionally regained de facto control of Gaza.<sup>83</sup> The neutralization of the Egyptian army proved temporal as Egypt quickly restored its forces to strengths greater than it had enjoyed prior to 1956.<sup>84</sup> Finally, though Israel's impressive military victory theoretically should have strengthened its deterrence, it ultimately did not: Nasser still refused to recognize Israel and became more resolved than ever to avenge Zionist aggression and reverse the catastrophe of 1948.

Shlaim contends that Israel and Ben Gurion learned two important lessons from its experience in Suez. Shlaim summarizes these lessons as follows:

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1) Israel no longer could expect to protect itself by expanding its borders and instead must rely on deterrence, specifically nuclear deterrence; and 2) Israel must deal and directly consult with the US before engaging in future wars.<sup>85</sup>

Once again Shlaim's arguments fail to hold water under critical examination. Ben Gurion may have learned his lesson concerning territorial expansion, yet this "lesson" seemingly slipped Levi Eshkol's mind in 1967 when Israel, rightly or wrongly, captured the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the Sinai. Additionally, Israel and Abba Eban conducted lengthy talks with the US before making a pre-emptive strike against Egypt in 1967, yet Israel struck after only receiving a "yellow light" from the Johnson administration.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, many have argued that Suez was a critical turning point for the internal politics of the Middle East because it confirmed the "reactionary and aggressive" nature of Israel, and because it made Nasser the undisputed leader of the Arab world.<sup>87</sup> While Suez certainly enraged the Arab world towards Israel, to say that it was a critical turning point is an exaggeration. Regardless of Suez, Nasser and the Arab world already regarded Israel as an aggressive actor due to prior incidents, notably the February 1955 raids into Gaza and Operation Kinneret in the Galilee region (a massive operation led by Ariel Sharon in response to Syrian harassment of Jewish fishermen).<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, while Nasser enjoyed a temporary surge in popularity, his power reached its zenith in 1958 when the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria was formed.<sup>89</sup> The UAR, however, would be dissolved in 1961, and Nasser never truly was able to consolidate his power over the Pan-Arab movement.<sup>90</sup>

As a result, Suez more closely resembled a hiccup than a true turning point in the history of Egypt and Israel's internal politics. Suez is significant in that it not only failed to solve existing tensions between Egypt and Israel, but further amplified them. Yet it is foolish to think some similar conflict between Egypt and Israel never would have come to fruition had it not been for the Treaty of Sèvres. As we have learned, Nasser used vicious anti-Semitic propaganda to further legitimize his rule. Once the Egyptian army reached

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parallel levels to the IDF, it is likely that Nasser would have felt compelled to attack Israel due to internal pressures within his own country. In the aftermath of Suez, the only thing that changed was that Nasser now actively sought to invade Israel and avenge the 1956 campaign. Though it would take eleven years, tensions between Egypt and Israel would erupt once more into bloody confrontation in 1967.

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