

only just gained political independence from the United States, and, facing enormous war-reconstruction costs, it remained economically dependent on the United States. At this very moment, Congress was considering a large package of aid for the Philippines. To convey the message that Manila might wish to rethink its position on Palestine, the White House got Felix Frankfurter and another Supreme Court justice, former Philippine high commissioner Frank Murphy, to buttonhole the Philippine ambassador. Simultaneously, a group of pro-Zionist senators sent a cable to Manuel Roxas, the Philippine president, reminding Roxas of the importance of a correct vote on the Palestine issue. Roxas ordered a change of mind, and the Philippines supported partition.

Liberia, another economic colony of the United States, received the attention of industrialist and former secretary of state Edward Stettinius. Steel-man Stettinius happened to be a close friend of rubber-man Harvey Firestone, whose company dominated the Liberian economy. Stettinius called the Liberian president, William Tubman, to indicate his concern over reports that Liberia would vote against the majority plan. He hoped these reports weren't true. Tubman made sure they weren't.

Haiti, even poorer than Liberia, had also announced against partition. Niles lined up a collection of American businessmen with operations in Haiti to suggest that an unfavorable decision on Palestine would not improve the business climate. Former assistant secretary of state Adolph Berle personally telegraphed the Haitian president, Dumarsais Estimé, to remind the Haitian leader of the importance of the Palestine question in the eyes of the American government. Estimé wired back that on second thought Haiti would vote for partition.

The pressure paid off. When the United Nations General Assembly voted on the majority plan at the end of November 1947, partition passed by two votes.

The General Assembly's acceptance of the majority plan cleared the path for the creation of Israel. For the Zionists, the vote for partition gave an international seal of approval to their long-held aspirations. For the British, it provided convenient cover for dropping a burden they no longer desired to carry. For the Arabs, the United Nations vote represented another setback to their desire to restore Palestine to the Palestinians. The British colonialists, who had supplanted the Ottoman colonialists, were leaving, but were giving way to another group of interlopers. Although these latest interlopers had

deeper roots in Palestine than either the British or the Ottomans, the deeper roots made them all the more threatening to Palestinian goals. The Ottomans had gone, and the British were going, but the Zionists quite evidently intended to stay. To be sure, the majority plan specified a state for the Palestinians as well as a state for the Jews. In this case, though, half a loaf looked hardly better than none, and no Palestinian leader volunteered to step forward and agree to an arrangement that signed away a large part of the national patrimony. Recognizing Israel, in the Palestinian view, amounted to a sellout.

For the United States, the United Nations approval of partition was a mixed blessing. Most Americans applauded the return of the Jews to the biblical homeland, some from not wanting more Jews in America, but many more from admiration for the Jews' grit and from a desire to make amends for what the Jews had suffered. For the Truman administration, the United Nations vote represented both a moral victory and a political success: Truman and his White House advisers sincerely believed in the Zionist cause; at the same time, they understood that a pro-Zionist policy served the administration on the hustings. New York might easily decide the outcome of the 1948 presidential election, and New York's Jews might decide New York.

The months following the United Nations decision witnessed an escalation of violence in Palestine, as both Jews and Arabs positioned themselves for the day when the last British soldiers left. The blood-spilling caused the Truman administration briefly to reconsider its backing for partition. Diehards at the State Department tried to capitalize on the reconsideration and prevent partition from being implemented, or at least to dissociate the United States from the implementation. They succeeded only in embarrassing, and therefore infuriating, the president. Truman wasn't about to waltz on his support for a Jewish state—and, in any case, the Zionists in Palestine weren't about to be denied their country at this eleventh hour, regardless of what the United Nations or the United States said or did.

As the moment of Israel's birth approached, the Truman administration had to decide when and how to grant diplomatic recognition. The diplomats resisted to the last. At a meeting on May 12, Undersecretary of State Robert Lovett pointed out to the president that the United States didn't know what kind of government the Zionists were setting up, and that to extend recognition prematurely would be "buying a pig in a poke." Secretary of State Marshall likewise urged care. White House counsel Clark Clifford was advocating immediate recog-

nition; Marshall blasted Clifford's proposal as "a transparent dodge to win a few votes." During his long career as a soldier, Marshall had carried the principle of political nonpartisanship to the degree of never voting for president. Now the secretary of state told Truman to his face that if he were a voter and the president followed Clifford's advice, he would vote against him.¹⁵

But the State Department lost this round, as it had lost the others. Truman decided in favor of immediate recognition, evidently believing that delay would be politically foolish and diplomatically quixotic. He ordered the diplomats to work out the details of recognition, which they did with little grace. On May 14, 1948, fifteen minutes after the official proclamation of Israel's existence, the United States recognized the government of the new country.

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By the summer of 1948, the future of American relations with the Middle East was taking recognizable shape. World War II had demonstrated the absolute essentialness of petroleum in international affairs. Without secure sources of oil, no country could hope to achieve a major, independent role in the game of nations. The Middle East contained a giant part of the world's oil supply; this guaranteed that the region would draw the attention of American leaders.

By mid-1948, the Cold War had well begun. The United States and the Soviet Union had demonstrated their antagonism toward each other, and each adopted as a primary goal the frustration of the other's ambitions. The Soviets hoped to expand their influence in the Middle East; Washington sought to keep the Soviets out.

The establishment of Israel in May 1948 added a new and unsettling wrinkle to Middle Eastern politics. By itself, the existence of the Zionist state would have complicated the relations of any country with interests in the region; the fact that the United States provided crucial support for Israel's creation vexed American dealings with the Middle East all the more.

¹⁵H. W. Brands, *Inside the Cold War* (New York, 1991), p. 187.

Chapter 2

With Friends Like These: 1948–1956

1. TO THE TRIPARTITE DECLARATION

The first war of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which broke out as the final British soldiers were leaving Palestine, lasted the longest. From May 1948 until January 1949, with intermittent truces, Israeli military units battled the forces of Israel's Arab neighbors—Egypt, Syria, Transjordan (soon to be renamed Jordan), Lebanon, and Iraq—and what fighters the Palestinians could put in the field. Although such a war was precisely what the dismalists in the State Department had been warning of, its outbreak to some degree lifted a burden off the American government. All interested parties concentrated their attention on events in the area of combat; the diplomats in foreign capitals and at the United Nations receded into the background.

Almost regardless of developments in the Middle East, the United States probably would have receded into the background of affairs of the region anyway. The period of the first Arab-Israeli war was a frantic time for Washington. In June 1948, the Soviet Union began blockading Berlin; shortly thereafter, the Truman administration ordered an airlift of necessary supplies to the stranded city. Also in June, Yugoslavia's Tito broke with Moscow, opening a gap in the Eastern front that American policy makers did their best to widen. Elections in France and Italy threatened to bring communists to power there; American Marshall Plan aid, along with some secret assistance to the noncommunist parties, attempted to keep them out of power. In China, the armies of Mao Zedong's Communists landed heavy blows on Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, sending American strategists

scurrying to discover a fallback position in East Asia. All these pressing concerns required the Truman administration to focus attention and resources on areas other than the Middle East.

Fortunately for the administration (not to mention Israel), the Zionists managed to hold their own—and then some—against the Arabs. During the first few weeks of fighting, the Israelis beat back the invading armies, in the meantime appealing to the United Nations to condemn the aggression. After a month, the Arabs agreed to a ceasefire. This proved to be a miscalculation, since the Israelis used the respite from fighting to resupply themselves with weapons, notably from Czechoslovakia. In the second stage of the war, which began as the ceasefire progressively unraveled, the Israelis shifted to the attack, pushing beyond the frontiers assigned them in the November 1947 United Nations resolution.

The Truman administration initially adopted a low profile in the diplomacy that accompanied the fighting. Washington's representative at the United Nations, Warren Austin, contributed chiefly the sentiment that the Muslims and Jews fighting over the holy places ought to settle their differences in a "true Christian spirit." The American role increased following the September assassination of the United Nations mediator, Sweden's Count Folke Bernadotte, by Jewish terrorists. American diplomat Ralph Bunche replaced Bernadotte, guaranteeing greater visibility for the United States in the talks that ultimately ended the first Arab-Israeli war in January 1949.¹

That the war ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty resulted from the fact that although the Israelis could defend themselves and prevent an Arab victory, they couldn't accomplish an Arab defeat. For now, anyway, the Arabs could simply withdraw back across their borders, waiting to fight another day.

Yet if the Israelis didn't win the war in a strict military sense, they won politically by securing (and extending) their borders and forcing the Arabs to deal with Israel as a state-in-being, albeit one the Arabs didn't recognize diplomatically. After 1949, the Arabs might fulminate and threaten, but they couldn't credibly deny that Israel existed. While the armistice agreement explicitly declared that the truce lines should not be construed as territorial frontiers, in practice they became just that—until modified by later fighting.

¹George T. Mazuzan, *Warren R. Austin at the U.N.* (Kent, Ohio, 1977), p. 99.

The second consequence of the Palestine War was the creation of the Palestinian problem. Before and during the fighting, several hundred thousand Palestinians fled the territory assigned to Israel by the United Nations and the territories occupied by Israeli troops. The majority of the refugees entered camps in the Gaza Strip, situated along the Mediterranean between Israel and Egypt, and on the West Bank of the Jordan River, both of which had been assigned to the Palestinians by the United Nations partition plan. Following the Palestinians' rejection of the plan, the West Bank soon fell under the rule of Jordan, while the Gaza Strip drifted in a political no man's land, grudgingly administered by Egypt. Egypt's grudge reflected the hard conditions in Gaza, where a quarter-million persons now tried to live on land that had previously strained to support 60,000.

American leaders appreciated that if peace should ever arrive in the Middle East, a solution to the Palestinian problem would precede it. Washington sporadically expostulated with Israel to allow the return of some significant number of the refugees. But Israel resisted, citing security considerations. An additional cause of Israeli reluctance was the fact that now that Israel existed, the 100,000 (and more—the number had grown) DPs in Europe had a place to go—so long as Israel wasn't full of Palestinians. Indeed, under Israel's Law of Return, every Jew in the world enjoyed the automatic right to immigrate to Israel. A population of several million would require lots of land—which led some Arabs, recognizing the demographics of the situation, to speak of the Zionists as latter-day Nazis, seeking "living space" for their own kind at the Arabs' expense. Israel eventually consented to be persuaded by the United States to allow a minor portion of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, but far fewer than the Palestine War had displaced.

The 1949 armistice pushed the Arab-Israeli struggle onto the back burner of American foreign relations. This location didn't sit well with those in the United States who thought Israel deserved better from Washington, and such persons regularly agitated for more attention to Israeli concerns. The pressure succeeded in moving the Truman administration to approve a \$100 million loan to Israel, an action that commenced a continuing and crucial (to Israel) financial connection between the United States government and Israel. To this flow of public dollars was added a substantial stream of private donations from American Jewish groups—a stream that also would grow over the coming years.

The pressure from Israel's friends in the United States likewise succeeded, although more slowly, in allowing the flow of American arms to Israel. In the spring of 1948, the Truman administration had embargoed weapons shipments from the United States to the vicinity of Israel. Since then, Israel had received much of its arms supply from the Soviet bloc. But the communist-made weapons weren't everything Israel's generals desired, and Israel's politicians disliked the idea of depending on a single source of supply. Both the generals and the politicians looked to the United States for a remedy for their problems. At the same time, they desired to counter British arms sales to the Arabs. When the Israelis presented their case to Washington, officials in the Truman White House sympathized, not wanting Israel to become addicted to Soviet weapons and not wanting to upset Israel's backers in the United States. The State Department took the opposite view: the diplomats feared further antagonizing the Arabs and warned of an arms race in the Middle East.

Attempting to strike a balance between these two opinions, Truman lifted the arms embargo, but simultaneously arranged an agreement among the United States, Britain, and France—France being the third major potential source of Western arms for the Middle East—to exercise restraint in selling weapons to the parties to the Arab-Israeli dispute. What became known as the Tripartite Declaration of May 1950 affirmed the three governments' understanding that the countries of the Middle East required weapons "for the purposes of assuring their internal security and their legitimate self-defense." Yet the declaration also served notice of the opposition of Washington, London, and Paris to the development of a weapons race between the Arab states and Israel. It explained that the three governments would require purchasers of weapons to provide guarantees that the weapons would not be used aggressively, and it reiterated the three governments' opposition to the use of force to alter the status quo in the region.²

For the United States, the Tripartite Declaration represented an effort at evenhandedness between Israel and the Arabs. To the Arabs, it asserted the United States' intention to oppose further Israeli expansion; to the Israelis, it promised access to American arms and indicated American acceptance of the 1949 borders. The declaration obviously didn't solve the Arab-Israeli problem, but at the time it

²*The New York Times*, May 26, 1950.

seemed to many to be the first step toward a solution. At the least, it promised to calm things in the Middle East down a bit.

2. QUICK FIX: THE CIA IN IRAN

At the beginning of the 1950s, American leaders desperately wanted the Middle East to calm down, since so much of the rest of the world was continuing to do just the opposite. In the spring of 1949, the Senate had approved American membership in the North Atlantic alliance, the United States' first peacetime entanglement since its ill-starred experience with France at the end of the eighteenth century. The Atlantic treaty provoked enormous discussion and sizable opposition; that the Senate ratified the treaty testified to the great alarm Americans felt regarding the future of democracy. Later that year, the Chinese Communists ran the Nationalists off the Chinese mainland, effectively completing the triumph of Marxism-Leninism (soon amended to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) in the most populous country on the planet. In June 1950, communist North Korea attacked anticommunist South Korea, an attack widely thought to be instigated by Moscow. The Truman administration again declared the American way of life endangered, and ordered American forces to the defense of South Korea.

In three months of desperate fighting, the South Koreans and the Americans, with help from several other countries, managed to stem the North Korean advance; in September, they launched a stunning counteroffensive that carried them far into North Korea, all the way to the border of China. The Chinese, after warning the Americans not to get too close, entered the fray in massive numbers. The Chinese assault threw the Americans into confusion and pushed the world to the brink of another general conflict. American leaders didn't anticipate that the Soviet Union would enter the ongoing fight in East Asia; instead, they feared that the Soviets would take advantage of the United States' preoccupation with Korea and China to put the squeeze on Berlin again, or perhaps attempt once more to destabilize pro-Western regimes in the Middle East.

If Moscow did intend destabilizing the Middle East, Iran seemed as good a place to start as any. The boost to Iranian confidence provided by American diplomatic support in 1946 had largely worn off; the country's monarch, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, had made

himself neither loved nor feared by the country's chief political factions. On the political right, members of the old aristocratic families resented the shah as the son of the usurper Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had illegally seized the Peacock Throne. The large estate holders distrusted him for holding perniciously progressive views on such matters as land reform. On the left, the powerful, well-organized, and pro-Moscow Tudeh party reviled the shah as the representative of a corrupt and archaic form of government, and a lackey of the Western capitalists to boot. Somewhere between left and right, or perhaps on a different political spectrum, Islamic fundamentalists denounced him as illegitimate and anathematized him for leading Iran away from the true teachings of the prophet Muhammad.

The most influential of the shah's opponents, however, was Muhammad Mossadeq. Americans never quite knew what to make of Mossadeq, with his flair for oratory and histrionics, his sometimes bizarre—to American and other Western eyes—yet always entertaining political tactics, and his capacity for concentrating the attention of his country and of much of the world on his own person. Born into one of Iran's most prominent families in the 1880s, Mossadeq claimed as cousins two individuals who between them had served as Iran's prime minister twenty times. (The family didn't talk about the stability of the governments the cousins headed.) Other relatives had held several scores of ministerships. Mossadeq himself had been a provincial governor, finance minister, and justice minister. Years earlier, he had learned to hate Reza Shah, and his antipathy carried over to Reza's son. Most of all, Mossadeq despised the British, whom he charged with subverting Iranian politics in the pursuit of oil profits.

He had a point. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, with the British government as majority stockholder, had from the first decade of the century held an exclusive concession to find and pump oil in a half-million-square-mile area of Iran. Almost from the start, the Iranian government expressed dissatisfaction with the terms of the concession and agitated for change. London resisted, on grounds both financial (profits from oil operations swelled the British treasury's coffers) and strategic (Iranian oil fueled the British navy). On numerous occasions, the British couldn't resist meddling in Iranian politics, and when the British troops arrived in 1942, they appeared to many Iranians to be mercenaries in the service of the rapacious Anglo-Iranian company.

It was during the war that Mossadeq began attacking the company and the foreign domination of Iran's economy he claimed it symbol-

ized. He didn't get very far at the time, but he gained a reputation as a spokesman of Iranian nationalism. In 1949, he employed this reputation in helping to establish the National Front, an umbrella organization uniting various groups advocating liberal reforms and an end to foreign control of Iranian economic and political life.

In 1951, as a member of the Iranian parliament's lower house, or Majlis, Mossadeq chaired a committee that drafted a legislative measure aimed at nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian company's Iranian holdings. The measure provoked the opposition of the prime minister, Ali Razmara, who held that likely British retaliation would seriously injure the Iranian economy. But religious extremists assassinated Razmara in March 1951, and in the polarized atmosphere that followed the assassination, the nationalization bill gained parliamentary approval. Mossadeq, the hero of the hour, landed in the prime minister's chair.

The nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian company touched off a struggle to the political death between Mossadeq and the British government. (In fact, *both* Mossadeq and his British counterpart, Clement Attlee, fell from power before the struggle ended.) The British condemned the nationalization as theft and contemplated military action against Iran. Financial and military considerations aside, the British shuddered at the precedent the nationalization might establish for British holdings elsewhere in the Middle East. If the Iranians could get away with taking over the Anglo-Iranian company's assets, which included the world's largest petroleum refinery at Abadan, what would prevent the Egyptians from seizing the Suez Canal? The very thought boggled British minds. To unboggle them, London readied its warships and troops.

But once Washington got wind of British plans, Attlee and his cabinet had to reconsider. Officials of the Truman administration worried that a British move to grab Abadan and the oil fields back from Tehran would trigger another Soviet move against Iranian Azerbaijan, and they relayed their worries, strongly expressed, across the Atlantic. Attlee cancelled the military plans.

The British opted instead for economic pressure. The Anglo-Iranian company shut down operations, throwing thousands of Iranians out of work and depriving the Iranian government of a major source of income. Simultaneously, the company threatened legal action against any other firm dealing in Iranian oil—a threat that in the (especially then) cozy world of international oil amounted to a blockade of petroleum exports from Iran.

In addition, the British applied political and legal pressure. London appealed to the International Court of Justice to enforce what the British claimed to be a no-nationalization clause of the company's contract with the Iranian government. When Mossadeq denied that the court had jurisdiction, and the court agreed, the dispute went to the United Nations.

The Truman administration feared that this latest setback would cause the British to reconsider their reconsideration of military force, and it threw a series of troubleshooters into the breach. First it tried George McGhee, the assistant secretary of state; then W. Averell Harriman, formerly ambassador to the Soviet Union and the Democrats' all-purpose fixer; then McGhee again; then Loy Henderson, whose opposition to the administration's line on Israel had cost him his job as director of the State Department's Middle East division and earned him exile in India and subsequently Iran. Through the end of 1951 and into 1952, none of the troubleshooters had any luck.

The basic problem was that neither the British nor the Iranians had much desire to compromise. For the British, the dispute with Iran held the key to Britain's future in the Middle East. The replacement of the socialist Attlee by the arch-imperialist Churchill at the end of 1951 only reinforced this no-compromise attitude. For the Iranians, the fight with Britain represented nothing less than a fight for Iranian independence. Though Iran, unlike much of the rest of the Middle East, had successfully resisted subjugation by the Western powers, Iranians often felt no less oppressed by Western influences than their subjugated neighbors. To yield on the oil issue would be to admit the legitimacy of these influences. All nations need foreign devils, and for Iran the British filled the bill. (For the United States at this time, the Soviet Union and other communists served.) Mossadeq especially believed the British to be at the root of what ailed Iran. The prime minister told Averell Harriman, regarding the British, "You do not know how crafty they are. You do not know how evil they are. You do not know how they sully everything they touch." To Harriman's reply that the British couldn't be *that* bad, Mossadeq answered, "You do not know them. You do not know them."³

Eventually the United States would supplant Britain as Iran's Great Satan, but for now Mossadeq tried to cultivate the Americans, in order to use them against the British. He spoke with Henderson

often and at length. The American ambassador found the prime minister captivating. "Mossadeq was an attractive man although he was neither handsome nor elegant," Henderson later recalled. "He was tall and lanky; his long horselike face topped with rather disheveled gray hair was expressive like that of an actor. He had a large mouth, and when he smiled his whole face lit up and one felt drawn toward him. He liked jokes and liked to laugh at them."⁴

And Mossadeq was sharp. Henderson described him as very shrewd, with an intuitive grasp of Iranian emotions and character. Henderson thought Mossadeq had Britain on the brain, but the ambassador didn't worry that the prime minister would overreact by giving the game to the Soviets. Mossadeq, Henderson said, knew that the Soviets were up to no good in Iran. Putting his finger on what seemed Mossadeq's primary motivation, Henderson concluded that the prime minister was possessed by an "almost megalomaniacal desire to act as the champion of the people in the struggle for 'independence'."⁵

For all his talents and ambitions, Mossadeq walked a tightrope in Iranian politics. The leftist Tudeh wished him ill, staging demonstrations of as many as 100,000 people and demanding that the prime minister take stronger action against the British imperialists and their American accomplices—the latter of whom they identified particularly in the persons of American advisers to the Iranian military. Although nominally illegal, the Tudeh had amassed sufficient strength that neither Mossadeq nor anyone else felt free to move against it; the prime minister instead sought to appease the party. Not surprisingly, this policy of accommodation raised red flags in the minds of American officials watching Mossadeq.

Equally threatening to Mossadeq, if not of such great concern at that time to Washington, were the Islamic fundamentalists. The leader of the fundamentalists was Ayatollah Abd al-Qasem Kashani. Henderson never warmed to Kashani the way the ambassador warmed to Mossadeq, not least since Kashani exuded all the warmth of the average religious zealot. Henderson found him "retrogressive and anti-foreign," disposed to think as poorly of the British as Mossadeq did, although for different reasons, and considerably more hostile to the

⁴Henderson oral history, Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

⁵Henderson to Acheson, Oct. 22, 1951, State Department file 350 Iran, National Records Center, Suitland, Md.

³James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion* (New Haven, Conn., 1988), p. 65.

United States. On a visit to the American embassy, Kashani boasted that he pulled the strings that controlled Mossadeq's actions; he added, without explicitly accepting responsibility, that individuals allied to himself had assassinated Ali Razmara. He went so far as to declare that Muslims from India to North Africa were under his control and would obey his every command. Kashani asserted that he and his fellow believers opposed communism most bitterly; accordingly, he did not entirely rule out cooperation with the United States, since he knew that the Americans opposed communism too. Of course, Washington would have to change its ways and recognize the legitimacy of the claims of Shia Islam—Kashani's sect—to rule Iran.

Henderson listened to Kashani with interest. Though much of what Kashani said struck the ambassador as outrageous, he granted that Kashani might serve a valuable purpose for Iran's future—and the United States—if only temporarily. In Henderson's view, the Islamic fundamentalists knew how to block what they didn't like, but had no positive program. "Religious fanaticism can be used to combat communism, but it cannot be employed as a constructive force for the country's progress," he asserted.

The fourth major element in the Iranian political equation—after Mossadeq, the Tudeh, and the fundamentalists—was Shah Pahlavi. In time, the shah would become a powerful ruler—a veritable tyrant, to his enemies—but at the beginning of the 1950s he was more of a milquetoast. The shah turned 32 in 1951, and although he had occupied his throne for a decade, he ruled less than he reigned. He distrusted Mossadeq, yet while he nominally possessed the authority to dismiss the prime minister and replace him with someone more to the royal taste, he declined to exercise this authority. He feared that he lacked power to match his authority: Mossadeq might well refuse to be fired, and the refusal would humiliate the crown. Henderson, a bull-by-the-horns type himself, found the shah's diffidence exasperating. The ambassador judged the shah indecisive and weak, and regularly despaired that Iran's salvation would ever come if it had to come through the monarch.

Increasingly, during the last part of 1952 and the first half of 1953, Henderson despaired that Iran's salvation would come at all. He never believed that Mossadeq was a communist, nor did he doubt that Mossadeq had anything but the best interests of Iran at heart. In this belief, Henderson generally reflected the opinion of other American officials. Had Iran been a stable democracy, on the model of

France or even Italy, American officials probably wouldn't have considered Mossadeq particularly threatening. Washington has never much liked nationalization as an instrument of other countries' foreign policy, but the American government had long since made its peace with the idea that nationalization was an attribute of the sovereignty of the nationalizing country and not something subject to international debate. (The test case occurred when Mexico nationalized American oil properties during the 1930s and the Roosevelt administration refrained from military or other forcible retaliation.) Besides, the British under Attlee's Labour government had been nationalizing some of Britain's major industries since the end of the war, and still Washington put Britain at the top of the list for Marshall Plan aid. (The British government looked less favorably on *other* countries' nationalizing of British holdings, as the Iran situation, and later the Suez affair, demonstrated.)

The trouble with Mossadeq was not Mossadeq per se, but what Mossadeq might lead to. As the oil blockade took effect, the Iranian economy slid into depression, creating stress and restiveness throughout the country. Most severely hit were the neighborhoods of the oil fields and refineries, which also happened to be the stronghold of Iran's most radical labor unions. The Tudeh battered on the unrest.

At the same time, the anti-Western sentiments both Mossadeq and the Tudeh exploited for their own purposes played into the hands of Kashani and the religious fundamentalists. In the early 1950s, American officials didn't particularly fear the emergence of an Islamic regime in Tehran, at least not for what such a regime would represent on its own terms. They worried that the likes of Kashani would seize the government, but would be unable to solve Iran's problems and would succumb to a leftist power play. Once the Tudeh gained control, Iran would quickly fall into the Soviet sphere.

With neither the Tudeh nor the fundamentalists affording what Washington perceived as relief from Mossadeq, American officials looked to the shah. They had to look hard. Despite repeated urgings from Henderson to stand up to Mossadeq, to assert himself and take charge of the country, the monarch continued to hem and haw. He and his ministers asserted that the time had not yet come for strong moves, that they should give Mossadeq more rope to hang himself. Henderson accounted this argument simply a rationale for inaction and a facade over a lack of nerve. Henderson increasingly felt that the safety of Iran required a coup—a constitutional coup, according to

the American reading of the Iranian constitution, but a coup still—by the shah against Mossadeq. Such a coup would require the cooperation of the Iranian military, yet mostly it depended on the determination of the shah. Unfortunately, Henderson predicted, the shah would “take fright at the very idea of a coup.”⁶

Until the summer of 1953, the United States government did little to buck up the shah’s nerve. Henderson offered verbal encouragement, but not the logistical and financial support required really to make a coup.

In June 1953, however, the situation began to change. The change resulted in part from the continued confusion in Iran. Mossadeq’s National Front was crumbling, forcing the prime minister to offer further concessions to the Tudeh and the Islamic fundamentalists. The economy spiraled downward, adding to pressure for change of a radical nature, in favor of either the political radicals or the religious radicals.

Yet an equally important cause of the change occurred in Washington. With the January 1953 accession of Dwight Eisenhower to the presidency, American policy regarding the Soviet Union and its allies shifted from the overt military approach of the Truman administration—represented by NATO and the continuing struggle against China and North Korea—to a covert political approach. Eisenhower had learned to appreciate the possibilities of covert operations and political warfare as commander of Allied forces in Europe during World War II, when resistance fighters and Allied secret agents successfully softened up German defenses before the Normandy invasion and other offensives. Eisenhower assumed the presidency at a moment when the Soviet Union was crossing the threshold into the hydrogen-bomb era, just months behind the United States; he understood how military force was losing its effectiveness in superpower relations. In 1946, during the earlier troubles over Iran, Truman had been able to take confidence from the fact that if things got really sticky, the United States possessed atomic weapons and the Soviet Union didn’t. In 1953, Eisenhower had no such advantage.

Covert operations would characterize Eisenhower’s foreign policy around the world, involving the United States’ clandestine agents in the affairs of Europe, Central America, Asia, and Africa. American spooks were active in much of the Middle East, especially in Iran, where during the late summer of 1953 they achieved what they—dubiously—deemed one of their signal successes.

Two months earlier, Henderson had traveled to Washington to apprise the Eisenhower administration of the latest developments in Iran. He met with most of the administration’s major foreign-policy players. The Dulles brothers—Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA chief Allen Dulles—headed the list, which also included the secretary of defense, Charles Wilson, and a variety of assistant secretaries and other middleweights. The CIA brought in Kermit Roosevelt, the intelligence agency’s top hand for the Middle East, to explain a plan—originally devised by the British and still requiring London’s cooperation—for the overthrow of Mossadeq and the consolidation of Pahlavi’s power. The plan called for a preemptive move by the shah to fire Mossadeq and replace him as prime minister with Fazlollah Zahedi, a prominent army general who until recently had been a Mossadeq ally. Roosevelt couldn’t give very many details of the plan, since much would depend on circumstances in Iran at the moment of execution. But, as befit the grandson of Rough Rider Teddy, he was confident of making the scheme work.

John Foster Dulles polled the assembled group to determine their reactions to the scheme. None opposed it, although some expressed greater enthusiasm than others. Most took the view that while the United States shouldn’t gratuitously intervene in the affairs of other countries, in this case American security might depend on such intervention. Mossadeq, through inadvertence and incompetence, was leading Iran down a road that ran dangerously close to Moscow. Many Iranians already blamed the United States for intervening; many of the rest blamed the United States for not intervening, for failing to support whichever faction in Iran the blamers belonged to. From the perspective of the United States government, it was a damned-if-we-do, damned-if-we-don’t business. Washington ought at least to get some good out of all the blaming—such as a more stable government than Mossadeq’s.

The anti-Mossadeq plan, denoted Operation Ajax, succeeded, though not without a few hitches. Mossadeq refused to be fired, arresting the messenger who delivered his dismissal notice and rallying his supporters in the streets. The shah got scared and fled the country, despite some spine-stiffening words from American General Norman Schwarzkopf, formerly adviser to the Iranian gendarmerie (and father of the hero of the Persian Gulf War of 1991). Roosevelt organized counter-riots to Mossadeq’s riots by freely dispensing money among rowdies from the slums of south Tehran. Officers loyal to General Zahedi sent tanks into the streets, and after several tense hours,

⁶Henderson to Acheson, Aug. 3, 1992, *ibid.*

the tide shifted in favor of the shah. The royalists captured Mossadeq, and the shah returned in triumph.

To the Eisenhower administration, the outcome of the operation seemed a victory for the administration's foreign policy, and for American interests in the Middle East. By timely action, the United States had prevented the takeover of Iran by elements unfriendly to the Free World—elements, moreover, that probably couldn't have resisted Moscow's expansionist pressures. The administration didn't acknowledge the American role in the anti-Mossadeq coup; Washington conspicuously congratulated the shah and the Iranian people for saving themselves and their country from a grim fate.

Some Iranians shared this interpretation of events, at least in outline. By the time of the coup of August 1953, Mossadeq's popularity had eroded drastically. Had it not, the CIA's scheme would have failed—as Roosevelt himself admitted afterward. A sizable portion of the Iranian people greeted the prime minister's removal with relief, as betokening an end to the economic distress and political turmoil of the previous few years.

To a significant group within Iran, though, the American role in the coup—which was no secret to Iranians, however little most Americans knew about it—seemed simply an extension of foreign domination of Iranian affairs. When Washington brokered a settlement of the oil dispute between Britain and Iran, in the process forcing the Anglo-Iranian company to grant American firms a share in Iran's oil business, and began sending large amounts of American aid to the shah, whose government grew increasingly repressive with passing time, the United States replaced Britain as the object of Iranian nationalists' hatred and xenophobia. Together, the shah and several American presidential administrations kept a lid on Iranian dissatisfaction for a quarter century. But the tighter they kept the lid, the more the pressure underneath it built.

3. FROM MEDO TO THE BAGHDAD PACT

Strategically speaking, the Middle East matters to the West for two principal reasons. One reason, obviously, is oil. The second, of longer standing, is location. From at least Roman days, the Middle East controlled the trade routes to the Indies; although Vasco da Gama's circumnavigation of Africa in the late fifteenth century opened an alter-

native route, the building of the Suez Canal three hundred years later restored the Middle East to transportation preeminence. The canal had been operating barely a decade before the British decided they needed to occupy Egypt to assure their easy access to India. The occupation began, as occupations almost always do, as a temporary solution to an immediate problem (in this case, unrest in Alexandria and its vicinity); it continued, as occupations often do, long after the original problem had disappeared. British troops remained in Egypt in the early 1950s. If and how long they would stay, and under what terms, were subjects of acrimonious negotiations between London and the Egyptian government, and the cause of violent skirmishes between Egyptian demonstrators and the British soldiers.

The United States entered the picture from two directions. First, Washington saw Egypt as a key to a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, without which peace and stability would never come to the Middle East. If the Egyptians, perhaps with enticements from Washington, could learn to live with the Israelis, the inhabitants of the smaller Arab states might manage the trick as well. Second, Egypt seemed a likely candidate for membership in a regional alliance against Soviet expansion. Again, as the most prominent of the Arab states, Egypt could set an example for other countries to follow. Here Egypt's location mattered particularly, for whichever side in the Cold War gained Egypt's cooperation would gain control of the Suez Canal. In recognition of Egypt's geostrategic significance, the British had constructed a large military base in the Egyptian desert near the canal; the future of this Suez base constituted the chief haggling point in the ongoing Anglo-Egyptian negotiations.

American leaders saw these two aspects of policy toward Egypt as the front and back of a single coin. An Egypt that received satisfaction from Washington on questions touching Israel would be more likely to cooperate with the United States against the Soviet Union; an Egypt that cooperated against the Soviets would be more likely to receive a favorable hearing in Washington on questions touching Israel.

Through the summer of 1952, the Egyptians didn't get much satisfaction from the United States on the Arab-Israeli question. Although the Truman administration took few active steps on Israel's behalf after extending diplomatic recognition, the Democratic president wasn't about to force the Israelis to convert the 1949 armistice into a peace treaty. A peace treaty may have been impossible at this early date: in Egypt and other Arab states the wounds of the war were

probably too fresh. But, in any event, the sympathetic and Democratic Truman was hardly the person to impose concessions upon the Israelis, and without Israeli concessions—for instance, the surrender of the Negev region, captured in the war, or a decision allowing the Palestinians to return—no Arab government could afford to make peace.

Events in Cairo during the summer of 1952 promised a change. The nature of the change, however, was impossible to determine for some time. In July, a group of Egyptian military officers overthrew King Farouk. The officers, led by General Muhammad Neguib, but inspired by Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser, objected to the monarchy's corruption and backwardness, which had contributed substantially to Egypt's humiliation in the Palestine War. ("Overfed, lazy, and selfish," was how Nasser described his seniors in Farouk's army, adding that they filled their time with "eating, drinking, gambling, carousing, smoking hashish, and engaging in many different forms of corruption and tyranny.") The coup makers also complained at the tardiness of the Egyptian government in ejecting the British from Egypt, and they pledged to accomplish the ejection or go down trying.⁷

Neguib, Nasser, and their colleagues initially looked to the United States for assistance. They knew little about America, but they recalled from their history lessons that the United States had gained its own independence by throwing the British out, and they appealed to this anti-imperialist American heritage. They impressed the American ambassador in Cairo, Lincoln Caffery, with their bona fides, if not their sophistication. "I believe they are well-intentioned, patriotic, and filled with desire to do something for Egypt," Caffery declared. "On the other hand, they are woefully ignorant of matters economic, financial, political, and international." Caffery went on to say that the officers seemed "anxious to learn."⁸

What they were most anxious to learn was whether the United States would help them against the British. London certainly hoped not. In sharp contrast to the situation in Turkey and Greece, where the British had invited the United States to take over from them, and to the situation in Iran, where the British had been happy for Ameri-

can efforts to overthrow Mossadeq (although they weren't so happy with the way the oil settlement turned out), the British sought to keep Egypt as their own bailiwick. In certain respects, British policy was anachronistic and illogical. Egypt's importance to Britain had originated in its geographic relation to colonial India, but India had become independent in 1947. Britain's continuing protectorate over the emirates of the Persian Gulf required, or at least strongly indicated, free passage of British vessels to the territories east of Suez, but free passage didn't demand a British sphere of influence over Egypt. As much as anything, Britain's attempt to hang on in Egypt represented a last gasp of British imperialism. And the gasping only grew more pronounced with the return of Churchill and the Tories to power at the end of 1951.

More than any other British prime minister, Churchill—the son of an English father and an American mother—promoted the Anglo-American "special relationship." What Churchill meant by this term varied from circumstance to circumstance; in the Egyptian case, he intended that Washington stay on the sidelines. The Egyptians would try to play the United States off against Britain, Churchill held. They must not be allowed to succeed. If Washington felt utterly obliged to promise the Egyptians something, such a promise ought to be conditioned on prior Egyptian acceptance of a deal granting Britain generous rights to the Suez military base.

Washington saw things differently. While not wishing to make life difficult for the British, and recognizing Britain's importance to American policy in Europe, the American government preferred not to act as a cat's paw for London in the Middle East. Two considerations underlay this preference. First, by associating too closely with Britain, the United States ran the risk of alienating the people of the Middle East, millions of whom despised the British and their brand of imperialism and were already suspicious of the United States for supporting Israel. Second, and related to the first, the British appeared to be living in an imaginary world, thinking they could hold what they had held for so long. In fact, the world had changed beyond the recognition of hidebound types like Churchill and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. To link the United States to Britain in the Middle East, in the face of the rising tide of Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, would be like boarding the *Titanic* after it hit the iceberg. Ambassador Caffery responded with exasperation to a message from Eden to the Truman administration, urging that the United

⁷Raymond William Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), p. 29.

⁸Cairo to State Department, Aug. 20, 1952, State Department file 774.00, National Archives, Washington.

States adopt a parallel policy of distancing from the Neguib-Nasser group. "London's Foreign Office tactics have been wrong, and over and over I have predicted the consequences," Caffery said (and he had). "They are wrong again."⁹

American officials in Washington didn't disagree with Caffery, but they hesitated to dissociate themselves as far from London as the ambassador would have wished. General Neguib repeatedly approached Caffery with requests for American aid, especially American weapons. The general and his associates didn't suggest that they ought to get something for nothing; they intimated that in exchange for U.S. arms, they would take part in a regional alliance against the Soviet Union. "If you could find a way to let us have 100 tanks," Neguib said, "various doors would be opened, including one leading to Middle Eastern defense."¹⁰

Caffery argued vigorously for approval of this request. He convinced the State Department, which in turn swung the Defense Department into line. But the White House balked. As always, Truman paid greater attention to the concerns of his Jewish constituents and to supporters of Israel generally than the professional diplomats did. The Zionist lobby strongly opposed shipping arms to Egypt, which was formally at war with Israel, and which now was headed by a group of soldiers determined to avenge their disgrace at Israeli hands. The State Department countered with the traditional response of backers of questionable characters: These guys may not be perfect, but they're better than what might follow. Of Neguib, the State Department memoed, "He represents our best chance to establish a relationship of confidence between his country and the West. We must support him if he is to overcome opposition which undoubtedly will increase unless he has something to show for his present reasonable and courageous attitude."¹¹

Truman wouldn't bite. With only a few weeks left in office, the Democratic president chose to leave this contentious issue to his Republican successor. He refused to grant Egypt American weapons, as the State Department and Pentagon recommended, although he did

⁹Cairo to State Department, Sept. 10, 1952, *ibid.*

¹⁰Cairo to State Department, Nov. 25, 1952, State Department file 780.5, National Archives.

¹¹Jernegan to Acheson, Dec. 30, 1952, State Department file 774.5 MSP, National Archives.

permit Egypt to *buy* weapons in the United States. Since Cairo lacked cash, this permission counted for little.

With Eisenhower's assumption of office, the Egyptians had reason to believe they would fare better. Jewish groups meant less to the Republicans than they did to the Democrats, and less to Eisenhower personally than to Truman. Therefore the Republican administration presumably would be less susceptible to pressure from the pro-Israel lobby. In addition, if the Republicans' campaign rhetoric, which promised not merely the "containment" of communism but its "roll-back," could be credited, the Republicans would probably tend to agree with the State Department's argument that anti-Soviet considerations required warming to the Arabs.

Eisenhower refused to leap into anything, though. Before deciding what to do about Egypt, he sent John Foster Dulles to Cairo for talks with Neguib and Nasser. The first thing Dulles learned was that Neguib was losing the internal struggle for control of Egyptian affairs; if the United States wanted to do business with Egypt, it needed to deal with Nasser.

Whether Nasser would deal with the United States was another matter. Nasser found the American claim that Soviet communism posed the primary threat to Egypt's well-being ludicrous. "I can't see myself waking up one morning to find that the Soviet Union is our enemy," he snorted. "They are thousands of miles away from us. We have never had any quarrel with them." Imperialist England, not communist Russia, had long been Egypt's enemy, and still was. "I would become the laughing-stock of my people if I told them they now had an entirely new enemy, many thousands of miles away, and that they must forget about the British enemy occupying their territory. Nobody would take me seriously if I forgot about the British."¹²

Dulles tried to change Nasser's mind, without success. As Dulles related to Eisenhower, the Egyptians had fixated on the British so single-mindedly that they neglected nearly all other threats to their country. "Their emotions are so great that they would rather go down as martyrs than concede," Dulles said. "It is almost impossible to over-emphasize the intensity of this feeling. It may be pathological, but it is a fact."¹³

¹²Mohammed H. Heikal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail* (New York, 1987), p. 39.

¹³*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, 9:25-26.

This fact had important implications for American policy toward the Middle East. The implication of most immediate consequence was a decision by the Eisenhower administration to scrap plans for a regional defensive alliance centered on Egypt. The alliance in question had been called by various names, most recently the Middle East Defense Organization. The idea had originated with the British a few years before, when London suggested a grouping of Britain, Turkey, and Egypt, connected in some fashion to NATO. American officials at first reacted skeptically, wondering whether the Soviet threat to the Middle East warranted the attention and resources required by an organization of this sort. The outbreak of the Korean War had caused Washington to upgrade its threat assessments, but it also increased the reluctance of the Pentagon to stretch American military forces further than they already were. American officials preferred to leave the Middle East as much as possible to the British. In December 1951, the American joint chiefs of staff declared, "The United States considers that the defense of the over-all area of the Middle East is a British strategic responsibility."¹⁴

Developments of the next several months—Britain's inability to achieve a settlement of its oil dispute with Iran, sharper fighting in Egypt between British troops and Egyptian nationalists, Korean War-induced British retrenchment in the Middle East and elsewhere—called this conclusion into question. Paul Nitze, the director of the State Department's policy planning staff, asserted in May 1952 that British resources were "wholly inadequate" to defend the Middle East. And the danger to the region was growing. Nitze noted that the United States and its allies had succeeded in strengthening Turkey and Greece against communism during the late 1940s, that United Nations forces currently were barring communist expansion in Korea, and that Franco-American efforts (French troops, American money) were frustrating the communists in Indochina. "In the Middle East, however," Nitze declared, "the general picture appears to be one of such continuing weakness as to constitute an invitation to a shift in the theater of primary pressure if further Communist progress were to be successfully blocked in other areas."¹⁵

The Middle East Defense Organization, or MEDO, had the aim of remedying this weakness. From the British perspective, it had the ad-

ditional aim of bringing the United States into the Middle East on Britain's terms. The British, with their long experience in the region and their (self-)presumed sensitivity to the subtleties of regional politics, would guide a joint Anglo-American policy, for which the British would furnish the brains, the Americans the muscle. Shortly after returning to office, Churchill visited the United States and requested American help. Speaking to a combined session of Congress, the prime minister described British troops defending the Suez Canal as "servants and guardians of the commerce of the world," and asked the legislators to approve an American force to join in this noble endeavor.

Congress would have nothing to do with Churchill's design. William Langer, one of the last of the Senate's isolationists, had anticipated just such a request, and had requested that the pastor of Boston's Old North Church, the signal post for Paul Revere's mythic ride, hang two lanterns in the belltower. Congressman Walter Judd dismissed Churchill's request with the comment, "Of course he wants to get his country tied as closely as possible to the United States. What other hope has it?" Seventeen lawmakers issued a demand for full disclosure of meetings between Churchill and officials of the Truman administration, claiming a fear of a secret sellout of American interests. (All seventeen were Republicans, suggesting less high-minded motives as well.)¹⁶

Congressional concerns hammered the first set of nails into the coffin of MEDO; more pounding accompanied a change of heart among American strategists. As the Pentagon and the State Department observed Britain's continuing troubles with the Egyptians, the defense officials and diplomats began to wonder whether Egypt would ever make a secure centerpiece for a regional alliance. In addition, though Egypt occupied the crucial position in the Middle East in terms of maritime transportation, it lay behind the likely lines of defense of the oil fields of the Persian Gulf against Soviet encroachment. American leaders, not having grown up immersed in the need to guard the route to India, consistently showed more interest in Persian Gulf oil than in the Suez Canal. The deepening crisis in Iran intensified this interest.

In the summer of 1952, J. Lawton Collins, the army chief of staff, outlined current thinking on the diminishing importance of Egypt in American strategic planning. Collins described the defense of the

¹⁴Joint Chiefs of Staff paper 1887/33, Dec. 28, 1951, Joint Chiefs of Staff records, National Archives.

¹⁵Nitze to Cabell et al., May 26, 1952, *ibid.*

¹⁶*New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1952 and Jan. 10, 1952; *Congressional Record*, 1952, pp. 276–279, 288, 317.

Middle East in terms of two "rings": an inner southern ring comprising Egypt and the countries immediately adjacent, and an outer ring arching from the Turkish Straits across the highlands of Asia Minor through the mountains of Iran and into Pakistan. An Egypt-centered MEDO, Collins said, supposing Egyptian cooperation, might hold the inner ring, but it would encounter great difficulty securing the region beyond. "The real hope," Collins continued, "lies in the defense of the outer ring, which would make use of the mountains." The outer-ring—or "northern-tier"—strategy would make optimal use of the Turks, the toughest and most reliable anticommunist fighters in the region. Most important, it would facilitate a defense of the oil fields of the Persian Gulf. "If we are going to hold Middle Eastern oil," Collins declared, "we will have to hold a line in Iran."

Collins went on to say that the active collaboration of Iran was imperative to the success of the entire endeavor. No matter how tough the Turks were, the Soviets could simply bypass Turkey if Iran fell under their sway. At present—while Mossadeq still held the Iranian premiership—forces antipathetic to the West called the tune in Tehran; but Collins suggested that such might not always be the case. "If we could get a stable government in Iran," the general mused, "one which would talk turkey with the Turks, we might be able to do something."¹⁷

The last nail in MEDO's coffin was driven by Nasser. The Egyptian leader's preoccupation with Britain, and his relative equanimity regarding the Soviet Union, finished off the projected alliance. Dulles returned from his May 1953 visit to Cairo convinced that Washington ought to forget about MEDO; at the same time, he grew increasingly enchanted with the possibilities of an alliance among the northern-tier countries. The secretary of state told Eisenhower that the Turks were champing at the bit, that Syria and Iraq realized the danger communism posed to them and could "probably be induced to join with us," and that Pakistan might easily become "a strong loyal point."

The obvious gap in this lineup was Iran, but the gap needn't always exist. At this moment, the Eisenhower administration's thinking regarding overall security arrangements for the Middle East meshed with its concerns about the internal situation in Iran. By rejecting MEDO, Nasser, in effect, doomed Mossadeq, for Washington now decided that the time had come to give the Iranian prime minister the push he needed to be toppled from power. Dulles told Eisenhow-

¹⁷*Foreign Relations*, 1952, 9:237–247.

er that the northern-tier strategy would probably work—"if we could save Iran." Therefore the "immediate need" of the United States was "to concentrate on changing the situation there."¹⁸

Shortly after this meeting, Dulles and Eisenhower approved the CIA's plan for Mossadeq's ouster; within weeks more, Iran had been "saved." Saving Iran from Mossadeq and the Tudeh turned out to be the easy part; subsequent steps to the northern-tier alliance, which acquired the name Baghdad Pact, were more difficult. The basic trouble was that the prospective members of the pact had little in common besides a desire for Western—especially American—economic and military assistance. Furthermore, American assistance to any country of the area upset at least some of the neighbors. Early in 1954, the United States signed a weapons agreement with Pakistan, which outraged India; the Indians thought—correctly, as events proved—that these weapons would be used not against the Soviet Union or China but against India. Israel and Israel's friends in the United States made a fuss whenever the Eisenhower administration hinted at aid to Arab governments, especially to Iraq, the most outspokenly anti-Zionist of the bunch. Saudi Arabia complained that an American alliance with Iraq would demonstrate Washington's favoritism toward Baghdad's Hashemite clan in the Arab world's dynastic wars. Egypt, not surprisingly, and Syria condemned the Baghdad Pact as a continuation of Western imperialism. Britain, liking the idea of being the big fish in a small pond, didn't press for direct American participation.

As a result of all these factors, the United States never joined the Baghdad alliance. Even so, Washington encouraged the group diplomatically and financially. An American representative—the ubiquitous Loy Henderson—sat on important committees connected to the pact, and Henderson's anticommunist pep talks and his fence mending among the diverse membership became a standard feature of alliance meetings during the mid-1950s.

4. DESCENT TO SUEZ

The Eisenhower administration's writing off of an Egypt-centered MEDO didn't imply writing off Egypt, at least not immediately. For nearly three years after Dulles's meeting with Nasser, the administra-

¹⁸*Foreign Relations*, 1953, 9:379–386.

tion continued to woo the Egyptian leader, seeking the same twin objectives the Truman administration had with Neguib: a peace between the Arabs and Israel, and a strengthening of the Middle East against Soviet expansionism. If Eisenhower's policy differed from Truman's, the difference chiefly involved emphasis. For Truman, Arab acceptance of Israel was a goal worth pursuing for its own sake. For Eisenhower, an Arab-Israeli settlement mattered primarily in the context of the struggle against the Soviet Union.

In most instances, the difference was hardly noticeable, since each president believed that peace in the Middle East would promote stability, which in turn would promote resistance to Soviet adventurism. Occasionally, though, the difference in emphasis produced different policy decisions. Truman almost certainly would have handled the Suez crisis of 1956, when Eisenhower slapped down the Israelis (and the British and the French), differently than his Republican successor did.

The Suez crisis arose out of Washington's (and London's and Paris's and Tel Aviv's) frustration with Nasser. Although Nasser nixed Egypt's participation in MEDO, he didn't rule out the possibility of other forms of cooperation with the United States. As matters happened—and as skeptical Arab-watchers predicted at the time—Nasser's professed interest in cooperation reflected no abiding coincidence of American and Egyptian aims, but rather his desire for American weapons and economic aid. While officials of the Eisenhower administration weren't blind to the possibility of mercenary motives in Cairo, they judged the risks of the situation to be worth taking.

The *diplomatic* risks, that is, were worth taking; the political risks were another issue. As in the runup to the establishment of Israel, the pro-Zionist forces in the United States had their ears to the ground, and every time the State Department and the Pentagon thought about sending aid to Egypt, the Israel lobby found out. At the beginning of 1954, congressional friends of Israel asked about reports that the administration was planning to provide assistance to Cairo. Could such shocking news actually be true? they demanded. Congressman Thomas Pelly, a Republican from Washington, declared that military aid to Egypt would be a "terrible mistake." Mixing metaphors, Pelly told his colleagues in the House of Representatives, "Let us have it clearly in mind that we are dealing with a two-edged sword. A loaded gun is not the thing to hand to someone who you are not sure will use it the way you intend." Democrat Emanuel Celler objected to aid to

Egypt on grounds that the Egyptians refused to let Israeli ships transit the Suez Canal. "Today Egypt arbitrarily excludes Israel from access to the canal," the New York congressman said. "Who knows but that the time may come when Egypt would arbitrarily proscribe any other nation, including the United States, from access?"¹⁹

Eisenhower wasn't about to let the Israel lobby dictate his Middle Eastern policy, but neither did he desire to provoke any unnecessary fights on Capitol Hill. To avoid fisticuffs, the administration devised a program of secret aid to Egypt. The idea of secrecy appealed to Nasser as well: he wanted the American aid, but not the stigma among Arab nationalists of publicly accepting it. In addition, he hoped to avoid the restrictions on use of American aid Congress customarily attached—and would be certain to attach to any aid that conceivably could threaten Israel. Finally, Nasser, who, after all, had come to power as the result of a conspiracy, liked working with the CIA, as opposed to the American embassy in Cairo and the State Department. Nasser hit it off almost at once with the CIA's Kermit Roosevelt. Roosevelt shared many traits of temperament and style with Nasser, and he dealt in cash—some \$3 million of which had already been delivered to Nasser's people.

The mutual desire for discretion between Washington and Cairo prompted the Eisenhower administration to offer Nasser a covert package of aid. At a September 1954 meeting of Eisenhower's top-secret Operations Coordinating Board—the administration's clearing-house for clandestine activities—representatives of the State and Defense departments and the CIA advocated an end run around Congress. The board members recommended telling Nasser that unless he accepted congressional conditions on aid, the administration could not initiate a full-scale military assistance program; however, he should also be told that "in view of our special friendship and our desire to assist his regime to maintain and consolidate itself, we are willing to make available a modest additional amount of economic aid in such a way that it will release dollars for the purchase by Egypt of American military equipment." The board members added, "This would be kept strictly secret."

John Jernegan, the deputy secretary of state for the Middle East, passed this recommendation along to Dulles, with the comment that Nasser could be "very useful to us" if "properly supported and culti-

¹⁹*Congressional Record*, 1954, pp. 410–411, 1674–1675.

vated." Jernegan concluded, "I think a special gesture of this kind is worth trying."²⁰

Dulles thought so too, and the project went forward. Unfortunately for its success, although perhaps fortunately for Eisenhower's good name, the two American officers dispatched to Cairo to make the offer quickly learned that the \$10 million the administration had in mind wouldn't begin to buy what the Egyptians deemed necessary. Nasser's chief of staff handed the two Americans, Colonel H. Alan Gerhardt and Captain Wilbur Eveland, a list of weapons that included bombers, tanks, and heavy artillery, and ran to well over \$100 million. Nasser shortly thereafter made the whole issue moot, however, by indicating that he had changed his mind. He couldn't accept American military aid at this time, secret or otherwise. His government kept secrets badly, and his political enemies would discover any covert program and use it to discredit him for selling out to the Americans. Perhaps later something could be worked out, but not now.

Within a few months, Nasser changed his mind again. Just before the end of 1954, the now-prime minister decided he had things well enough in hand in Cairo to risk accepting American weapons. He still declined to put his signature to the normal agreement covering American military aid, but he said he wouldn't object to writing a personal letter to Eisenhower promising that Egypt would use the aid only for the purposes the United States intended.

By this time, though, the back door for weapons had closed. After the State Department, the Pentagon, and the CIA considered Nasser's counteroffer, Dulles sent a reply explaining that regrettably the administration had already spent the money previously earmarked for Egypt. If the prime minister wished to pursue the question of military aid, he would have to get in line with the leaders of other countries.

The administration's shift on the aid issue was the result of two factors. First, administration officials were feeling increasing heat from the Israel lobby, and they didn't want to be caught trying to help Israel's biggest enemy. On sober reevaluation, even an administration as enamored of covert activities as Eisenhower's had to concede that secret aid to Egypt wouldn't remain secret for long, especially not from the Israelis, who would have every reason to spill the story. The repercussions for the president of being discovered circumventing

Congress on behalf of an unpopular government could well be imagined. (Another Republican president, Ronald Reagan, would learn all about such embarrassment thirty years later, when he was found to be dealing arms to Iran on the sly.)

The second reason for withdrawing the offer of secret aid to Egypt was that the Eisenhower administration sensed weakness on Nasser's part. Administration officials asked themselves why Nasser was now requesting something he had refused earlier, and concluded that he needed the United States' help more than the United States needed him. This being the case, the administration ought to drive a harder bargain than previously contemplated. Among other things, the harder bargain should include concessions by Egypt to Israel, as part of a comprehensive settlement between those two antagonists.

During the first half of 1955, a settlement appeared more essential than ever—but also more difficult. In February, Israeli troops responded to guerrilla activities by attacking an Egyptian base at Gaza, killing thirty Egyptian soldiers. Like the mild shakings that often precede major shocks in earthquake zones, the attack signaled a reintensification of the war that had never formally ended since 1949.

Two other events additionally complicated the picture, by straining relations between the United States and Egypt. In April 1955, Nasser attended the Bandung (in Indonesia) conference of nonaligned nations. By itself, Nasser's identification of Egypt with the neutralist movement wasn't grounds for American condemnation. India's Jawaharlal Nehru and Yugoslavia's Tito were two founders of the neutralist movement, and though Washington occasionally had difficulty with the prima-donnaish Nehru, American policy consistently supported both. But if Nasser's association with the nonaligned gang didn't convict him of a hanging offense, it lost him a few more votes on Capitol Hill, where legislators asked why he wouldn't stand up and be counted in the great struggle against communism. (Many, but not quite so many, asked the same question regarding Nehru and Tito.)

The other crucial event of the period answered the congressional critics' question. In September 1955, Nasser announced a barter agreement between Egypt and Czechoslovakia: Nile cotton for East-bloc arms. Nasser had made no effort to hide the impending deal from Washington. Rumors of an agreement had been surfacing for months, and as early as the previous May, Nasser had told the American ambassador in Cairo that Egypt had a firm commitment from

²⁰*Foreign Relations*, 1952-1954, 9:2305-2306.

Moscow for the weapons. The Eisenhower administration reacted slowly, suspecting a bluff. When it became apparent that the deal would soon be consummated, the administration sought to forestall it. Dulles first sent Kermit Roosevelt, then George Allen, an assistant secretary of state, to Cairo to try to talk Nasser out of going behind the Iron Curtain for weapons.

The thrust of the administration's argument to Nasser was that Egyptian acceptance of Soviet-bloc weapons—on top of Egypt's animosity toward Israel and its embrace of nonalignment in the Cold War—would make it impossible for the administration to ask Congress for aid to Egypt. Dulles had plenty of evidence to support this position. Although Congress had been adjourned at the time of the announcement of the Czech arms deal, the press had taken up the hue and cry against Nasser. *Newsweek* characterized Nasser's activities as "nonsense on the Nile." The *New Republic* asserted that Cairo's "single preoccupation" was "empire," and likened Nasser to Hitler, asking, "Can Egypt be appeased?" *Time* declared that Nasser's decision for Soviet weapons afforded Moscow "a firm and influential hold on an area hitherto dominated by the West."²¹

For all the animosity Nasser was generating, the Eisenhower administration was not quite ready to give up on him. He might be obnoxious and unreliable, but for better or worse he held one of the keys to peace and stability in the Middle East. His acquisition of Czech weapons could easily lead to a regional arms race, which would probably provoke someone—likely Israel—to a preemptive attack. Should that occur, the Western position in the Middle East might collapse in an instant. Other Arabs would appeal to Moscow for help, and the Russians would be only too happy to oblige. All of the United States' efforts since 1945 to keep the Kremlin out of the Middle East would have gone for nothing.

To avert such an outcome, the administration launched a highly confidential diplomatic initiative. In January 1956, Eisenhower sent Robert Anderson, formerly secretary of the navy and more recently deputy secretary of defense, to Cairo to try to persuade Nasser to make peace with Israel. Anderson already had been to the Middle East once: the previous December he had met separately with Nasser and Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to test the possibilities of a settlement. Anderson's efforts had yielded nothing concrete, but

²¹*Newsweek*, June 6, 1955; *New Republic*, April 16, 1956; *Time*, Oct. 10, 1955.

aside from Nasser's refusal to allow him to fly directly between Egypt and Israel, neither had Anderson discovered special cause for pessimism.

Before returning to the Middle East in January, Anderson spoke with Eisenhower and Dulles. The secretary of state proposed a comprehensive package for peace, including American diplomatic support for Egypt against such Arab rivals as Iraq (Dulles conceded that this part of the package would require particular delicacy, on account of the United States' indirect links to the Iraqis via the Baghdad Pact), massive amounts of American aid to develop the Egyptian economy, and American assistance in resettling the Palestinian refugees in countries other than Israel. On the last point, regarding the Palestinians, Dulles admitted that a solution wouldn't come easily. But, like Franklin Roosevelt before him, Dulles had great confidence in the power of American dollars. "Money," Dulles said, would "deal basically with the problem of the refugees."²²

Robert Anderson departed shortly for the Middle East. For much of the next two months, he shuttled back and forth between Cairo and Jerusalem, stopping at Athens or Rome in between to cleanse his shoes of enemy dust. He offered a variety of sweeteners to the package outlined by Dulles, including an American-built bridge over the Gulf of Aqaba between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to remedy Israel's geographical splitting of the Arab world. As an alternative to a bridge, he suggested that Israel grant the Arabs transit rights across the Negev, with an overpass-underpass arrangement that would allow Arabs and Israelis to move without blocking each other. Nasser simply laughed at this last idea. "If an Arab on the upper level had to relieve himself and accidentally hit an Israeli," he mocked, "it would mean war!"

At one point in the discussions, Anderson thought he had secured Nasser's assent to start face-to-face meetings with the Israelis. Anderson hurried from the room to cable the good news to Washington. As matters turned out, though, Nasser had found Anderson's Texas accent and idiom incomprehensible, and in nodding what Anderson interpreted as agreement, the prime minister was merely trying to be polite. When Anderson left the room, Nasser asked Kermit Roosevelt, also present, what in the world Anderson had been talking

²²Memo of conversation, Jan. 11, 1956, records of the Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kan.

about. Roosevelt replied that Anderson thought Nasser had promised to meet with Ben-Gurion personally. Nasser was flabbergasted. "I could never do that," Nasser said. "I'd be assassinated!" (The fate Nasser described later befell his successor, Anwar Sadat, and for the same reason.)²³

The Anderson mission failed, and after it did the Eisenhower administration essentially gave up on Nasser. Eisenhower complained that Nasser had proved to be "a complete stumbling block" to peace in the Middle East. "He wants to be the most popular man in the Arab world," the president said, ascribing to Nasser's thirst for popularity his "extremist" views regarding Israel and what Eisenhower deemed Nasser's refusal to take any step that would open him to criticism on any question touching Arab nationalism.²⁴

Previously the Eisenhower administration had sought to cultivate Nasser; now it opposed him. The motivation behind the policy shift was partly political, to counter the criticism that was building in Congress and across the United States regarding the administration's easy treatment of Nasser, and partly based on Cold War considerations, to demonstrate to other would-be neutralists that Washington wouldn't let itself be played off against Moscow. Dulles summarized administration opinion on the second point by saying that the United States must "let Colonel Nasser realize that he cannot cooperate as he is doing with the Soviet Union and at the same time enjoy most-favored-nation treatment from the United States."²⁵

The principal device for registering American disapproval of Nasser's policy was the suspension of American aid. More precisely, since the United States at this time was supplying Egypt with little aid, disapproval entailed withdrawing offers of future assistance. The biggest package on offer, and therefore the two-by-four most likely to gain Nasser's attention, involved an Egyptian project for a new dam at Aswan on the Nile River. For several years, Washington, working through the World Bank, had been preparing feasibility studies for the Aswan project, which, if all went as planned, would provide irrigation water for hundreds of thousands of acres of otherwise arid Egyptian land, and millions of watts of electricity for Egyptian facto-

²³H. W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism* (New York, 1989), pp. 261–262.

²⁴Entry for March 13, 1956, Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York, 1981), p. 319.

²⁵Dulles to Eisenhower, March 28, 1956, Eisenhower papers, Eisenhower Library.

ries, shops, and homes. Nasser's political rise had occurred just as the engineers were drawing up blueprints, and the project became the centerpiece of his program to bring the Egyptian masses into the twentieth century.

For the Eisenhower administration, the Aswan Dam had initially seemed a good bet. It would show American support for Nasser and for Egypt in a manner that even the most suspicious supporters of Israel would have trouble objecting to—a dam was hardly an offensive weapon. It would demonstrate American interest in humanitarian projects, thereby deflecting criticism that the United States was interested only in military alliances. And it would mix American money with money from other countries, chiefly Britain, in such a way that opponents of foreign aid couldn't say that the rest of the Free World was letting Uncle Sam carry the burden alone again.

In fact, so good did the Aswan bet seem that for a time the administration went to great lengths defending it. In January 1956, while Robert Anderson was in Cairo, the administration sent Herbert Hoover, Jr., to Capitol Hill to speak on behalf of the dam project. In several hours of testimony, the undersecretary of state explained how the dam would more than pay back, in terms of regional stability and good will, the \$56 million the administration proposed to give the Egyptians and the several hundred millions it proposed to lend them. Hoover's interlocutors expressed doubt, wondering what political conditions the administration intended to attach to the money. They suggested requiring a promise by Nasser not to get in any deeper with Moscow. Hoover answered that conditions would probably backfire, in that the Egyptians were very touchy about anything that seemed to infringe on their sovereignty. On the whole, the reception Hoover received indicated that the administration might get the money it wanted for Egypt, but not without a fight.

After Nasser's refusal of Robert Anderson's offers, the administration decided it didn't want to make the fight. Backing away from the Aswan package it had already put on the table might have been embarrassing had Nasser not persisted in the kind of behavior that made him a handy villain for American legislators. In May 1956, Nasser announced that Egypt would extend diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China, which the United States was trying to isolate. In June, he celebrated the final evacuation of British troops from Egypt—London and Cairo had finally come to terms, basically Egypt's, regarding the Suez base—with a visit from the Soviet foreign minister.

By the summer of 1956, Nasser had become a target for all manner of critics: Israel's partisans, for the usual reasons; anti-Soviet conservatives, for his cozying up to the Kremlin; American budget balancers, for his wanting to spend lots of American money; and, not insignificantly, American cotton growers, for the possibility that the Aswan Dam would help Egypt's farmers undercut American producers.

Things reached such a pass that the administration might have felt compelled to pull back from the Aswan project even if it had still wanted to be friendly to Nasser. The fact that it no longer did simply made reneging easier. On July 19, Dulles summoned the Egyptian ambassador and informed him that the United States government had decided to withdraw its offer of financial assistance for the Aswan Dam.

5. HELL BREAKS LOOSE, IN STAGES

The American decision struck Egypt hard. "This is not a withdrawal; it is an attack on the regime," Nasser declared. In his most bitter criticism of the United States yet, the Egyptian president (his new office following recent election) told American leaders, "Drop dead of your fury, for you will never be able to dictate to Egypt!" He added, "We will not allow the domination of force and the dollar."²⁶

Two days later, Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. This move killed two birds at once: it enhanced Egyptian self-esteem (and Nasser's own political position), since Egypt would now control the operation of this vital waterway; and it would provide the now-needed funding for the Aswan Dam, since the canal annually brought in around \$100 million in tolls.

Nasser's move upset the Eisenhower administration, but it absolutely infuriated the British. Anthony Eden, prime minister following Churchill's belated retirement, immediately began speaking of the necessity for strong measures to undo Nasser's reprehensible deed. Eden ordered a freeze on Egyptian assets in British banks and a ban on shipments of British weapons to Egypt, and he conspicuously increased the British military presence in the eastern Mediterranean. In addition, he wrote a letter to Eisenhower, informing the president that London was contemplating still stronger measures. "My colleagues and I are convinced that we must be ready, in the last resort,

²⁶Brands, *Specter*, p. 273.

to use force to bring Nasser to his senses," Eden said. "For our part, we are prepared to do so. I have this morning instructed our Chiefs of Staff to prepare a military plan accordingly."²⁷

Some American officials thought Eden had the right idea. Nathan Twining, Eisenhower's air force chief of staff, described the Egyptian seizure of the canal as "militarily unacceptable" and asserted that the United States should adopt measures to get the canal back under friendly and responsible control. Two days later, the American joint chiefs of staff advocated contingency planning for an American military response. "Timeliness in effecting this action," the chiefs said, "is essential."²⁸

Eisenhower didn't at this stage rule out the use of force, but neither did he desire to encourage the British to do anything rash. After receiving Eden's bellicose note, the president sent Robert Murphy, his most experienced diplomatic troubleshooter, to London to calm the British down. When Murphy discovered the extent of British military preparations and the depth of Eden's animosity toward Nasser, he called for reinforcements. John Foster Dulles caught the next plane across the Atlantic, and together the two diplomats managed to persuade the British to count at least to ten before striking. They repeated their performance for the French, who had their own reasons for detesting Nasser. The French especially objected to Nasser's encouragement of an insurgency against the French government of Algeria. Paris seemed nearly as eager as London to slap the Egyptian president; but, for the present, the French government also agreed to stay its hand.

As events subsequently proved, Dulles and Eisenhower didn't give as clear signals to the Europeans as they might have. Part of the problem arose from the fact that the secretary of state and the president looked on Nasser as being almost as threatening as the British and French did. In a briefing of congressional leaders after Dulles's return from Europe, the secretary asserted that fulfillment of Nasser's bloated ambitions, which evidently included control of Middle Eastern oil, would reduce Western Europe to "a state of dependency." Dulles went on say that Nasser had a "Hitlerite" personality. Eisen-

²⁷Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (Boston, 1960), pp. 476-477.

²⁸Twining to Joint Chiefs of Staff, July 29, 1956, *Declassified Documents Reference System* (microfiche), 1978, 369b; Wentworth to Joint Chiefs, July 31, 1956, Joint Chiefs of Staff records.

hower agreed, likening Nasser's public pronouncements to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The president plainly indicated the administration's resolve. "We can't accept an inconclusive outcome leaving Nasser in control," Eisenhower declared. "We do not intend to stand by helplessly and let this one man get away with what he is trying to do."²⁹

Yet the administration determined to exhaust all diplomatic channels before possibly escalating the crisis to the military level. Dulles helped organize an international conference of canal users that met in London in August. Egypt boycotted the conference, which meant that the delegates were mostly wasting their breath. But, as Washington figured things, breath wasted talking was breath not used fighting. After the conference put together a proposal for international operation of the canal, the attending countries appointed a commission to try to sell the proposal to Nasser. The Egyptian president refused to buy, and at the end of September the crisis remained as far from resolution as ever.

Nasser's rejection of the international proposal convinced the British that they had given diplomacy more time than it deserved. They chose to untie the Gordian knot the way Alexander did, with the sword. The French were happy to join, as were the Israelis, who worried about Egypt's access to East-bloc arms and considered this moment of European annoyance an opportunity to smite Nasser before he got too strong. The three governments devised a plan whereby the Israelis would attack Egypt, signaling the British and French to call for a ceasefire. When the Israelis and presumably the invaded Egyptians ignored the ceasefire call, London and Paris would send in planes and troops, ostensibly to protect the Suez Canal. Nasser's fate, and the ultimate disposition of the canal, would be decided on the battlefield, where by then the odds would heavily favor Nasser's foes.

The three conspiring governments went to great lengths to shield their plans from American eyes. Their deception worked, partly because the mobilization the plot required might have been, for all the Americans were able to detect, merely a bluff to scare Nasser. But it was no bluff, and on October 29 Israeli forces invaded the Egyptian Sinai peninsula and headed for the Suez Canal. The following day, on schedule, London and Paris delivered the agreed-upon ultimatum, demanding that shooting stop and the combatants get clear of the canal. The Israelis, after reaching the canal, pulled back ten miles.

²⁹Minutes of meeting, Aug. 12, 1956, Eisenhower papers.

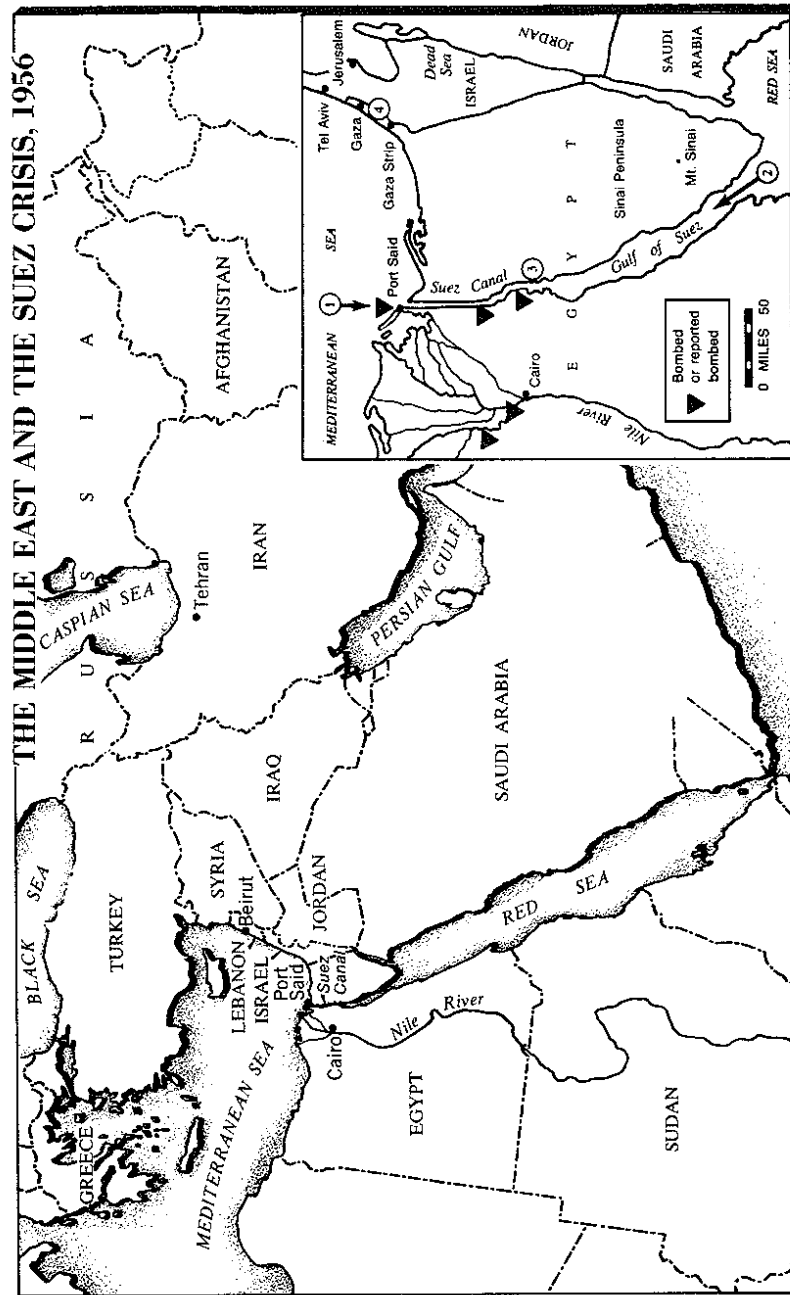
The Egyptians, adopting the view that this was their country and their canal, didn't. On October 31, British and French airplanes began bombing Egyptian targets; a few days later, British and French ground forces landed in Egypt.

The attack on Egypt represented a fundamental miscalculation by the British, who were the prime movers in the operation. Eden evidently believed that although the Eisenhower administration might publicly shake a finger at the use of force to dislodge Nasser, Washington would tolerate a quick and successful strike. To some degree, Eden's miscalculation reflected the prime minister's obsession with Nasser, whom Eden considered to be even more dangerously malign than Eisenhower and Dulles did. To some degree, Eden's error was caused by the confusing signals the American administration had given during the previous weeks. Eisenhower had stated that no one could legally challenge Egypt's right to nationalize the canal company and that a solution to the quarrel must be peaceful; but the British could be forgiven for taking such statements in the context of the president's campaign for reelection, which would culminate in balloting that was just days away. Dulles had adopted a firmer anti-Nasser line. While in London, the secretary of state had told British officials that some means must be found to make Nasser "disgorge" what he was trying to swallow. Eden had noted Dulles's remarks carefully. "These were forthright words," Eden later recalled. "They rang in my ears for months."³⁰

If the Eisenhower administration was sending mixed signals before the attack on Egypt, once the invasion began it left no doubt where it stood. Eisenhower went on television to deplore the use of force. He said that the United States could not insist on one code of conduct for its enemies and another for its friends.

The president might have used such language had the Suez War been the only event commanding international attention at the time, but his words held particular meaning on account of a simultaneous Soviet invasion of Hungary, where a revolution against Soviet control had just broken out. This coincidence of bullying was one reason why the Anglo-French-Israeli assault infuriated Eisenhower: at just the moment when the Kremlin was showing its true imperialist colors, the United States' two closest allies were doing the same thing. American leaders always denied the argument put forward by nonaligned

³⁰Eden, op. cit., p. 487.



countries that there existed a moral equivalence between East and West in the Cold War; but the juxtaposition of the Suez and Hungarian crises provided powerful evidence of just such an equivalence.

Beyond thundering rhetorically against the invasion of Egypt, the Eisenhower administration took diplomatic and economic measures to halt the fighting. At the United Nations, American representatives worked for passage of resolutions designed to restore peace to the Middle East. More coercively, the administration clamped down on Britain's supplies of those two mainstays of modern warfare: money and oil. When the Middle Eastern war triggered a run on the British pound, Eisenhower ordered American treasury officials to sit on their hands; and when London sought to shore up the British currency by a loan from the International Monetary Fund, he directed his treasury secretary to block it. Similarly, when the crisis disrupted Britain's network of oil supplies, the administration sabotaged Britain's efforts to cover the gap with deliveries from western-hemisphere sources.

The combined effect of these actions, which threatened to leave Britain broke and on empty, compelled Eden to back down. On November 6, London suspended the anti-Nasser operation. The French, grumbling, went along, as did the Israelis, who grumbled even louder.

Untangling the combatants required more time. The British and French withdrew from Egypt within several weeks, but the Israelis stayed in Sinai until March of the following year. They retreated only in the face of escalating U.S. diplomatic pressure, and did so with a minimum of grace and a maximum of irritation toward the American government.

* * *

The Suez War was a turning point in American relations with the Middle East. The war discredited Britain and exploded most of what had remained of British prestige and power in the region. Until 1956, the United States had relied on Britain to help keep the Soviet Union out of the area; with Britain now largely removed from the picture, Washington would have to shoulder the bulk of the burden itself.

From the American perspective, circumstances in the Middle East were growing more complicated by the year. Interconnections were developing among the three factors that counted most in American assessments of the region, and these interconnections made dealing with each of the factors more difficult than dealing with them in

isolation would have been. The question of oil had gotten thoroughly mixed up with the question of the Soviet Union; this was what had caused the Eisenhower administration such concern about Mossadeq and Iran, and prompted the administration to turn the CIA loose against the prime minister. The outcome of the Iranian affair—the shah safe on the Peacock Throne, Persian Gulf oil flowing freely to the West (and American companies sharing in the profits)—seemed to be all Washington could hope for in the short term. But the situation required constant watching.

The Suez War symbolized another interconnection: between the issues of Israel and of the Soviet Union. By accepting Soviet-bloc weapons, Nasser had, in effect, invited the Soviets into the Middle East. The Eisenhower administration, after failing to get Nasser to alter his policies toward Israel and toward the Soviet Union, adopted a policy of opposition to Egypt. Washington withdrew its Aswan aid offer; one thing led to another; war resulted. Although the administration took Nasser's side against Britain, France, and Israel, it did so out of no love for Nasser. American officials distrusted Nasser more than ever now that he was cultivating the Kremlin. American policy, always anti-Soviet in the Middle East, soon became effectively anti-Nasser.

Chapter 3

Deeper and Deeper: 1957–1965

1. PICKING UP THE PIECES: THE EISENHOWER DOCTRINE

Nature, said to abhor a vacuum, had nothing on American policy makers during the Cold War. It was a cardinal tenet of American strategic thinking that wherever Western forces suffered a setback, the Soviet Union would seek to gain an advantage. Although Eisenhower's refusal to countenance the British-French-Israeli aggression against Egypt briefly enhanced the United States' reputation in the Middle East, the net result of the Suez War was to diminish Western influence in the region. After Suez, the British lion scared no one. Because, in the opinion of the Eisenhower administration, certain people in the Middle East needed scaring, Washington decided it had to do the job itself.

Dulles explained the situation to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the beginning of 1957. "There is today a vacuum of power as a result of the recent British-French action," Dulles said. Unless the United States found some way to bolster the security of the region, "that critical area will almost certainly be taken over by Soviet communism, with disastrous effects upon our own security position in the world." The secretary of state went on to say that for more than a century, Britain had served as a bulwark against czarist and Soviet ambitions in the Middle East. "That bulwark has been swept away." Dulles concluded, "Only the United States can, I think, save that area and, indeed, save itself from very great peril."¹

¹*Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series), 9:3, 21.