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Anglo-American Relations Between the 1953 Coups and the 1956 Suez Crisis

Aaron F. Psujek

Eastern Illinois University

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Aaron F. Psujek

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Abstract

The Cold War and global politics brought upheaval to the Middle East in the 1950s. The conflict between the United States and Soviet Union shaped the history of the region at the same time it brought war to Korea. Britain's relationship with the U.S., especially in the Middle Eastern theater, was shaped by the Cold War. British intelligence, political, and press members and agents used the tensions to bring the United States in to help them in the various crises that swept the Middle East in the 1950s. This strategy served to bring the two countries closer together in the Middle East in the short term, yet drove long term wedges in the Anglo-American relationship which would erupt in the second half of the 1950s.

The 1953 coup of Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran and the 1956 Suez Crisis are used in this thesis as the lenses examine the changing Anglo-American relationship in the Middle East. These two events serve exceptionally well considering both are crises stemming from nationalization of a resource and both featured very similar actors in key roles such as Anthony Eden, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the Dulles brothers. Ultimately, it is shown that the post-1956 fracturing of the Anglo-American relationship stemmed from the actions of both countries in 1953. The questions raised by American politicians, diplomats, and intelligence agents resonated throughout the decade and the pursuit by British actors of similar goals and the use of similar stratagems proved disastrous for Britain's long-term position in the Middle East.

Anglo-American Relations Between the 1953 Coup and the 1956 Suez Crisis

Aaron Psujek

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Introduction

Two crises in the 1950s ushered in a new era of foreign power in the Middle East and opened the region to the Cold War: the coup of Mohammed Mossadegh, the Prime Minister of Iran, in 1953 and the 1956 Suez Crisis spurred by Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal. Few historians have noted at length the interplay between the Iranian Coup and Suez. Both featured the same or similar actors; in both, Anthony Eden or Winston Churchill's desired to secure British power in the region, and Dwight D. Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and Donald Wilber discussed the advisability of supporting Britain and how the United States "...must somehow try to become senior partners with the British in this area and work in that context."¹ Cold War politics progressed from Iran to Egypt as well while the British obsession with its prestige can be observed through the writings and discussions of second tier politicians (diplomats, parliament and congress members, undersecretaries, and ambassadors) connected to the region.²

The 1953 coup came at the end of a longer process of negotiations that began in 1951 with Mohammad Mossadegh's nationalization of the oil industry in Iran. This longer oil nationalization crisis featured many attempts at a settlement largely spearheaded by the United States. However, all failed given both British and Iranian intransigence. In late 1952 and early 1953 British intelligence agents, primarily Montague Woodhouse, approached both the Truman and incoming Eisenhower administrations about spurring a change in Tehran. 1956 saw another nationalization crisis wrack the Middle East with Egyptian President Nasser's seizure of the Suez

¹ Everett Gleason, March 11, 1953; US Department of State; *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter: *FRUS*), *Iran, 1952-1954* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), X, 712.

² For this thesis, prestige has two interrelated aspects. The international standing of one nation in relation to others and the myths, symbols, concessions, and powers that grant certain nations greater authority than others. Particularly, in these cases, the ability for Britain and the United States to interfere in, if not outright dominate, aspects of the Iranian and Egyptian governments.

Canal. Early in 1956, however, both Britain and the United States understood that this crisis could not be solved with subterfuge and spent most of the second half of that year looking for a solution. Eden and his peers became frustrated with an uncompromising Nasser and an American policy they considered weak and increasingly anti-British. For its part, the Eisenhower administration considered Eden's policy brash and unyielding. When Eden conspired with the French and Israeli governments to create an excuse for British intrusion in the nation, Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles worked against the invasion rather than assist the British.

One can view the relationship between Anglo-American policies in 1953 and 1956 in two different, interconnected ways; first: rising Cold War tensions in the region and the evolution of the Cold War into a global conflict; second: the role that collapsing British prestige played in diplomacy and discussions on both sides of the Atlantic. The continuing strategies employed by British personnel between Iran and Suez secured American assistance in the short term yet drove a wedge between the allies that exploded with the British invasion of the canal base. During the Iranian crisis British political and intelligence officials, such as Sir Francis Shepherd and the MI6's Montague Woodhouse, took advantage of the Cold War in order to procure American support and determine British action in Iran. During the Suez crisis, on the other hand, when British leadership pushed the American ambassador Winthrop Aldrich and President Eisenhower even more forcefully on Cold War issues, their actions had the opposite effect. The British did not receive American support for the invasion of the Suez Canal base; rather, Washington actually worked against London's attack. These tensions ultimately led to John Foster Dulles' conclusion in October 1956 that "...this is a declaration of independence for the first time that

[Britain and France] cannot count upon us to engage in policies of [imperialist intent]."³

Similarly, the end of the Korean War and the far more overt Soviet support for Egypt during 1956 highlights the changed world environment between Iran and Suez. British prestige also played a defining role in the outcome of both crises. A close reading of discussions from both the United States and Britain about British influence and ability to stabilize the Middle East show that while the Eisenhower administration saw Britain's standing collapse with the Cold War growing in the Middle East, old status quos were questioned and a new confidence in America's own position in the region emerged.

Three key components featured in both events: the words and actions of politicians, intelligence agents, and the press. In this thesis, I examine discussions both between and inside each nation's government. Parliamentary debates highlight the difficulties within Britain and showcase the reports of those on the spot in the Middle East filtering up. Especially prominent in 1953, the conclusions of Donald Wilber and other American intelligence agents following the Iranian coup find American officers questioning the political status quo in the Middle East. Politicians and intelligence officers such as Shepherd, John Walker, George Middleton, Aldrich, and Wilber highlight the changing Anglo-American relationship within the Middle East and their actions can show us how dynamics shifted from 1953 to 1956.

The press provides a snapshot of how the British and American governments sought to understand the public reaction. Newspaper articles also show how assumptions about Iranian and Egyptian culture moved across the Atlantic. The chapters that follow draw from *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *London Times*. Especially in 1956, the press, or more

³ Richard Nixon to John Foster Dulles, October 31, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 884.

specifically how Washington and London understood the press, factored directly into decision making. Roger Makin's reports to Anthony Eden on the American press show the British understanding of the American public and Eisenhower's position during Suez. The American press underwent a dramatic change in the early 1950s: during the Iranian oil crisis, it adopted British stereotypes of Iranians and Mossadegh. The reactions to the Iranian oil crisis, seen in both press sources and internal political discussions, easily fit into what Edward Said calls a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the orient and (most of the time) the occident," and his process of Orientalism.⁴ However, as will be shown the same cannot be said about the Suez Crisis.

Through examining the discourse between intelligence agents, politicians, ambassadors, and journalists one can see the power shifts that began in Iran and emanated throughout the Middle East. The years between 1953 and 1956 witnessed broad changes felt not just by the elites of Britain, the United States, Iran, and Egypt but, as this thesis shows, resonated deeply in the discourse of intelligence and political officers as well as in the way that journalists reported on the region. I do not seek to offer a grand theory or model that governed international and regional relations. Rather, I deeply examine the sources left by intelligence agencies, political actors, and news reports that provides diverse evidence for the shifts that took place at this time.

At its core, my research suggests Great Britain stood desperate to maintain its prestige and economic footing in both crises. In both Iran and Egypt, the British understood America as essential in their defense of the Middle East. In order to cultivate U.S. support the British used a variety of tactics, most commonly overblown appeals for solidarity in the face of Soviet encroachment as well as their own standing as the traditional western power in the region. These

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 2.

arguments solidified the Anglo-American alliance in 1953 yet also highlighted the cracks that were appearing in the relationship. In 1956, on the other hand, the Americans disparaged these same strategies. This led to a sudden and violent, although short term, Anglo-American break in the Middle East. In the long term this cast the United States as the dominant member of that relationship in the region.

There exists a distinct historiography for both the Iranian oil crisis and the Suez Crisis. The most readily discussed motive for both concerns the economic problems faced by the United States and Britain. The United States had few economic entanglements in the Middle East in both 1953 and 1956. While America became more enmeshed in Middle Eastern oil during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations this does not provide enough of an explanation for American decision making.

In the historiography of the Iran coup as the hypothesis first posited by Kermit Roosevelt, the primary CIA agent in Tehran during the Coup in 1953, that suggests a paradigm shift between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations with the new Republican president offering an immediate change as he entered office in 1953 still dominates. Mostafa T. Zabrani continues the focus on the Eisenhower administration, "as seen by Mossadeq and his National Front Party, the chief issue was Iran's right to nationalize a British oil giant that held exclusive right to drilling and selling the countries petroleum. To the incoming Eisenhower administration in Washington, something very different was at stake – a possible Soviet takeover in Tehran."⁵ Ervand Abrahamian also sees the importance in Eisenhower's election. "British hopes for a coup received a major boost with Eisenhower's election in November 1952. The new administration,

⁵ Mostafa T. Zahrani, "The Coup that Changed the Middle East: Mossadeq v. the CIA in Retrospect," *World Policy Journal*, 19, no. 2 (2002): 93.

unlike its predecessor, showed no compunction in overthrowing governments, nor in being identified with the oil companies."⁶ The above works characterize Eisenhower as a president more ready and able to precipitate intervention than Truman. The policies pursued by Eisenhower provided a clean break from those of Truman. This paradigm shift model downplays the similarities between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations: the actions of Truman's administration created the political context that Eisenhower stepped into, such as the reliance on Britain to maintain a stable Middle East and early concerns about Britain's abilities.

Steve Marsh argues against a strong divide between the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. He concludes that while there were, of course, differences between the two presidents, Eisenhower inherited a multifaceted political, military, and economic crisis and continued walking the same path that Truman had already begun to tread. "Eisenhower inherited an Iranian policy that had become increasingly assertive through 1952 but that was fast exhausting options...His administration continued Truman's policy almost seamlessly, giving Mossadeq every opportunity to conclude a reasonable negotiated settlement or to demonstrate publically his unwillingness/inability to do so."⁷ Under Marsh's model, divisions between the western allies stemmed both from a continuation of London's strategies aimed at gaining Washington's support and a changing American perspective of the Middle East. This changing perspective began with Truman in the early 1950s and continued, indeed expanded, under Eisenhower. These events ultimately led to the expansion of American military, political, and economic presence in the region. Marsh, however, halts his analysis in 1953. He acknowledges that the Suez Crisis marks a turning point in the process of American power supplanting British foreign authority in the Middle East. However, his arguments leave open the need for a more

⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, "The 1953 Coup in Iran," *Science and Society* 65, no. 2 (2001): 197.

⁷ Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 189.

comprehensive view of the connection between 1953 and 1956. Just as the roots of Eisenhower's decision to execute the coup of Mossadegh lie with Truman and before, so too do the origins of American and British decisions during the Suez Crisis lie with the oil nationalization crisis.

Like the Coup of 1953, the Suez Crisis has a distinct historiography. Two analytical traditions follow the crisis in general and Anthony Eden in particular. First, Elizabeth Monroe's examination of the demise of the British Empire in her seminal *Britain's Moment in the Middle East* situates the crisis within a broader imperial context, arguing that it represented Britain's last gasp of imperialism and thus "an accumulation of emotions long pent up burst forth as soon as alien hands touched that sacred cow, the Suez Canal."⁸ Monroe casts Eden as a frustrated leader involved in backroom politics and shady dealings, looking to prevent Britain's empire from slipping between his fingers. A number of historians follow her lead in both her representation of Suez and of Anthony Eden, including Dennis Judd and, to some extent, William Roger Louis.⁹

Keith Kyle's massive, important *Suez* eschews a wider angle of the entire British Empire in favor of a case study examination of crisis in Egypt. While he does not challenge Monroe's work and also sees the crisis in 1956 as emblematic of a dying British Empire in the Middle East, his far narrower context accentuates his analysis of political actors like Eden. Kyle situates Eden in battles of will rather than follows Monroe's lead and paint the British Prime Minister as a leader overcome by emotion.¹⁰ These confrontations existed between Eden and a variety of different politicians and diplomats, most prominently that of Eden versus John Foster Dulles and Nasser. In regards to the Eden-Dulles relationship particularly, Kyle argues "Dulles relations

⁸ Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1971* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1981), 206.

⁹ Dennis Judd, *Empire* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996); William Roger Louis, *The Ends of British Imperialism* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

¹⁰ Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 18-19, 60-61.

with Eden, one prima donna with another, but of a different type, were to be of critical importance at the time of Suez."¹¹

Both Monroe and Kyle make useful contributions to the historiography in general and this thesis in particular. Monroe situates the Suez Crisis within the global context of Britain's slowly collapsing empire. While she does not directly compare Iran and Suez, her model proves useful for this project. Kyle, on the other hand, points to the importance of relations between Eden and Dulles and their view of the Anglo-American relationship. He argues that problems emerged in 1956 as the debate over which western power had the lead in the Middle East continued, stemming from American Cold War concerns versus Britain's worries over its empire.

After Suez Britain's overwhelming desire...was to get back into good standing with Washington...But the special relationship between the two countries in the Middle East was permanently altered. The pretence that Britain could take the lead was abandoned. Eisenhower and Dulles...brought the United States fully into the Middle East on a strictly 'Cold War' basis, the basis which since the beginning of 1956 Eden had been urging on her.¹²

Kyle rightly points to Eden pushing a Cold War strategy for securing American support. However, this process began at the start of the decade rather than in 1956. As seen from both Steve Marsh's and Keith Kyle's works, Cold War discourse dominated both crises. This thesis will seek to bridge these examinations, showing how and why the Eisenhower administration resolved to aid Britain in Iran yet resisted the Anglo-French-Israeli Suez invasion.

New tensions emerged between Britain and the United States because of the growing Cold War in the Middle East and the crumbling British position. Both President Truman and President Eisenhower paid closer attention to the region and became less convinced in the earlier

¹¹ Ibid, 46.

¹² Ibid, 582.

supposition of leaving the region to the United Kingdom's care.¹³ Cold War containment clashed with the fear of London's assumed willingness to allow the Soviets Northern Iran or other slices of the Middle East, if only to retain hold of Abadan, Iran's Southern oil fields, or other holdings in the region.¹⁴

Similarly, American intelligence officers and politicians alike questioned the British ability to act as the senior partner in the region. The American ambassador to Iran himself, Loy Henderson, complained about the damaging effect that British policies and strategies had on the events leading up to 1953.¹⁵ Donald Wilber, a CIA asset, also wrote a damning essay entitled "Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran" which highlighted the lessons learned by the CIA in the coup. In this paper he complained about the lack of professionalism found in the MI6, the absence of British installations throughout the region, and generally finds his British counterparts to be lacking. Higher up in Washington, Dulles and Eisenhower considered ways to secure primary membership in the Anglo-American relationship in the Middle East without breaking with the British. These discussions coursed through American political and intelligence circles by the end of 1953.

At the same time as American personnel questioned the ability of the British, London continually tried to secure Washington's aid. With its greatest ally's assistance, the UK sought to reassert her dominance on a region of the world that had become wracked with nationalism and resistance to foreign powers. Britain needed American political and military support in the

¹³ The mid to late 1940s featured a number of statements by the United States on the importance of the Middle East. For example, the United States rating its economic concerns with the region as "not particularly outstanding" in 1947, or the 1949 agreement between George McGhee of the United States and Michael Wright of Britain that stated the alignment of British and American interests in the region, effectively situating Britain as the dominant western power in the region until the Suez Crisis. For more information, see Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil* and Kyle, *Suez*.

¹⁴ Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations*, 169-192.

¹⁵ Loy Henderson to Burton L. Berry, January 12, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 1-3150 to 7-3052; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Middle East in order to stave off its collapse in the region. Britain primarily needed the United States because, as a leading world power, support from the United States would grant Britain legitimacy in its actions; legitimacy and support for actions which could easily be construed as imperialistic.

In this aspect as well there too emerged issues, namely distaste on the part of American politicians for old, "nineteenth century" imperialism. Concerns over Britain's imperial past, and allegations of continuing old, outdated practices, emerge from the writing of American personnel. Yet these reservations did not completely interrupt the United States support for Britain in Iran throughout the entire oil crisis.¹⁶ At the same time the cracks in the Anglo-American relationship that would erupt with the Suez Crisis emerged during and because of the coup. It was these cracks, Steve Marsh argues, that proved to be the true legacy of the Iranian oil crisis. The crises of the 1950s strained the Anglo-American "special relationship" to the breaking point.

Britain closely considered American views concerning its imperial past, present, and future. Churchill and, later, Eden included the United States in the defense of the oil fields of Iran and the Suez Canal in order to take advantage of its status as a world power, lessen international pressure, and provide any potential military assistance. The British leadership also wooed Washington through painting both crises as matters of international law and making the Middle East an important arena for America. Britain in fact aided the transformation of the region by emphasizing the Middle East as an important Cold War battlefield. For instance, Montague Woodhouse, an important British intelligence official, argued to American agents that without strong intervention on the part of the Western allies, Iran would fall behind the Iron

¹⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 83-84.

Curtain.¹⁷ This emphasis on the Cold War aligned with the goals of the United States closely, but paradoxically hurt Britain in the end by displaying their weakness in Iran and Egypt.

Sir Francis Shepherd, British ambassador to Iran before his ejection in 1952 who was continually at odds with the Iranian prime minister and also a vehement critic of Mossadegh's policies. In 1951, he warned his government "it is unfortunate that the behavior of the National Front would appear to some extent to be based, whether consciously or not, on the first of the Marxist principles." That is, he framed the debate in terms of communism and anti-communism and suggested that in order for the British to combat this rampant Marxism they needed strong solidarity with the United States which would help secure the British position.¹⁸ Shepherd has unfortunately been overlooked by some within the historiography as he paved the way for future British officials as a supporter of a hard-line approach toward Iran. His successors such as John Walker and George Middleton also discussed Soviet movements and the need, or lack thereof, for American support. These three politicians offer a backbone for the analysis of British policies in Iran considering they acted as a direct link between agents in and around Iran and the British government. Their writings relayed from Tehran to London created and fed into the discussions that took place throughout the British government.

American businesses also pressured Washington and stressed the need to come to the Shah's aid. These business interests may seem like a diversion for this thesis on the surface but offer a useful juxtaposition to British strategies. American businessmen also emphasized the dangers of the Soviet Union and fed into the stereotyping of the Iranian people. Elgin

¹⁷ William Roger Louis, "Britain and the Overthrow of the Mosaddeq Government," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, ed. Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 160.

¹⁸ Francis Shepherd, "Soviet Tactics in Iran," September 1951, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2005), I, pt. V, series B, 89.

Groseclose, an American businessman and a foreigner who served in the Iranian government, in particular characterized the Iranian people as xenophobic, likely to flinch at necessary duty, and emotionally approach situations. The Soviet Union also featured heavily in his and other businessmen's appeals to Washington. Similar ideas can be found in British strategies and in press sources, as mentioned above. However, despite pushing similar views of Iranians and Egyptians, British personnel discussed Soviet movements far more subtly in 1953 and the attention they paid to the Soviet Union did not reek of sensationalism like the businessmen's appeals. By 1956 the British would far more closely mirror those arguments from American business interests in tone and desperation.

In 1953 the United States resolved to come to Britain's aid in Iran despite serious issues raised in the process that refused to dissipate afterwards. By the end of the coup, the United States acted as the primary member in the Anglo-American relationship in practice if not international acknowledgement. Washington's intelligence officers were unimpressed with their British counterparts after the coup. Americans began to push for a change in the status quo and moved toward taking the British spot as the primary Western power in the region.

During the nationalization of the Suez Canal the United States increasingly pressured the United Kingdom to avoid solutions involving force. Like earlier in the decade, Eisenhower ordered his administration, primarily Dulles, to find a compromise between Nasser and a recalcitrant British government. By the end of 1956 Washington refused to assist London with its plan to invade the Suez Canal zone. When the dust settled the invasion failed just as the British Prime Minister expected it to: without American assistance and American support, the

British were forced to retreat.¹⁹ The combined international denouncement, especially from the United States, was too much for the British and its allies, the French and Israelis, to bear.

London's constant warnings to Winthrop Aldrich, the American ambassador to the UK, highlight the differences between Britain and the United States by the time of the Suez Crisis, specifically in terms of the Cold War. British officials repeatedly came to Aldrich preaching the immediate Soviet and Egyptian threats to friendly governments in the region. These warnings Aldrich found alarmist if not outright insincere. In 1956, British Cold War estimations greatly diverged from American. The American ambassador remained doubtful of a peaceful solution and made his concerns quite clear to leading American political officials who shared his views.

The British push to include the Americans in the Baghdad Pact in late 1955 to early 1956 constitutes one of the key strategies to assure Washington's support. The pact was designed as a Middle Eastern defense alliance composed of countries friendly to the West plus Britain and primarily sought to keep the Soviets out of the region while also serving as a major point of contention in the Anglo-Egyptian relationship.²⁰ London saw solidarity with the United States as the most effective deterrent to Soviet intrusion and support for their own power.²¹ Including Washington in the Baghdad Pact would give London the confidence they required for future American support. However, the Americans constantly rejected British proposals, foreshadowing the break that was to come and reflecting the increased confidence they felt in their own dealings within the region.

¹⁹ Kyle, *Suez*; Tony Shaw, *Eden, Suez, and the Mass Media* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996).

²⁰ "United Kingdom Commitments Under the Baghdad Pact," in *Egypt and the Defense of the Middle East* vol. 3 (London: The Stationary Office, 1998), 539.

²¹ *Ibid*, 518.

During the Suez crisis itself Anthony Eden repeatedly appealed to President Eisenhower directly, citing the Anglo-American special relationship and need for unity in the face of nationalism and flagrant disregard for international law. Eisenhower, on the other hand, remained cold in his replies and on one occasion wrote a curt statement concerning the differences between the nationalization of the oil fields at Abadan and the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Like other British strategies, these attempts at invoking the special relationship actually further divided the two nations rather than bringing America's much needed support.

Britain did little to help its own cause, as American newspapers and politicians alike saw debate over the United Kingdom's imperialism take hold in Parliament and throughout the public. The "conservative rebels," a small but vocal group in the parliament who had sympathies throughout the government, argued against Selwyn Lloyd and Eden's imperial practices and advanced a response based on negotiation.²² These debates quickly spread in the UK as different groups sought to use the crisis to their advantage and the British public sagged with ambivalence. The internal element did not escape Eden, who bemoaned the weakness of his British peers and indicates in his memoir that the Americans cited such difficulties during the Suez Crisis.

Britain needed the United States to help buoy its position in the Middle East. At the same time the quest to receive American support changed Washington's position on the importance of the region, its views on Britain and its relationship within the Middle East, and the role of Cold War containment and strategy from Iran to Egypt. In the attempt to save its empire, Britain accidentally introduced its own successor to the Middle East, beginning a process of transformation which would supplant British foreign power with American and the ramifications of which are still felt to this day.

²² Kennet Love, "Britain's Mood Less Angry but Suez Debate Continues," *New York Times*, September 16, 1956, 5.

In the following chapter I will first discuss the Iranian oil crisis and coup. Within that chapter, I will examine how British personnel on the ground in Iran used the Cold War as a strategy of drawing in American assistance. Next, I closely examine the "Overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh" paper written by Donald Wilber following the coup to uncover the cracks that had already begun to form in the Anglo-American alliance. Finally and similarly, I look at British prestige and how American and British personnel understood the Iranian crisis in context of Britain's collapsing prestige in the region.

Secondly, I explore the Suez Crisis. In this chapter as well I begin with an explanation of the role that Britain's use of the Cold War played in determining the outcome of the crisis. However, in order to fully understand the depth of Britain's Cold War tactics, I begin my exploration of this topic in the months leading to the Suez Canal's nationalization. After, I again look at British prestige, and how American leaders resisted Eden's attempts to unite the two nations' standing in the region and, rather than concern themselves with the maintenance of British prestige, actually turn away from the U.K. in order to preserve America's own prestige.

II: The 1953 Coup in Iran

On May 1, 1951 the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh fulfilled his promise and nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC)-controlled oil fields and refining facilities at Abadan. This action followed a 50:50 profit sharing agreement between the Venezuelan government and United States oil interests and a similar agreement in Saudi Arabia. With the move Iran had finally struck back against the long hated oil company.²³ The agreements in Venezuela and Saudi Arabia served as key examples to Mossadegh and the Iranian people that movement internationally was toward a 50:50 split between oil companies and third world governments. The AIOC pushed back and, because of its inflexibility, a 50:50 split was no longer acceptable. Thus, Mossadegh spearheaded a plan for full nationalization. The British Government also responded quickly and worked with the AIOC in order to enact an international boycott of Iranian oil, essentially neutralizing the Iranian economy.²⁴

While the Iranian Prime Minister strove to keep the dispute between AIOC and Iran, the British government quickly rushed to aid the oil company as its primary negotiator.²⁵ London had long viewed the Iranian oil fields as *its* possession rather than that of the oil giant, both because of the inherent strategic value they provided for the nation's global economic and military plans and because the British government operated as a primary stockholder of AIOC. In early negotiations, diplomat Sir Francis Shepherd and others refused to allow Mossadegh the ability to deal with "the former company" alone, without interference from London.

²³ Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 62. Herbert Hoover, incidentally, spearheaded this deal between Venezuela and the US and would use this experience to provide assistance to John Foster Dulles in the Iranian crisis.

²⁴ Mary Ann Heiss, "The International Boycott of Iranian Oil and the Anti-Mosaddeq Coup of 1953," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, ed. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 178.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 108.

The United States participated relatively little in Iranian affairs compared to their British allies.²⁶ This is true despite the U.S. viewing Iran as an important bulwark keeping the Soviet Union out of the region, a threat made all the more real by the Azerbaijan crisis of 1945-1946 and the Czechoslovakia coup of 1948. By 1951 the United States initially held positive views for Mossadegh's ability to resist Soviet intrusion and, despite largely assisting Britain, helped hold back a British invasion in May 1951 and September 1951.²⁷ These positive views of the prime minister quickly diminished, especially after Mossadegh's brief resignation in the summer of 1952. American officials increasingly questioned Mossadegh's ability to hold Iran together and fretted about a possible Tudeh (the Iranian communist party) takeover.²⁸

Mossadegh and the party he led, the National Front, saw the crisis in a far different light than the foreign powers. Instead of interpreting the United States as extending the Cold War into Middle East or seeing the crisis as a matter of British prestige, Iranian officials viewed the movements of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union in the light of the old "Great Game." The Great Game was the indirect conflict between Britain and Russia over who would dominate central Asia. Shepherd noted a shift back to the "Great Game" as the crisis moved from 1951 to 1952 and beyond, stating "as I have previously suggested it would seem the Persians, having lost faith in the prospect of American financial help, are returning to their traditional attitude of holding the balance between Russia and Great Britain."²⁹ However, Iranian fears were also dismissed as accusations of xenophobia from Sir Francis Shepherd and were subsequently discarded by British officials.

²⁶ Mark Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d'Etat against Mossadegh," in *Mohammed Mossadegh*, ed. Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 229.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 230-231.

²⁹ Francis Shepherd, "Soviet Tactics in Iran," September 1951, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2005), I, pt. V, series B: 92.

The Iranian fear of the "Great Game" was not surprising given the infringements on their sovereignty that the 19th to 20th century Anglo-Russian conflict wrought. One can see the Iranian fear of the conflict when Mossadegh emphatically told Loy Henderson "you do not know how evil [the British] are. You do not know how they sully everything they touch."³⁰ No one represented all that Mossadegh hated about the British more than Shepherd, who held quite negative views of the Iranian people. As a primary British politician on the spot, Shepherd served an important function in London's system of control and knowledge of the nation.

Given both Britain and the United States' very real Cold War concerns, little chance existed for the British to agree with dividing Iran between itself and Russia as George Middleton briefly mused and will be discussed more extensively below. One need only look to Russia's refusal to leave Northern Iran after World War II and the subsequent standoff between the UK and U.S. on one side and the USSR on the other to find an example of Britain turning away from the "separate spheres" approach to the nation. That said, there were concerns in Washington about Britain's potential return to its earlier strategy. English officials played into those concerns as well, with George Middleton suggesting to London an abandonment of the northern regions as he felt Soviet takeover an inevitability in Iran. Still, Russian movements did not foreshadow such a disastrous outcome although Francis Shepherd notes that a situation advantageous to the Soviets arose along with the National Front.³¹

The United States involved itself as a mediator during Truman's presidency from an early point in the crisis. A number of failed attempts followed Averell Harriman's unsuccessful mission in July 1951, designed to educate the Iranian government on the troubles of leading an

³⁰ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize* (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 442.

³¹ Shepherd, "Soviet Tactics in Iran," 92.

oil corporation such as the cordial, though vapid, trip by Mossadegh to the United States in October, 1951.³² Mossadegh did his best during this trip to sway Truman against the British and gain both economic and political support in the face of pressure from London. Truman responded by treating Mossadegh with respect but promised little, offering him the presidential room at the Walter Reed hospital to assist with his many ailments. Still, during this trip little progress was made toward a settlement.³³ Similarly, the Harrison mission of 1951 met with resistance from both Britain and Iran leaving the American ambassador, Loy Henderson, and his aides with their hands tied at every turn despite his best efforts to find a solution. Frustration mounted and despite William Warne's (an advisor to Henderson and the director of technical cooperation with Iran) appeals to aid the Iranians, Washington settled on London's plan to overthrow Mossadegh for a more negotiable government.³⁴

Why did Eisenhower sign off on Britain's plan for an overthrow rather than step away from the crisis as a whole? Economic concerns were clearly at play for the United States considering it did have entanglements in the Middle East, such as in Saudi Arabia, despite its admittedly low economic interest in the region as a whole. Safety concerns for American personnel were also cited, although the veracity of these accounts was questioned by Loy Henderson and other members of the U.S. government. However, at the core stood rising American interest in the Middle East, and Iran in particular, as a Cold War battlefield. As will be shown, the reports coming out of Iran through Sir Francis Shepherd and his successors filtered

³² Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 113-117.

³³ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), 129.

³⁴ William Warne to Loy Henderson, July 30, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 1-3150 to 7-3052; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

through London and reflected in discussions taking place in Washington, stoking American Cold War fears.

Iran as a Cold War Battlefield: British Tactics for American Aid

The following sections show the strength of lower level political actors in 1953, as British ambassadors and diplomats in Iran engaged their superiors and American peers in discussion. These discussions then flowed overseas and influenced the political discourse present in Washington. Concerns over Mossadegh's ability, the political atmosphere of Iran and the world over, and the discussions highlighting the need to stand with Britain are evident in the writings and discussions emanating from Washington by 1953.

Stephen Kinzer has suggested that the perception of communist threats stems from strictly economic concerns, yet this was not the case.³⁵ While American oil companies constituted a significant portion of the post-Coup oil organization, as Daniel Yergin points out the United States actually had a glut of oil at this time and struggled to convince those corporations to buy into the consortium led by the Anglo-Iranian after the coup.³⁶ American businessmen continued to influence politicians and bureaucrats in Washington. Businessmen's concerns contributed to the growing American Cold War focus in the Middle East. Clearly, not just Britain used American Cold War ideology as a means to entrench Washington in Iran. Two examples in particular shed light on how corporations sought to push the U.S. toward intervention in Iran. First, Garry Bub's missive to Washington contained references to the danger of the Soviet Union and an offer for the government to utilize his company's contacts and resources in the region. Secondly, Elgin Groseclose issued warnings to Truman's administration

³⁵ Kinzer, 86.

³⁶ Yergin, 470

about the unreliable nature of the Iranian people and also touched on the possibility of Russian action.

Garry Bub wrote to Washington on August 5, 1952 (just after the July uprising following Mossadegh's brief resignation) as an employee and representative of the Stewart-Jordan Company, an advertising agency out of Philadelphia with connections to the Shah of Iran. Bub, with a noticeable lack of subtlety, stated that the Stewart-Jordan Company "offers our services to you and the United States in any capacity you see fit to use them..."³⁷ Stewart-Jordan had clear stakes in the Iranian crisis. Bub states "You, sir, are the greatest advocate of direct talk, protocol be damned. It is with this thought in mind that I write. We, here at this agency, have established, over the past year and a half, a firm friendship with the present regime in Iran."³⁸ Bub declared that his company had grown especially close with the Fatemi brothers soon after Hussein Fatemi was elected to the Iranian Majlis, or parliament. These ties to Iran, although young considering they only started in early 1951, were uniquely strong for an American company.

Bub warned the Truman administration that "the unhealthy anti-American situation now prevailing in Iran is remarkably similar to the anti-American feeling developed the past few years in East Germany and the satellite nations under the guise of nationalism."³⁹ He blamed one culprit: "the 'little men' in the Kremlin are completely responsible..."⁴⁰ Ultimately, he concluded that official negotiations with Mossadegh had been a complete failure and that the Stewart-Jordan Company offered an alternative that could bridge the gap between Washington, London,

³⁷ Garry Bub to Harry Truman, August 5, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 8-252 to 10-1254; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

and Tehran. Mr. Bub's offer received little direct attention but American personnel noted his company's experience in the nation and his warning. Stewart-Jordan's ties to Iran were impossible to deny and reinforced the worldwide Cold War. These themes continued in the much more widely read essay penned by Elgin Groseclose.

Groseclose, who had both written about Iran and served as its Treasure-General in 1943, wrote a far more in depth analysis of the American-Iranian situation on April 7, 1953. While he also emphasized the dangers of the Soviet Union, he added an analysis of the inherently emotional nature of the Persian people. The United States government took these arguments seriously. One of Groseclose's political contacts, Arthur S. Flemming, kicked the letter directly up to the desk of Dulles himself. Washington's interest in Groseclose's opinion is obvious, as he was one of the few Americans with extensive experience in the nation, having served there in economic and political capacities as well as having his own business concerns in the nation.

Groseclose stated that the cause of the crisis did not stem from economic or even political causes. Rather, Iranians were willing to sacrifice their oil industry in order to satisfy an emotional urge to tear down the British. This emotionality stemmed from both their imperial past and also from a spiritual loneliness caused by a "distant...inaccessible God."⁴¹ America had an obligation to involve themselves in the crisis in order to defend their own interests in the nation, stand by their ally in the British, and to resist the Soviet threat.⁴² He states that the two goals of the United States in the proceedings should be to preserve Iranian independence and "revitalize the politico-moral fabric of the Iranian state."⁴³ This revitalization could only be

⁴¹ Elgin Groseclose, "An Outline of An Affirmative Diplomacy in Iran," December 31, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 8-252 to 10-1254; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 1.

⁴² Ibid, 1-2.

⁴³ Ibid, 4.

achieved through "affirming and defending American interests in Iran, notably the missionary enterprise and to obtain for American citizens their customary rights of entry, residence, movement, and occupation."⁴⁴ Finally, "American diplomacy in Iran [should] affirm and re-affirm the American idea is the surest basis of a stable international order."⁴⁵ The Soviet Union acted as the power that had the most want, and ability, to take over Iran politically and obstruct these American goals. This, in large part, stemmed from Russia's inability to control Iranian oil without political domination.⁴⁶ Groseclose did not call for an overthrow of Mossadegh's government. Such an action would move directly against his argument that more respect for the Iranian way of life would help bridge the gap between the thinking of Iran and the United States. Still, his words highlight the growing fears of the American government: the Kremlin's extension into the Middle East.

While Washington may have never seriously considered Stewart-Jordan's offer a feasible one, Bub's tactic of singling out Cold War tensions around the world contrasts with the more subtle British reactions toward Moscow's perceived intrusion into the Middle East. Shepherd's warnings concerning a collapsing American image in Iran and the failure of the seven-year plan seen below showcase this subtlety. Groseclose offered a more balanced picture but still discussed many features of the Iranian national character similarly broadcast from London. He also mirrored Bub's warnings about the dangers of the Soviet Union. The effect that these letters had on American actions in Iran is difficult to track, but they undoubtedly provided more third-party evidence for the need for American action. British actors, such as Monty Woodhouse,

⁴⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 6.

Francis Shepherd, John Walker, and George Middleton, drew upon similar arguments in order to procure American support.

A number of sources elucidate the careful eye that British personnel cast on Soviet movements in and around Iran. This special attention did not emerge in a strictly British context, but also focused on how Washington would react to Soviet actions and how American-Russian developments could help, or hinder, Britain's objectives in Iran. This strategy, and the growing Cold War in general, both drew the western allies closer in the short term and created a crack in the relationship which would erupt during the Suez Crisis. Britain was seen as a necessary ally both to keep the Soviets out of Iran and because of the global Cold War, most readily seen in Korea. However, this same Cold War strategy caused the United States to change its perception of the region and enter it more fully and independently, leaving far less room for their British allies.

Shepherd warned his government of Soviet desires to take Iran immediately prior to the nationalization of the oil industry. He argued for the threat of a communist led violent revolution assisted by the Red Army.⁴⁷ Shepherd went on to discuss that Russian troops were traditionally stationed on or near the northern Iranian border in order to take advantage of any situation that developed in the country.⁴⁸ Finally, he concluded that, while Soviet interest in Iran had begun to wane by early to mid-1951, the National Front and Mossadegh's supporters throughout the country were creating the opening for which the Russians had continually searched. Shepherd wrote, "it is unfortunate that the behavior of the National Front would appear to some extent to be based, whether consciously or not, on the first of the Marxist principles which I quoted at the

⁴⁷ Shepherd, "Soviet Tactics in Iran," 89.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 89.

beginning of this dispatch."⁴⁹ The upcoming nationalization crisis not only highlighted Britain's weakness, but served as a chink in the armor of the entire Western Bloc engaged in a global struggle. So long as the National Front remained, so too did the threat for a Soviet invasion.

Shepherd's warnings show how seriously the British government considered the Soviet threat as he continued to track their movements in the north. Despite his personal biases against the United States, he continually preached solidarity with Washington which his successors would continue. At this early juncture, Shepherd provided the British government invaluable analysis of the American position in Iran and through these reports one can see the intrinsic connection shared by Britain and the United States in the crisis.

Shepherd pointed to a hostility arising between the Iranian people and Americans as the seven-year plan failed and Iran received little American financial aid. "The lack of progress with the seven-year plan combined with the small amount of help received from the United States," he warned "has somewhat embittered the Persian people."⁵⁰ The British ambassador indicated that the United States, long a distant but popular power in Iran, held itself too aloof and thus lost the popularity it historically enjoyed in the nation.⁵¹ This, in turn, led Iranians to drift toward a more traditionally neutral position between Britain and Russia because, he argues, some Iranians feared their nation would serve as ground zero for World War III, as already indicated by their drift back toward a "Great Game" mentality, discussed above. This fear of a neutral Iran would eventually become a fear of Mossadegh favoring the Soviets, even if he himself was not considered a communist. As a report from October 18, 1951 noted, "the policy of neutrality implies not only a diminution of Western, and particularly British, interests and influence in

⁴⁹ Ibid, 89.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 91-92.

⁵¹ This popularity stemmed from the early twentieth century with the actions of Howard Conklin Baskerville in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905.

Persia but the adoption of a friendly attitude toward Russia and a degree of appeasement of that country."⁵²

Shepherd's warnings tied the United States' and Britain's fortunes together. Indeed, he argued that American backing maintained British prestige in Iran. "Any weakening of British strength [after loss of Pakistan and India] on this account is I think held by Persians to have been more than made up by the backing of the United States, even if the latter country is not regarded as having a very strong direct interest in Persia"⁵³ Closeness with the United States seemingly countered any weakness Britain displayed to Iranians through their loss of major foreign holdings.

Shepherd clearly placed great importance on the support of the United States and relayed such messages back to London. Furthermore, Shepherd insisted that in some cases the Iranian perception of the British actually improved with their connection to the United States despite American popularity in Iran slipping away. He implied that the western alliance created such a feeling of revulsion toward America that reactions toward specifically British actions and perceptions of British political wisdom actually improved in the eyes of many Iranians.⁵⁴

Shepherd's communications acted as a useful tool which brought the United States and Britain closer together. His powerful words like "revulsion" and his stress on America's crumbling image in Iran left Britain as the United States' natural ally in the situation. At the same time, Shepherd and others within the British government, as well as American businessmen like Bub above, tried to convince Washington that America was intrinsically tied to the proceedings in Iran. While Shepherd himself appeared to have little direct interaction with

⁵² Shepherd, "Soviet Tactics in Iran," 262.

⁵³ Shepherd, "Soviet Tactics in Iran," 92.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 92.

Washington, as the primary British agent on the ground through the early part of 1952 he held considerable influence over reports and conclusions coming out of Tehran. For example, when in the House of Commons, Mr. Frank Tourney warned in November, 1952 that "it may be that before the space of perhaps 12 months sufficient pressure will have been put on Persia to make her go Communist. If that is so, what hope is there for Eastern Europe?"⁵⁵ He reflected the underlying danger of the Soviet Union repeatedly written about by Shepherd and his successors, John Walker and George Middleton.

The writings of the British ambassador also provide a useful example of how English officials on the ground understood Iranian peoples and culture. British perceptions generally helped craft the American understanding of Iranians during the oil nationalization crisis, although agents and diplomats of the United States were not so beholden to British stereotypes that they lacked the ability to form their own opinions. Shepherd's writings, particularly those near the end of his tenure in Iran, show how British agents depicted Mossadegh as an emotionally unstable leader and the people of Iran incapable of rule without guidance. In other words, orientalist depictions fed into the Cold War fears that were circulating.⁵⁶

Just prior to his ejection in 1952 Shepherd wrote a paper entitled "The Persian Social and Political Scene," designed to educate his successors, as well as those in London, about the nature of the Iranian people and Iran's political life. He began the paper with a declaration Iranians could not be subject to easy generalizations and then proceeds onto facile generalizations. Throughout all of Shepherd's writings, one witnesses his derision of the Iranian people; negativity only reinforced through his noxious dismissal from the nation. For example, in

⁵⁵ House of Commons of the United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 06 November 1952, vol. 507, cc. 300-443, accessed August 2, 2014, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1952/nov/06/foreign-affairs-and-defence#column_341

⁵⁶ Heiss, "The International Boycott of Iranian Oil and the Anti-Mosaddeq Coup of 1953," 178-220.

another paper he writes "the Persians, however, showed a remarkable deficiency in initiative and energy in attaining their own recovery and in taking the necessary measures to apply what plans were made."⁵⁷ Shepherd's ouster stemmed from Mossadegh's assertion that British personnel tampered with Iranian documents and engaged in subterfuge.

Emotional Iranians abound in Shepherd's prose. "Most Persians are introverts. They have strong emotions, have a strong imagination, and they turn to the agreeable side of things." Moreover, "they constantly fail to test their imagination against reality and to subordinate their emotions to reason."⁵⁸ In short, according to Shepherd, Iranians, of course, lack reason. How could Britain hope to settle with a people so unreasonable, whose heads rested permanently in the clouds? Shepherd's Iranians, "are vain and conceited and unwilling to admit themselves in the wrong, but always ready to blame other people and without the proper pride which forbids abuse of one's country before foreigners."⁵⁹ Not only are they emotional and self-centered, they are weak: "they are not notable for courage and this, assisted by the influence of centuries of autocratic government, makes them unwilling to accept responsibility."⁶⁰ Iranians, Shepherd made clear, were barely able to rule their own nation, let alone maintain an international institution like the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Shepherd's ideas were congruent with those of his conservative allies still holding office in Britain who had argued that they had a responsibility to supervise nations like Iran.

Shepherd's image of the Iranian people suggested an intensified danger posed by Soviet intervention. Given that Iranians were unreliable, unreasonable, and dominated by emotion, the Soviet Union could just as easily fill the British role. As Shepherd related to the Shah in January

⁵⁷ Francis Shepherd, "Persia: Internal Conditions and the Prospect for the Future," January 1952, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, III, pt. V, series B, 68.

⁵⁸ Shepherd, "The Persian Social and Political Scene," 170.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 170.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 170.

1952, "the [British consulates] did not intervene in internal affairs but their advice was available when required...If British influence were removed from the provinces what was there left? The Americans were certainly not yet established and the field would be left open to the Russians."⁶¹ Shepherd found that the United States was not ready to go forward alone in Iran, and if they could not replace the British surely the Russians would.

Like Shepherd, The London *Times* pushed an image of a dangerous Mossadegh and a duped Iranian public. *The Times* stressed the "ultra-nationalist" nature of Mossadegh's actions and his arbitrary power. One reporter wrote "even in Persia the personal authority of one man cannot forever be the substitute for a policy."⁶² Another article suggests the conspiratorial Mossadegh would spearhead a plan that would "prepare public opinion for an onslaught in which the Opposition will be pictured as British agents."⁶³ Both Shepherd and the English press then had similar views of Mossadegh and Iranians.

The *New York Times* mirrored this British negative view of Iranians in general and of Mossadegh in particular. Albion Ross', after Mossadegh's brief resignation in 1952, which argues "the collapse of the Mossadegh regime in Iran is the result of an almost fantastic incompetence rather than any serious opposition to Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh's ultra-nationalistic policies."⁶⁴ Another article from the *New York Times* lamented that "lingering hopes that Premier Mohammad Mossadegh might, for the sake of his country, have second thoughts once the dire consequences of his unyielding policy became evident all but vanished this week."⁶⁵ These messages relayed an image of a weak Iranian people and a despotic

⁶¹ Francis Shepherd, "Persia: Internal Conditions and the Prospect for the Future," 63.

⁶² "Power Without Policy," *The Times*, July 2, 1953.

⁶³ "Control of Persian Elections," *The Times*, January 11, 1952.

⁶⁴ Albion Ross, "Mossadegh Led Iran to Financial Dead End," *The New York Times*, July 20, 1952.

⁶⁵ Michael Clark, "Mossadegh of Iran in Messianic Role," *The New York Times*, July, 8, 1951.

Mohammad Mossadegh in the lead up to, and during, the United States souring on Mossadegh in mid-1952, as Gasiorowski had noted. These articles helped feed not only a political but also a public wide decline of American perceptions of Mossadegh.

American political writers occasionally reflected Shepherd's orientalist arguments and took warnings from the press to heart. Ambassador Loy Henderson, for example, wrote on March 6, 1953 concerning the possibility of a native coup, cautioning of the “tendency of most educated Iranians to prefer talk to action combined with incapacity to organize causes us to have considerable doubt for the ability of groups loyal to Shah to stage successful coup at this time.”⁶⁶ Another internal memo from Arthur L. Richards⁶⁷ to Captain Etheridge Grant⁶⁸ dated October 27, 1952 lamented,

the difficulty of holding any sort of conversation with Iranians without subsequent distortion and misrepresentation...This memorandum is not forwarded in any critical spirit but only because it may be of interest to you and any Defense officials sought to determine Nasr Khan's views regarding the possibility of the Iranian Army and specifically Generals Majazi and Zahedi leading an anti-Tudeh (and, incidentally, anti-Mosadeq) movement.⁶⁹

These characterizations of Iranian untrustworthiness and irresponsibility impacted American analysis in the months leading up to the Iranian Coup. Oriental stereotypes fueled American apprehensions about Mossadegh's ability to maintain a stable Iran and also the ability for the Iranians to rid themselves of Mossadegh's problematic ways.

In the British embassy, Shepherd's two successors John Walker and George Middleton continued his same themes following his ejection from Iran. On May 22, 1952, Walker sent to

⁶⁶ Loy Henderson to John Foster Dulles, March 6, 1953; US Department of State; *FRUS, Iran, 1952-1954* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), X, 701.

⁶⁷ Director of the Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs.

⁶⁸ Working out of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

⁶⁹ Etheridge Grant to Arthur Richards, October 27, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 8-252 to 10-1254; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Eden, then foreign secretary, a report covering an alleged oil agreement in the works between the Soviet Union and Iran. He based his report on information from an unnamed "source" which reported that Iran had initiated official talks with the Soviet government in a desperate bid to sell their oil. The Soviets, the source reported, were all too eager to oblige.⁷⁰ However, tensions existed between both parties as the Soviets disagreed with both the price and delivery locations and the Iranians refused to budge on both counts.⁷¹ Still, this news had to have disturbed Britain whose most effective pressures had been economic in nature.⁷² A reliable partner with which to sell that oil may have disrupted their entire strategy.

Walker also tracked similar information the United States embassy had received. He wrote that the Americans received the "essential parts" of the same information he had been given by his source, although he did not delve into what precisely that entailed or whether or not he corresponded with the American embassy concerning the source's revelations.⁷³ He did, however, imply some sort of conversation with the U.S. diplomats: "they said that the Persians were informed some time ago of the implications of the Battle Act (which prohibited U.S. assistance to countries engaged in business with the Soviet Union), and that a copy of the Act has been given to the source, at his request, and its implications explained once again."⁷⁴

By April, 1952, the seventeenth Majlis had convened which would lead to Mossadegh's resignation and the July Uprising of 1952. Loy Henderson worked closely with the British in order to destabilize Mossadegh's position, arguing that Ahmad Qavam provided a more

⁷⁰ John Walker, "Further Details of Soviet-Persian Oil Negotiations," May 22, 1952, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, III, pt. V, series B, 101.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 102.

⁷² Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 111.

⁷³ Walker, "Further Details of Soviet-Persian Oil Negotiations," 102.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 102.

appealing alternative and helped lead to Qavam's abortive government in July.⁷⁵ The Iranians turning to the Soviet Union for aid would have put even further strain on the American-Iranian relationship, regardless of the diplomacy resulting in an actual deal. Walker continued,

The United States Embassy do not yet seem to have reached an agreed view on their attitude towards a possible oil agreement with the Soviet Union, as far as the Battle Act is concerned. The source suggested to them that 500,000 tons of oil a year was not a large amount and that the United States Government might possibly overlook it.⁷⁶

Walker's careful tracking of the American position showed worry over whether or not the United States would take a hard line stance against the Soviet Union. Walker concluded his report stating "the source has told us that Dr. Musaddiq made a similar remark at the last Cabinet Meeting, and this suggestion has probably been put to the Americans to see how they react."⁷⁷ This reflection highlights Mossadegh's gambit playing the two powers off each other.

Woodhouse, a leading British intelligence agent and the man who started inquiring with the American government and CIA about a coup in late 1952, long felt that only joint Anglo-American action could prevent the Soviets from marching south and taking Iran for themselves and sought to take advantage of Mossadegh seemingly tying himself closer to the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ From discussions in November, 1952 with the CIA and the incoming Allen Dulles (who was particularly intrigued with the idea of a coup), Woodhouse pleaded his case and strongly pursued American support on behalf of MI6 and Britain.⁷⁹

Walker's correspondence and Woodhouse's warning correlated closely with an internal memorandum from Washington. In June 1952 the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the Iranian

⁷⁵ Abrahamian, *The Coup*, 135-138.

⁷⁶ Walker, "Further Details of Soviet-Persian Oil Negotiations," 102.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 102.

⁷⁸ Louis, "Britain and the Overthrow of the Mosaddeq Government," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq*, 160.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 160-161.

situation and came to the conclusion that "the United States must maintain the resolute attitude set forth therein in order to enhance the likelihood of maintaining military cooperation between Iran and the United States and of decreasing the possibility of Iran ultimately coming under Soviet domination."⁸⁰ It goes on to state that the allegiance of Iran closely connected to the Anglo-Iranian oil crisis: while Churchill and Mossadegh challenged each other, so too did Iran face an ever greater risk of falling under Soviet domination.⁸¹ The paper concluded that "it would obviously be desirable that this settlement be made on terms which a new Iranian Government, more friendly to the West, could accept without being overthrown [by Soviet instigation]."⁸² Hence, a strong Iranian government was needed in order to resist Soviet domination, which was a government that Mossadegh could not create. While the Joint Chiefs paid little attention to the views of the Shah and civilian government in their estimation, this paper reflected the growing American interest in the Cold War centered in Iran, an interest which would spread to the entire region by 1956 with Suez.

The United States looked to play a more active role in Middle Eastern and Iranian affairs in 1953. At the same time, some British personnel were open to exploiting American-Soviet tensions for their nation's own ends at the expense of their U.S. allies in the region. Mr. Middleton, the chargé d'affaires in Iran and primary diplomatic agent on the spot after Shepherd's removal for allegedly tampering with Iranian government documents, reported to Eden on May 29, 1952 addressing Soviet efforts to stop American military aid from flowing into Iran.⁸³ Middleton stated that the Soviet's "derive the allegation that the Persian Government have put

⁸⁰ Omar Bradley, "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense," June 25, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 1-3150 to 7-3052; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ George Middleton, "Soviet Government Attack on Arrangements for the Supply of American Military Aid to Persia," May 29, 1952, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, III, pt. V, series B, 103.

their army under American control and are thus assisting the United States to realize their plans of aggression against the Soviet Union."⁸⁴ This Soviet action raised tensions between all three nations.

Middleton reported that the hostility came as something of a shock to the British in Tehran, the Iranian government, as well as the Soviet Embassy itself. Given the perceived ambivalence and hands off approach the Soviet's displayed during Shepherd's time, Middleton speculated that "it is possible that the Russians hope that Dr. Musaddiq to excuse himself from the Soviet accusations, will still further whittle away his assurances and thus make it difficult for Congress to approve the supply of [American] military aid."⁸⁵ The Americans, for their part, resolved to stay in their bases until a decision had been made regarding the military mission in Iran.

Middleton's report connected British and American interest in resisting the Soviet Union. "The Soviet Union have watched, not without satisfaction, the Persians nationalize the oil industry and refuse to come to any agreement with AIOC or Her Majesty's Government...But Soviet delight at our own discomfiture will have been largely offset by dismay at the increase of American influence in this country."⁸⁶ He concluded, "what the Soviet Union disliked most of all was that the Americans were being allowed to take our place."⁸⁷ Middleton here anticipated American ascendancy even as far back as 1952 and recognized the United States' growing dominance in Iran. He united the goals of the two western powers by arguing that the Soviet Union effectively worked against both nations' positions in Iran even though the Americans had begun to supersede the British.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 104.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 104.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 104-105.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 105.

Middleton, somewhat paradoxically, also argued that these new Cold War tensions could be manipulated for Britain's benefit. The Soviet attack on the American military mission, he suggested, would be successful. Given the perceived inevitability of Soviet success, he argued,

This *démarche* may however have other consequences not unwelcome from our point of view. It is likely to weaken the position of Dr. Musaddiq and his government; above all, it will remind thinking Persians that they must conduct their foreign policy on two fronts, and that, the fundamentals of Russian-Persian policy being unchanged, they cannot afford to weaken to the point of destruction the influence of the west which traditionally counter-balances Russian pressure. Whether the West appears in British or American guise is on the whole immaterial to the Persians.⁸⁸

Here, Middleton advocates that the British take a page out of the Iranian handbook and play the two great antagonists, the United States and the Soviet Union, off each other. Such diplomacy might have forced the Iranians back into British arms as it would leave the Middle Eastern nation without a friend in the USSR or the U.S. and caught in between both.

As successor to Shepherd in Iran and one of the leading British agents on the ground in Tehran, Middleton's word carried much weight back home in London. However, he tempered his ice cold diplomatic rationalization with warmer words comforting his superiors that he did not intend for the British to leave the Americans in the lurch.

In saying this I should not like it to be thought I should welcome a diminution of American influence in Persia as a condition of the increase of our own (for it is the Americans not we, who are in a position at present to afford Persia the...aid which she undoubtedly needs): rather I suggest that the Persians may well compensate any concessions they make to the Russian representations by equivalent concessions to the West.⁸⁹

Certainly once again connecting British and American interests under the label of the "west" is an odd conclusion based on Middleton's earlier words, in which he advocated the

⁸⁸ Ibid, 105.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 105.

British take advantage of Soviet-American diplomatic troubles. However, given the persistent questions in London over how Truman and, later, Eisenhower viewed the Iranian oil crisis and whether their support extended beyond acting simply as a mediator, it made sense that Middleton would temper his words.⁹⁰

Still, Middleton remained concerned about the Soviets, as seen in his September 1952 report where he stated, "I am inclined to think that the classical pattern of a Nationalist movement being taken over by communists for their own purposes is now becoming more evident here and that we may before long expect some undisguised form of overt co-operation [between the Soviet Union and Tudeh party]."⁹¹ He then warned London that "if [the United States] hesitates or equivocates Persia will in all probability be lost to the West."⁹² Dean Acheson mirrored these views when, in a December dispatch from Washington to London, he argued that Iran teetered on the brink of a full break with the United States as well as Britain. If this occurred "the point of no return would pass in the Iranian situation and that there would remain nothing that the United States and United Kingdom, in concert or individually, could do to save the situation."⁹³

The careful attention to the Soviet threat and the connection of British and American objectives foreshadowed British strategies during the Suez Crisis. The writings of Middleton, John Walker, and Sir Francis Shepherd emphasized the connection shared by Britain and the United States in the face of possible Soviet expansion. While these men had little upper level contact with Washington, they provided the agenda and ground-level evidence necessary for the

⁹⁰ George Middleton to Anthony Eden, September 1952, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, III, pt. V, series B, 166.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 166.

⁹² *Ibid*, 196

⁹³ *Ibid*, 196.

British government to appeal to the Truman and Eisenhower administrations and led to Clement Attlee's firm conclusion, which the cabinet supported, that Britain could not afford a break with a United States of any kind on an issue the magnitude of which they faced in Iran.⁹⁴

The United States had further Cold War concerns beyond those pushed by Britain above; most prominently the Korean War, which caused the United States to focus on the retention of Britain as a powerful ally against the Soviet Union and communism worldwide. While the effect that the Korean War had on the proceedings in Iran extends beyond the scope of this paper, the war exuded a palpable effect on the Iranian oil crisis. Historian Steve Marsh has explored the connection between Korea and Iran. "The globalization and militarization of containment policy following NSC-68⁹⁵ and the outbreak of the Korean War had put enormous demands upon a nation new to global leadership...America still needed help and Britain remained its foremost ally because it contributed more than 40 percent of Europe's NATO defense spending," concludes Marsh.⁹⁶ Korea caused the United States to have a direct and vested interest in protecting British interests worldwide. These interests clearly diminished by 1956 with the Suez Crisis.

Waged from June 1950 to July 1953, the United States sent roughly 350,000 troops to Korea compared to Britain's respectable 20,000. The British presence in Korea was necessary for American objectives, giving the Iranian coup an international dimension. Pragmatically, the Korean War provided the United States a clear reason to stay loyal to the British in Iran. At the same time, it also helped grow the idea of a global Cold War. If Korea had become ravaged by war and communism could not Iran fall to the same fate?

⁹⁴ Louis, "Britain and the Overthrow of the Mosaddeq Government," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq*, 134.

⁹⁵ The American policy of containment is attributed to this document from 1950.

⁹⁶ Marsh, 92.

Certainly the British emphasis of Cold War threats in both the Iranian coup and the Suez Crisis stands as a clear strategy to procure U.S. support. Just because the British utilized these warnings to procure US aid does not mean that these were manufactured threats. The British remained concerned about Soviet movements throughout the crisis and had historic precedent for this concern considering the old Great Game played between Britain and Russia. Despite these similarities, an examination of British and American intelligence in Iran and throughout the Middle East, particularly American reactions to working closely with British agents, shows the stark divisions that existed between the allies.

Intelligence Officers: The Cracks Exposed

Even in 1952 and 1953, with the United States more willing to accept British arguments about situations throughout the Middle East, American politicians and agents at many levels expressed frustration with their British counterparts. The American intelligence community voiced its reservations loudly in Donald Wilber's post-coup internal CIA report "Clandestine Service History, Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952-August 1953." This recently declassified document sheds light on the organization of the coup and the CIA's interpretation of events including lessons learned about operating a large scale operation and dealing with its British colleagues. The frustration leveled at the British as well as the United States' overreliance on foreign intelligence and resources are clear. However, the CIA also expressed admiration and thanks for some of the British support, which often came in defiance of London. While the CIA expressed frustration, this never developed into outright derision.

When the initial coup attempt backfired and faced apparent failure on August 16 and 17, 1953, the CIA reports that British agents stayed on in Nicosia to provide support for their

American counterparts in Tehran. Wilber explained, "At Nicosia the SIS refused to give up hope, and bucked against their own office in London and against the Foreign Office."⁹⁷ This support for the American agents in Tehran, led by Kermit Roosevelt, paid off when later attempts proved to be far more successful and Mossadegh was eventually ousted.

However, even when lauding the British agents for their constant support for the CIA, Wilber still detracted from their contribution. He writes, "while the persistence and apparent faith shown by the SIS station at Nicosia was altogether admirable, it should be remembered that they had nothing to lose if the cause had been pressed to ultimate failure and disclosure."⁹⁸ It is interesting that Wilber should contend that the British have little to lose in the operation given the CIA conducted the coup for their benefit. He appeared to be examining the coup in a narrow perspective with the "anything" referring to the lives of agents, rather than any larger political effects. This statement marks an important lesson from the coup. The American agents, U.S. officials believed, were the ones on the ground sacrificing; the British agents did little more than talk in Cyprus.

The CIA report also indicates that the three way communications necessary with the British agents in Nicosia precipitated much confusion.⁹⁹ This, combined with the generally slow response time between Tehran and Nicosia, led to vital information arriving at the agency's station far slower than expected. While the document is unclear whether the CIA considered the British agents responsible for this poor communication or just an unfortunate fact of clandestine operation, the CIA's disappointment with the professionalism, coverage, and ability of their SIS counterparts reads much clearer.

⁹⁷ Donald Wilber, March, 1954; Central Intelligence Agency; *Clandestine Service History, Overthrow of Premier Mossadegh of Iran, November 1952-August 1953* (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1969), 59.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 59.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 85.

Throughout the course of the operation, members of the Agency were in touch with members of SIS in Washington, Nicosia, London, and Cairo. In all but one of these places, we were on their home ground and, hence, in a position to penetrate their organization, particularly with regard to building up personal histories of its personnel...of greatest interest from an operation point of view was the very limited number of personnel engaged in Middle East operations.¹⁰⁰

Wilber expressed considerable shock on behalf of the CIA and he concluded that the limited British presence in the Middle East was one of the key lessons to emerge from the operation to overthrow Mossadegh. MI6 left the CIA unimpressed, a fact that helps explain the American willingness to disregard the British intelligence network moving forward and rather increase its own presence in the region. Especially when combined with the political pressures exerted by the likes of Loy Henderson who complained about Britain's conclusions about Iran and the Middle East. The very British strategies utilized to bring U.S. support also persuaded Washington to forge their own path in Iran and the Middle East in general.

The shortage of British personnel also pushed the CIA to build its own internal resources. Wilber wrote that "this shortage of personnel was directly reflected in a number of ways which seemed quite surprising at first glance. An example of this is the fact that the representative in Washington had to spend a good part of his time enciphering and deciphering."¹⁰¹ Working with the British resolved the Americans to build their own internal resources that would allow the CIA to operate on a larger, more independent scale in the Middle East. Pragmatically, the British began to appear redundant and far less impressive than the CIA previously estimated in terms of size and ability.

Similarly, the CIA noted tensions between MI6's field offices and London. The same division between the Nicosia station and its headquarters that Wilber previously lauded also highlighted "the existence of friction between SIS headquarters and the station in Nicosia [that]

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 87.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 87-88.

was of interest to us."¹⁰² The CIA appreciated the moral support that it received from Nicosia as London pressured its agents to abandon the operation but the American agency also found the situation unprofessional.

Finally, the SIS shocked the CIA by easily becoming the junior partner in the intelligence relationship. This especially surprised the CIA given British personnel's greater experience in both Iran and the region at large. Wilber stated, "it seemed obvious to Wilber that the British were very pleased at having obtained the active cooperation of the Agency and were determined to do nothing which might jeopardize the US participation."¹⁰³ The British quick acceptance of the United States as the masters of the situation connects to their strategy of making Iran an important arena for the Americans. The United States had to feel invested in the situation and consider the coup central to its strategy in the region. However, Wilber expressed considerable shock over how easily Britain allowed the CIA to take point given that this operation given Britain's far greater experience in the region.

Considering the above reservations that the coup created for the United States about Britain's intelligence infrastructure within the Middle East, as well as the confidence that the coup gave the CIA in its own operatives, cracks had already developed between Washington and London well before the Suez Crisis. Both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations saw problems arising in the Middle East. British power rapidly diminished while the Cold War spread across the globe, U.S. intelligence agents were unimpressed with Britain's own infrastructure, and finally the MI6's rapid acquiescence to American demands allowed the United States to enter the primary role in the intelligence relationship. British insistence on increasing the American presence in the Middle East in order to bolster its own position rapidly proved to

¹⁰² Ibid, 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 87.

be counterproductive by 1956. Still, at the end of 1953 Wilber called for the coordination of Anglo-American interests and actions throughout the world.¹⁰⁴ The Iranian oil crisis and coup exposed the flaws in the relationship, but did not cause an Anglo-American break entirely.

British Prestige: Anglo-American Solidarity and Early Signs of Trouble

Questions of British prestige, its role within the Middle East, and the place of imperialism in the modern world dominated discourse leading to the Anglo-American coup of Mossadegh. Historian Ronald Hyam understands prestige as “power based on reputation, an amalgam of the two, something that has to be acquired by power but can only be retained through reputation.”¹⁰⁵ All governments thus worry about prestige because the estimation of power is a crucial part of state relations, especially states such as Britain, since “concern for prestige is the essence of being a great power.”¹⁰⁶ Churchill and the British government made the retention of this reputation and the legitimacy to act as a dominating power in Iran a key goal in the oil crisis.

The danger Mossadegh's actions posed to British prestige spurred debates within news sources, parliament, and helped influence the American decision to intervene in 1953. However, as will be shown, by 1956 questions over British prestige actually hindered Eisenhower's resolve to assist Eden's government. English Defense Minister Emmanuel Shinwell stated in 1951 “if Persia were allowed to get away with it, Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries would be encouraged to think they could try things on...The next thing might be an attempt to nationalize the Suez Canal.”¹⁰⁷ The connections between the situation in Iran, the Suez Canal, and the Middle East in general were evident long before historians ever studied the two events.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 95.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 130.

¹⁰⁷ Quote from: Yergin, 458.

British politicians almost universally denounced the oil nationalization. However, Britain's eventual solution remained contentious for many in the government. For example, in a parliamentary debate on June 21, 1951, immediately following the nationalization and in the early stages of the crisis, the Labour MP Herbert Morrison stated,

I thought that in some of the speeches to which we have listened honorable members have been casting their minds back to the days of imperialism, and are perhaps thinking that it is possible to do in this modern period what could have been done years ago in the period of imperialist practices. We are not in a period now when we can colonize countries which have reached the stage of self-government.¹⁰⁸

A violent reaction to Mossadegh would not only intrude on the sovereignty of a self-sufficient Iranian government but would recall the Britain's strategies of the 19th to early 20th century. However, instead of embracing these as the "good old days," Morrison argues that Britain no longer had the right to such an intrusion.

Morrison also insisted that Mossadegh and his supporters used the word "nationalization" wrongly: "but I notice today that nobody, as far as I know, has criticized the acceptance of us of the principle of nationalization if it were so pursued by the Persian Government. I may say that the acceptance of the principle of nationalization was also urged by the Government of the United States in this case."¹⁰⁹ The implication read clearly: should the Iranians had followed the proper, legal channels and nationalized the oil responsibly, the British Government would have been more than happy to acquiesce. However, the Iranian actions under Mossadegh constituted little more than theft from a major British company with direct ties to the British Government. So while Morrison called for a movement away from the old school imperialism that some of his peers argued for, he still acknowledged that Iranian actions could not be allowed to stand.

¹⁰⁸ Herbert Morrison, "Parliamentary Debate," June 21, 1951, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, I, pt. V, series B, 216.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 216.

Little chance existed that the British Government would have let go of Abadan and the oil fields of Iran without a fight. Yet Morrison's statements in Parliament still offer a glimpse into the political psyche at the time. Britain faced a changing world and increasing resistance from imperial holdings. The fear was that without changing the way it approached challenges and situations abroad, the UK would surely be left in the dust. This impression was also expressed in Middleton's writings, who stated in September 1952 "I am not suggesting that we abdicate our responsibility [in Iran] but that it must as a matter of urgency be shared with others whose concern in this area is equally vital." Based upon the British arguments above as well as in the particular report itself, Middleton implied that the "others" were the Americans.¹¹⁰

Eden's memoir *Full Circle* does not discuss the Anglo-American role in the coup of Mossadegh yet still provides a sense of the relationship at that time. However, he does ironically write that "the temptation to intervene to reclaim this stolen property must have been strong, but pressure from the United States was vigorous against any such action."¹¹¹ Eden's analysis of the coup is suspect, but the narrative he crafts continues through the Suez Crisis: the British faced increasing resistance in the Middle East from the United States. Despite this narrative, Eden still argues for the "special relationship" that Washington and London shared and, according to Eden, which Ambassador Henderson exemplified.¹¹² Eden eventually absolved the United States somewhat by arguing that the Americans were tremulous about helping since they did not want to be seen pursuing their own commercial interests, an issue upon which Mossadegh increasingly harped and remained evident in the appeals of Bub and Groseclose to Washington.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ George Middleton to Anthony Eden, September 1952, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, 166.

¹¹¹ Eden, 216-217.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 226.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 222.

Of course, much of Eden's analysis of the coup itself can be discarded considering the United States provided the agents facilitating the downfall of Mossadegh. Still, Eden's remarks about the Americans are interesting given the narrative of *Full Circle*, which seeks to put the Anglo-American relationship front and center; a relationship, Eden ultimately concludes, that failed Britain despite their loyalty to America.¹¹⁴

The United States recognized the prestige problem that the British faced with the crisis, a concern that it dismissed in 1956 as a justifiable cause for American intervention in the Suez Canal War. Indeed, in a high level meeting between senior members of Eisenhower's staff on March 4, 1953 Harold Stassen, director of operations for the Foreign Operations Administration, "added that we ought also to try to indicate that it is not an objective of United States policy to liquidate the British Empire"¹¹⁵ Indicating the fear from London that the empire was under attack -- Eisenhower, too, argued for maintaining a strong connection with the British: "it was certainly possible...for the US to do what it thought necessary to do in Iran, but we certainly don't want a break with the British."¹¹⁶ Washington would not risk a break with the British while it was the dominant power in the region and the Cold War was hot in Korea.

While Eisenhower lauded the British as allies, in the same meeting his administration questioned who acted as the senior partner in the relationship and the crisis. This reflecting the same questions being asked by the American intelligence community concerning MI6 and the CIA. In response to Secretary Charles Wilson's question over the ability of the British to operate as the primary member, Dulles responded "[it] has been the case until fairly lately, but that the

¹¹⁴Ibid, 512.

¹¹⁵ Loy Henderson to John Foster Dulles, March 11, 1953; US Department of State; *FRUS, Iran, 1952-1954* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), X, 701.

¹¹⁶ Memorandum of a Discussion, March 4, 1953; US Department of State; *FRUS, Iran, 1952-1954*, X, 697-698.

British had now been thrown out.”¹¹⁷ Dulles acknowledged that the British ejection from Iran changed the Anglo-American relationship. How this new relationship was to take form was an entirely different matter.

Eisenhower's administration quickly acknowledged the powerful position the United States resided regarding Britain's future in the region. “Any proposal that the US purchase Iranian oil at this time would constitute a terrific blow to the British.”¹¹⁸ In the meeting Dulles also reaffirmed the need for the Americans to support the British:

Secretary Dulles went on to say that of course if the British were completely shut out from Iran and from negotiations, it would not probably be difficult to get results from Iran, but the UK was involved deeply in concern for its own prestige, and this was a much more difficult thing to deal with than any mere matter of compensation. It seemed to Secretary Dulles that we must somehow try to become senior partners with the British in this area and work in that context.¹¹⁹

Secretary Wilson agreed with Dulles "that our real objective was to try to secure a settlement while at the same time saving British face.”¹²⁰

The above serves as an acknowledgement of, as Steve Marsh would argue, Anglo-American difficulties in reconciling conflicting desires and policies.¹²¹ These difficulties included the maintenance of the Middle East as a bastion of Western Power in the Cold War and the defense of the British Empire in the region. The United States government weighed these problems carefully, evidenced both above and through another internal memo which discussed ways that America could seize and retain primary responsibility in the Middle East without disturbing the Anglo-American relationship. "Consideration should be given to intermediate stages which would avoid such complete US Government assumption of responsibility and

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 695.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 712.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 712.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 712.

¹²¹ Marsh, 169-180.

breach of cooperation with the British."¹²² A breach would push Iran and the maintenance of the oil industry on the United States alone, as well as "such unilateral action would dangerously affect British collaboration in areas and on major problems far removed from Iran or the Middle East."¹²³ Prior to WWII, the United States had long been content to allow the British reign as the dominant foreign power in the region.¹²⁴ Yet after the war as American power grew and with the eruption of the Cold War throughout the world old ideas began to be rethought. The weakness shown by Britain in the face of Mossadegh's challenge caused more hesitation in the United States to provide the British with a blank check to do as they would in the oil crisis.

The United States' careful consideration for the British position also challenges Marsh's thesis. American leaders did more than twist Britain's arm in order to support their own policies. Instead, Eisenhower and his cabinet acknowledged the current weakness of the British and understood that by ignoring British demands the crisis could be solved more easily, yet still implied they needed to stand by them. This solidarity stemmed from the world political environment, the traditional status quo, and Britain's strategies of uniting the two nations' fortunes in the region. The process of supplanting British authority with American was slow and extended from 1953 to 1956.

Divisions were evident at an early point in the crisis among second-tier diplomats as well. For example, Henderson expressed frustration over the extensive reliance on British intelligence and knowledge in Iran and the entire Middle East. At the same time he needed to walk a fine line between discussing that frustration and appearing resistant to British aid. In January, 1952 Henderson wrote "I have believed for years and still believe that close cooperation between the

¹²² Henry Byroade, "Draft of Policy Statement on Iran," October 1, 1952; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 8-252 to 10-1254; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Marsh, 3-4.

British and ourselves is necessary in the present world. I do not believe, however, that it would pay either us or the British for this cooperation to be based on a misunderstanding of a given situation."¹²⁵ Henderson essentially reaffirmed his belief in the British before launching into an attack on their analysis. "We have at times found that their policies are wiser than ours. On the other hand, the British have on occasions been over-optimistic regarding their ability to deal with certain situations in accordance with nineteenth century formulas and the result have been that those situations have deteriorated rather than improved."¹²⁶ The nineteenth century formulas that Henderson mentions refer to the direct imperial practices employed by Britain in such places as Egypt in 1882.

Henderson expressed frustration over Britain's antiquated, imperialist practices. He also pointed to Greece and Turkey as examples of Britain "dumping" international situations of their own making in America's lap.¹²⁷ Despite this frustration Henderson acknowledged Britain's superior grasp of Iranian and Middle Eastern affairs and at least outwardly did not argue for abandoning the British in the region. Concerns over British decision-making in the region strengthened after the coup moving forward to the Suez Crisis, which marked America's increased role as the senior partner in the relationship.

The time of British dominance in the region was slowly drawing to a conclusion by the end of Truman's administration, as Marsh has so saliently argued. The 1953 coup provided Eisenhower's administration an opportunity for the United States to become an important foreign power in the region which simultaneously provided less room for the British in Iran. Ironically, it was only with the Americans spearheading of the 1953 coup for the tensions between the allies

¹²⁵ Loy Henderson to Burton L. Berry; Box 2853, Folder 611.88 1-3150 to 7-3052; Iran 1950-1954; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

to boil and, eventually, explode in 1956. The distance between the two western powers would grow even more rapidly with Washington's refusal to back British policy in the Suez Crisis.

Conclusions

One of the key lessons that arose for the British out of the Iranian oil crisis was the idea, as articulated by the MP Hamilton Kerr, that Britain "should not forget that we are the strongest and most reliable ally of the United States and, therefore, the one Power in the world which can influence the United States policy."¹²⁸ This principle informed British global policy and particularly its strategy in the Middle East. The surface facts of the 1953 coup make arguing against this principle difficult. Britain's influence did push the United States to aid the overthrow of Mossadegh. It exerted effective pressures on both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, continuously blocking American attempts at solving the crisis. Yet, as one digs beneath the surface it becomes harder to argue that such pressures did not strain the Anglo-American relationship to a dangerous degree. As the Suez Crisis approached, one can see how cracks in the "special relationship" that emerged because of the coup erupted into a split that would last well into the next decade and begin the process of America superseding British authority in the region.

The oil consortium that arose following 1953 had ramifications throughout the entire region. Daniel Yergin carefully tracks this consortium and explores how the Anglo-Iranian oil company was forced to turn to American assistance in order to reenter Iran. Jersey, Socony, Texaco, and Standard of California, along with Gulf and Shell and the French company CFP,

¹²⁸ House of Commons of the United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 06 November 1952, vol. 507, cc. 300-443, accessed August 2, 2014, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1952/nov/06/foreign-affairs-and-defence#column_341

united with Anglo-Iranian in order to mask its return to the country.¹²⁹ This consortium sparked much controversy; both stemming from the ongoing investigation into an oil cartel by the United States Justice Department and from the simple fact that many American oil companies were not interested in entering Iran.

While the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company despaired at having to rely on foreign aid in order to retain its previous holdings it still enjoyed a majority in the new consortium.¹³⁰ Despite this majority Anglo-Iranian, and thus British, control over the oil and interest in politics waned in Iran. As Yergin writes, "with the establishment of the Iranian consortium, the United States was now *the* major player in oil, and the volatile politics, of the Middle East."¹³¹

¹²⁹ Yergin, 475.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 476.

¹³¹ Ibid, 477.

III: Suez

Like the Iranian oil crisis, the Suez crisis pitched the British Empire against the forces of Middle Eastern nationalism and powerful international pressure. After the dramatic seizure of the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956 triggered by Egyptian President Gamal Nasser's televised address to his nation, the British government quickly enacted economic sanctions against Egypt. Its hope was to starve Egypt out just like they so effectively did to Iran.¹³² However, this crisis had a different element not seen in the early 1950s; the widespread international usage of the Suez Canal. Even from an early point in the proceedings, Britain acknowledged that "the Egyptians would not yield to economic pressures alone."¹³³

While Iranian oil shipped far and wide and much of Western Europe depended on that oil in 1951, more nations worldwide directly utilized the Suez Canal. On the surface this appeared to make Egypt's decision to nationalize even more difficult to defend. It could easily be argued that oil in the nation of Iran belonged to Iran while the Suez Canal opened itself to traffic from all over the world. However, the international nature of the canal forced Britain, even more than in the early 1950s, to adhere to international pressures. This, in turn, saw it push for American assistance even more forcefully in order to alleviate those pressures.

The United States hesitated in offering its full support for all British actions from the very beginning, instead acting as a negotiator and mediator in the dispute, similar to their response in the Iranian oil crisis from 1951-1952. Yet in 1956 the United States never fell on Britain's side. Instead it resisted the use of force throughout the Anglo-French-Israeli failed invasion of the Suez Canal zone. What had changed? Why had the Eisenhower administration resolved to help

¹³² Kyle, 153.

¹³³ Ibid, 139.

the British in 1953 and then three years later decided to actively work against their position?

Where had the status-quo of British primacy in the Anglo-American Middle Eastern relationship gone?

There existed several factors that differentiated the Suez Crisis from that of the Iranian coup. First, more nations used the Suez Canal as discussed above. Moreover, the world political situation had changed by the time of the Suez Crisis. The Korean War had finally finished and the Soviets stressed their dedication to a peaceful solution to the Suez question. The Russians also emphasized that a forceful reaction by the United States might create an international conflict which could quickly spiral out of control. Britain itself did not promote a united front, since Eden's government faced internal resistance from both parliament and citizen groups that troubled Washington. Finally, and most importantly, the cracks that had already formed in the Iranian crisis, cracks such as the United States' dissatisfaction with the British intelligence network in the Middle East and the Eisenhower administration's resolution to become the primary member in their Middle Eastern relationship (seen in Dulles' arguments above) widened throughout the Suez Crisis. These two back to back crises showed Britain's weakness and crumbling position in the region. With Suez, the United States resolved to step forward and play a more dominant hand in Middle Eastern affairs because British policy could no longer be trusted.

Britain, for its part, navigated the troubled waters well all things considered. Eden, who by 1956 sat as the prime minister in London, considered American support vital to the success of the British position in the Middle East.¹³⁴ This continued the strategy his predecessor, Churchill,

¹³⁴ Shaw, *Eden, Suez, and the Mass Media*; Kyle, *Suez*; Bertjan Verbeek, *Decision-Making in Great Britain During the Suez Crisis* (New York: Ashgate, 2003).

had taken. From within and without, Britain faced pressure to acquiesce or compromise with President Nasser. Eden, as historians such as Keith Kyle or Elizabeth Monroe argue, saw the British Empire slipping through his fingers. In order to procure the American support that London considered so vital Britain once again turned to strategies similar to those used in the Iranian crisis. Notably, London sought to convince the United States of the moral superiority of its position, draw American attention to its inherent interest in the region, and utilize the Cold War to such an affect. These strategies only exacerbated the differences between the two powers, drove the United States further away from Britain, and simultaneously and inadvertently allowed Washington to more easily replace Britain as the dominant western power in the region. The United States had changed the status quo while Britain sought to continue it.

Ultimately, the Suez Crisis became a key event in the denouement of British imperialism in the Middle East. This crisis also had serious ramifications for French power in the region and Israel took great interest in the proceedings. Many nations, great and small, were directly affected by Nasser's nationalization. As stated, the Suez Crisis had a much larger profile than the Iranian oil crisis which both Britain and the United States factored into their policy making. London and Washington thus rejected cooperative subterfuge early in the proceedings, evidenced by a lack of dialog between intelligence communities across the Atlantic. However, the British, with the help of the French and the Israelis, would turn back to covert means for ending the crisis in their favor as the United States continued to stall, reject, and deny the British their support.

Immediately following the nationalization of the Suez Canal on July 27, Eden issued a statement directed at President Eisenhower in a bid to quickly secure American and French assurances. "The unilateral decision of the Egyptian Government to expropriate the Suez Canal Company, without notice and in breach of the concessions, affects the right and interests of many

nations." That was the problem, the solution involved Eden "[expressing] the strong hope that the United States and French Governments would issue similar statements today."¹³⁵ He knew he would receive French support and he hoped for US aid as well. However, Eisenhower, quickly, replied with a curt statement concerning the difference between the nationalization of the oil fields at Abadan and the nationalization of the Suez Canal. "In the discussion which followed, the President said this action is not the same as nationalizing oil wells, since the latter exhausts a nation's resources and the Canal is more like a public utility, building them up."¹³⁶ Eisenhower saw the key difference being that Suez served the public, whereas the oil at Abadan was seen as British property.

With this direct comparison between the oil nationalization in Iran and the nationalization of Suez Eisenhower foreshadowed American actions by highlighting the intrinsic difference between the two crises. He also drew a line in the sand which left little room for British primacy in the relationship. The situation had changed in Washington from the time of Iranian crisis. The lessons learned in 1953, as well as a changed worldwide environment with a more active Soviet Union and no corollary to the Korean War giving the U.S. a direct, pragmatic reason to secure international British support, shifted the way that America approached the Middle East and Suez.

Even before the Suez Crisis began British documents suggested both the rising tensions with Egypt and showcased its strategies to secure American aid. A British report from March 21, entitled "'Middle East:' Cabinet Conclusions on Countering Egyptian Policy" states, "as a result of those conversations [the Foreign Secretary] was satisfied that Colonel Nasser was

¹³⁵ Telegram from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State, July 27, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 5.

¹³⁶ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, July 27, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 6.

unwilling to work with the Western Powers or to co-operate in the task of securing peace in the Middle East."¹³⁷ This clearly stated London's views on prospects of working with Nasser and recalls its portrayals of Mossadegh as an unreasonable, irresponsible leader.

The report detailed the need for American support and characterized Nasser as the boogeyman of the Middle East. "That being so, we ought to realign our policy in the Middle East: instead of seeking to conciliate or support Colonel Nasser, we should do our utmost to counter Egyptian policy and to uphold our true friends in the Middle East."¹³⁸ This stance serves as a prelude to the difficulties bridging the British and Egyptian positions later on in 1956. Finally, the text concluded,

Thus we should seek increased support for the Bagdad Pact and its members. We should make a further effort to persuade the United States to join the pact...There are also possibilities of action aimed more directly at Egypt—*e.g.* the withholding of military supplies, the withdrawal of financial support for the Aswan Dam, the reduction of United States economic aid and the blocking of sterling balances. In all this we should need the support of the United States Government. The first task would be to seek Anglo-American agreement on general realignment of policy towards Egypt.¹³⁹

The continuation of British strategies during the Iranian Coup and the Suez Crisis are obvious. Even before the nationalization of the Suez Canal one can already sense the growing tensions and Britain's scrambling to receive the support of its greatest ally.

Given that the United States entered a neutral role in the Suez Crisis, much as it did in the earliest days of the Iranian crisis, these kinds of statements from Britain recall the difficulties finding a negotiated solution to the oil crisis. Here, three years later, Britain again sought American assistance in the Middle East, hoping to resist the rising force of nationalism. Yet

¹³⁷ "Middle East: Cabinet Conclusions on Countering Egyptian Policy," *Egypt and the Defense of the Middle East*, vol. 3 (London: The Stationary Office, 1998), 502.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 502.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 502.

before turning its back on London during the Suez Canal crisis and ensuing invasion, Washington actually engaged in Britain's strategies to undermine Nasser in 1955 and the first half of 1956. Moved by fears over his Soviet ties, America joined Britain in a wide reaching plan known as Operation Omega. Omega ultimately ended with the withdrawal of American and British financial support for the Egyptian Aswan Dam project. The United States thus helped craft the descent to the Suez Crisis, a fact which the British attempted to use in order to procure Washington's support and which further drove a wedge between the allies, shown in Sir Roger Makin's reports further below. The active role in Omega allowed British personnel to place the blame on American shoulders and reinforced Eden's understanding of American policy as erratic.

Nasser himself spurred deteriorating relations with both America and Britain through threatening Israel in early 1956.¹⁴⁰ Correspondingly, the Egyptian president also appeared to draw closer to the communist bloc through the receipt of Soviet weaponry as well as his recognition of communist China in that same year.¹⁴¹ With the United States' adoption of a Cold War view of the Middle East these developments greatly disturbed them. The Arab world's rising star drew closer to its international antagonist and directly flouted the western powers. American assistance for Britain seemed obvious and assured, especially given the aforementioned U.S. withdrawal of aid to build the Aswan Dam, a move meant to "outflank" the Soviets but by all appearances "rewarded Nasser without earning his cooperation in return."¹⁴²

Why then did the United States turn from Britain over the course of the Suez Crisis? The answer hinges on the direct diplomacy done by the Soviets, the collapsing British prestige in the

¹⁴⁰ Neil Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 252.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 252.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 255-256.

region, and the conflicting public response in Britain and ambivalent response in the United States. The Middle East had been dragged into the Cold War in 1953 and by 1956 faced the convoluted politics that the war entailed.

The Use of the Cold War as a British Tactic

The U.S. response to British strategies involving the Cold War contrasts sharply with its reaction to those same strategies in 1953. One key element of this shifting response to British pressures involved the United States' growing confidence in its actions in the Middle East. This can be seen in the open skepticism of British opinion and American expressions of frustration concerning the British inability to move on from nineteenth century imperialist mindsets without tempering words like Loy Henderson had to three years before. This new, individual interest in the region was heightened by the fact that the same administration, with very similar actors, worked in both the 1953 coup and the 1956 crisis, allowing lessons and responses to be more easily translated from one situation to the next.

In 1956 the United States clearly had its own understanding of Cold War tensions in the region and the best way to manage conflicts that arose. John Foster Dulles stated that "for the first time the United States and Russia are not the principle antagonists" in the crisis, adding that he did not wish Suez to explode into open war.¹⁴³ However, the threat of such an eruption constantly weighed on not just Dulles' thoughts but the minds of all American leaders. As such, they carefully tried to walk a fine line between appeasing the British, as well as the French, and pushing the Russians toward conflict. This eventually gave way to a policy that the British found to be erratic and unclear, as an examination of London's own interpretation of Soviet threats within the Middle East highlights.

¹⁴³ Memorandum of a Conversation, Soviet Embassy, August 18, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 221.

As seen in 1953, Britain also paid careful attention to Soviet movements around the Middle East. In an internal report by officials from the British Treasury, Foreign Office, and the Ministry of Defense, the British administration outlined its role in world affairs. Ironically, the committee published this report only weeks before Nasser's nationalization bombshell in June. Sir Norman Brook, secretary of the cabinet, defined the committee's functions: "in the course of the next few weeks the Prime Minister proposes to consider, with the Ministers immediately concerned, what adjustments should be made in Government policy in view of changes in the methods, if not objectives, of the Soviet Union."¹⁴⁴ This opaque reference to changing British strategies in the face of a growing Soviet threat reflects the Middle East's more prominent position in the Cold War. While British agents in Iran closely considered Russian movements and understood the Soviet threat as very real, there never existed a call to reorganize. The events surrounding Abadan, Mossadegh, and the coup helped create a Cold War context for many Egyptian, Russian, British, and American actions in 1956. It was London, however, and not Washington that most forcefully pushed for an active response when the Suez crisis erupted, seeing it as an example of Soviet subversion. The United States approached the crisis with an understanding of the dangers posed by the USSR and a desire to limit the international impact of the canal's nationalization, but the British reinforced and fanatically pursued the threat.

The importance that British personnel placed upon economic concerns is evident throughout the report. The opening line of the study stated, "the uninterrupted supply of oil from the Middle East is vital to the economy of the United Kingdom and of Western Europe. It now depends more upon our being able to obtain the friendly co-operation of the producing and

¹⁴⁴ "The Future of the United Kingdom in World Affairs," *Egypt and the Defense of the Middle East* vol. 3 (London: The Stationary Office, 1998), 509.

transit countries than upon the physical strength we can deploy in the area."¹⁴⁵ In other words: the game had changed and Britain no longer could respond how it used to. As the report goes on to state, "it is increasingly a political rather than a military problem."¹⁴⁶

Also, throughout the report the British can be seen taking American assistance for granted, particularly when it came to the Soviet specter. The report stated those members of the Bagdad Pact that required aid should look toward the United States for provision and equipment and suggested the United States must be more directly involved in its operation: "we should work out with the Americans definite plans to build up the political, economic, and social side of the Pact" In essence, Britain dragged the United States deeper into its own operations in the Middle East and the U.S. was expected to foot much of the bill; an invitation, incidentally, that Eisenhower refused many times over.¹⁴⁷ It is worth noting that while the US was willing to "exert a helpful influence in the area in relation to the Pact," the US government found formally joining the Pact untenable as late as December 1956 because it was "anti some of the anti-Communist Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia."¹⁴⁸ Finally, the report concluded by stating "we should continue our efforts to improve the harmony of American policy with our own."¹⁴⁹ Britain seemed far more interested in a closer relationship with the United States than Washington did with London, as seen through its dissatisfaction with the Pact.

As evidenced by the desire to include the United States in the Baghdad Pact, Britain's stress on the Middle East as a Cold War battlefield extended to its strategies for procuring American support. Another British report defined the Pact as a "global war defense organization

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 509.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 509.

¹⁴⁷ Kyle, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum of a Conversation Between Caccia, Secretary of State Dulles, December, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Western Europe and Canada* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1986), VI, 679.

¹⁴⁹ "The Future of the United Kingdom in World Affairs," 509.

against the USSR and that as such it provides a Cold War instrument to keep communism out of the Middle East."¹⁵⁰ It goes on to reiterate that the United Kingdom's military expenditure must be kept to a minimum in the Pact, continuing the economic themes that were mentioned above. Britain was to offer assistance and support to Middle Eastern nations, not outright defend them. The military expenditure, as shown above, was meant to go to the United States. The United Kingdom invoked the Cold War in an effort to bolster its prestige and save its collapsing empire in the Middle East, yet the costs involved in maintaining that empire was increasingly pushed onto the United States.

Perhaps the final statement above sounds unfair. The British were not the mustache-twirling villains that Mohammed Mossadegh painted them as back in 1952, and it would be unwise to ignore the very real Cold War concerns they had in the region. Such concerns included, for example, the worry over the threat of limited war that communist subversion, according to the British Foreign Office, fostered throughout the region.¹⁵¹ However, a constant theme appeared where British personnel used the United States and its Cold War worries in order to protect Britain's own position. As one report made clear, London believed the most effective deterrent to a limited war that stemmed from Russian interference "would be the knowledge that the United Kingdom and the United States had combined military plans for immediate action against the aggressor and the belief that they would be put into effect."¹⁵²

Egypt itself contributed to the Cold War tensions that erupted with the Suez crisis. Nasser did not just nationalize the canal only to remain a passive observer as Britain, France, America and, indeed, the entire world scrambled to find a solution. The Egyptian leader played

¹⁵⁰ "United Kingdom Commitments Under the Baghdad Pact," *Egypt and the Defense of the Middle East* vol. 3 (London, The Stationary Office, 1998), 539.

¹⁵¹ "United Kingdom Requirements in the Middle East," *Egypt and the Defense of the Middle East* vol. 3, 517.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 518.

a very clever and careful game of balancing the Soviet Union and United States against each other. For example, the American embassy in Egypt, led by Ambassador Henry Byroade, found on July 30th that Nasser distanced himself from the Soviets largely to prevent the United States participation in the crisis. "[Nasser] said he had read in certain newspapers that nationalization of Suez Canal probably had been worked out with Russians. He wanted me to know at earliest possible moment that this was not true and that they did not have any advance information of his action."¹⁵³ Hopefully, for Nasser, this strategy would limit all American action but especially a potential invasion. At the same time, Nasser expressed considerable fear that the USSR was his only major ally at the upcoming Suez Canal Conference. He then asked Byroade for advice going into the conference, and the American ambassador responded that he could tell the Egyptian president little other than to avoid discussing the Panama Canal, which would undoubtedly bring the wrath of the United States.¹⁵⁴ Byroade responded to Nasser's strategies by questioning the legality of the nationalization and, both personally and officially, declared Nasser's actions a serious mistake. Still, the strategy of standing between the Soviet Union and the United States provides an explanation for the Soviet's increased presence and the United States' reluctance to antagonize Moscow to a great extent. Despite a generally hostile response from Byroade and other American diplomats in Egypt, however, Nasser successfully navigated the dangerous waters between the United States and the Soviet Union, playing the two superpowers off each other in order to secure his nation's future as an (albeit brief) leader in the nonaligned world.

¹⁵³ Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, July 30, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 55.

¹⁵⁴ Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, August 4, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956*, XVI, 133-139.

Reflecting the United States' more independent intelligence network in 1956, the CIA published reports throughout the Suez Crisis tracking British, Egyptian, and Soviet movements. In one such paper on August 30, two months before the invasion, an operative warned "the Soviet role in the Suez controversy continues to be opportunistic...at the same time, it continues to denounce the use of force and insists that a peaceful solution could be found."¹⁵⁵ The report goes on to state

Soviet spokesmen continue to profess concern that the Suez crisis might yet explode into a conflict which would spread beyond the Middle East. The Army newspaper, the *Red Star*, repeated Shepilov's statement in London that the use of force by the west would be a threat to peace and that conflict might spread to other areas.¹⁵⁶

These statements highlighted American concern that any use of force by the United States created the possibility for World War III. Where the British sought to craft an immediate Soviet threat to all friendly nations in the Middle East, the American intelligence agency found the Soviets taking a "wait and see" approach that could easily erupt into an international conflict. There were notations about how "Soviet statements have nonetheless made it clear that the USSR is avoiding commitment to any direct military support for Egypt," yet avoidance did not equate to the impossibility of Soviet support in the future."¹⁵⁷ Not only did this drive a wedge between the UK and the Americans, it also highlights the increasing independence of the Americans in the region. One does not see a return to the days of overreliance on British infrastructure and the perceived need for their approval for any operations in the region.

¹⁵⁵ Office of Central Intelligence, "Current Intelligence Weekly Summary," August 30, 1956, CIA-RDP79-00927A000900100001-3; accessed through CIA Records Search Tool, Declassification Database; NARA, College Park, MD, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 2.

With the nationalization of the Suez Canal, British personnel made far more overt warnings about the Soviet Union to American diplomats. Winthrop Aldrich, the United States ambassador to the United Kingdom from 1953 until 1957, expressed considerable concern in October 1956 over the status of the Anglo-American relationship just prior to the Israeli invasion and the beginning of hostilities with Egypt. "I agree that the Suez problem has strained US-British relations to an extent greater than any of the issues which have disturbed our alliance during my four years here and beyond the limits of divergences which we might regard as generally normal between allies."¹⁵⁸ This shows the strains bedeviling the Anglo-American relationship, with Aldrich fearing a break in the near future considering Britain and the United States no longer conducted business as allies.

The largest issue that plagued the relationship was fanatical British fears of Soviet intrusions in the Middle East against their holdings. "They still believe that various governments friendly to the West in the area are imminently threatened by Egyptian and Soviet instigated subversion."¹⁵⁹ The British used the Soviet Union in an effort to connect the Suez Crisis to the defense of the entire region in an appeal to American strategy. British personnel emphasized to Aldrich the immediately threatening "anti-Western developments" that burdened the Middle East in a bid for American support. However, Aldrich found British arguments to be "immoderate and obviously impractical courses of Western counter-action."¹⁶⁰ The American ambassador finished his report with a sobering statement on the divisions between the United States and Britain, stating that difficulties made a peaceful solution extremely difficult.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Winthrop Aldrich, "Telegram from the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State," October 9, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 671.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 671.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 671.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 671.

On October 1, just prior to the invasion, Eden drew upon the Cold War to make a late bid to Eisenhower just as British personnel approached Aldrich. Eden wrote "there is no doubt in our minds that Nasser, whether he likes it or not, is now effectively in Russian hands, just as Mussolini was in Hitler's."¹⁶² However, the next day Dulles responded by stating "we are not now engaging in any economic war against Egypt," and barred the British from using the Users Association, an international board attempting to find a solution to the crisis, as a means of exerting pressure on the Egyptians. As the crisis continued, divergences in Cold War strategy and frustration with British hawkishness harmed the Anglo-American alliance.

By November 1, the time of the invasion, Washington found the Anglo-French-Israeli assault on the Suez Canal base actually exacerbated tensions with the Soviet Union. Rather than stand at each other's sides as allies, the British increased international tension with its ill-advised invasion. On October 29 the president and his advisors found that "announcing the plan to go the UN, and [the United States'] general stand in the matter, might help in [resisting radical Soviet action]. It was observed that we and the Russians might find ourselves on the same side in this matter."¹⁶³ The next day, the president expressed that he had "a great deal of questions over any idea of asking congress for \$600 to \$800 million to support oil deliveries and other economic aid to Britain and France when the full impact of their action began to be felt" when and if the Soviets came into the crisis militarily on the side of the Egyptians. The British used Cold War fears to garner American support. When these failed because of more independent American analysis of the situation and Russian interference, the British abandoned those concerns and moved away from its American ally in favor of an overt assault. Britain's plans for a forceful response did not align with American Cold War strategy in the region, this led to the

¹⁶² Quote from: Scott Lucas, *Britain and Suez* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 69.

¹⁶³ Memorandum of a Conversation with the President, October 29, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 838.

break in October and November 1956 that cemented American supremacy in the Anglo-American Middle Eastern relationship.

Eden's memoir also indicated that Nasser used the specter of imperialism in drumming up support for his cause. Nasser not only competently played off the Soviet Union against the United States but also manipulated British motives and imperial history in Egypt to his own ends. Eden writes, "international authority was the same thing as colonialism, [the Egyptian government] said. Such perversion of the ordinary terms of language is common to dictatorships and in this, as in other matters, Nasser was following the example of his European predecessors."¹⁶⁴ Eden was particularly fond of allusions to Mussolini and Hitler, as seen in his late bid to Eisenhower above.¹⁶⁵ While the British prime minister pursued allied strategies concerning international control over the Suez Canal, he writes that Nasser equated that international board with the shackles of imperialism. From *Full Circle*, then, one can see the inherent differences in the ways that London and Cairo viewed the Suez Crisis, this difference made any attempt at conciliation extremely unlikely to succeed.

It appeared that the Egyptian president would need every tool available in order to protect Egypt from Britain. He flirted with dangers not just from his nation's old but weakening imperial master but also from the United States and even the Soviet Union, despite western concerns over Nasser's supposed alliance with the Soviet Bloc. However, overly aggressive British proposals against the Soviet Union throughout the Middle East led to untenable divisions between Britain and the United States that marred Washington's entry into the October conflict, especially when London expected Washington to foot the bill for those operations. London required the aid of

¹⁶⁴ Eden, 493.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 480-481.

the United States in order to grant legitimacy, and receive the necessary international support, for saving its Suez Canal base.

British Prestige: Danger to the Anglo-American Relationship

As during the Iranian coup, in the Suez Crisis the British government set the defense of its international prestige as its central goal. One internal report from June 1956 delved into a brief overview of the military means available in the Middle East and its relative costs. Of those available, only two were stated to cost Britain a significant amount: the support of the Bagdad Pact and the Suez Canal base. Of these two, the Bagdad Pact received far more attention with the call to "not allow the Bagdad Pact to be treated simply as a military association,"¹⁶⁶ or, in other words, as a military alliance above all else. The report surprisingly argued for an examination into "how soon the Canal Zone base can be liquidated." Thus, Britain was to examine how quickly they could recall their troops stationed in the base and then, presumably, sell the location off, perhaps even Egypt itself.¹⁶⁷ One can see the desire to liquidate the Canal base in other reports as well. In another paper, Britain more deeply analyzed their future in the region and settled on Cyprus as the location of British installations as London sought to downsize its military footprint in the area. This separate paper argued that "since it is in the power of Egypt to deny the Suez Canal facility to us, it is essential to retain some means by which British military power could, in the last resort, be brought to bear on this state. Cyprus would be a valuable asset for this purpose."¹⁶⁸ Ironically, despite earlier statements that the situation in the Middle East was by that point political rather than military, Britain still put military reorganization and planning first.

¹⁶⁶ "The Future of the United Kingdom in World Affairs," 510.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 510.

¹⁶⁸ "Facilities Required by HM Forces in Cyprus in Peace and War," *Egypt and the Defense of the Middle East* vol. 3 (The Stationary Office: London, 1998), 511.

Despite these arguments, the British decided to march to war over the Suez Canal a few short months later along with France and, covertly, Israel. If they already considered ridding themselves of a costly foreign base why did the British stand so resolute and uncompromising in the face of Nasser's nationalization? Nasser could not be rewarded for his obstinacy and Britain could not allow its prestige to be damaged by the actions of the Egyptian president.

The protection of Britain's international standing stood as one of Eden's main motivations and runs throughout his memoir. Eden filled *Full Circle* with statements about the difficulties he faced from within and without his nation. One of the key themes of the memoir concerned the growing divide between Britain and the United States while he held office, whether as secretary or prime minister. He repeatedly used an image of the United States as erratic at the best of times, impertinent at the worst. For example, he wrote that the United States offered little in the way of solid financial action against Nasser and Egypt. "On dues, the United States Government never agreed to effective action. This made it impossible to put pressure upon Nasser by a means which was ready to hand, depriving him of the revenue of the canal he had seized, until a new settlement was made."¹⁶⁹ Without the backing of the U.S., Britain could not put the financial pressure on Egypt that it required.

While Eden does offer a begrudgingly positive recount of Washington's attempt to find a peaceful solution, he bemoaned the way that his peers in London and Washington shied away from forceful, imperialist action. "We agreed with Mr. [Christian] Pineau's¹⁷⁰ forecast and supported his views. He proved himself a true prophet. The Americans were less receptive, in part because their inveterate distrust of 'colonialism' left them basically out of sympathy with

¹⁶⁹ Eden, 508.

¹⁷⁰ The French Foreign Affairs Minister during the Suez Crisis and an architect of the Suez invasion.

French problems in North Africa," recalled the prime minister.¹⁷¹ In this, Eden depicted the French as being the true allies of the British while the United States sat unreceptive to British pleas given its penchant for distrusting anything that smacked of imperialism.¹⁷²

Eden argued that making an example out of Nasser did not equate to nineteenth century imperialism. Rather, he wrote that "if Nasser had [been forced] in the end "to disgorge," the result would be plain for all to see. Theft would not have paid off, a breach of agreement would not have been endured, a wholesome lesson would have been taught in respect to the sanctity of agreements."¹⁷³ Thus, Britain did not seek to ensnare and dominate Egypt; rather, it sought to protect international law.

Hyam shows that colonialism and prestige tightly intertwined as "international rivalries and anxieties about prestige were central to the machinations of bureaucratic cosmologists." Given this intrinsic connection between imperial practices and international standing, the Americans clearly labeled the Suez Crisis as a colonial matter and one related to prestige, seen below. However, Eden, at least in *Full Circle* argued that Suez was of international law. There are difficulties trusting Eden's memoir and the argument that Egypt violated international law played into his broader strategies of securing international support, discussed further below. Still, even if one takes his words at face value *Full Circle* still provides a snapshot at the break between Britain and the United States by 1956. In 1953 Eisenhower, Dulles, and others making the decision to execute the coup strove to align with a British understanding of the situation. A similar attempt never took place in 1956.

¹⁷¹ Eden, 485.

¹⁷² The irony of America dominating the Panama Canal did not appear in *Full Circle*, but has not been lost in secondary literature on these same issues.

¹⁷³ Eden, 488.

Highlighting the erratic American policy bemoaned by Eden and the British Government, Dulles echoed Eden's sentiment about the sanctity of international law in the second Suez Conference on September 19, despite his proven biases against Britain by 1956. At the conference he implored, "let's stick together...and work not only for 'peace' but also for peace 'in conformity with the principles of justice and international law.'"¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately for Eden, this support from the United States did not extend into the use of force.

Through examining the many debates sparked throughout Britain by the Suez Crisis, one can witness the internal strife that Eden discussed. While one can see similar discussions during the Iranian Coup, specifically how both agents on the spot and MPs debated close ties with the United States or the imperial practices of Britain, such arguments spread even more quickly in 1956. The increasingly widespread debates about Britain's position in the world in 1956 have two explanations that will be further explored below. First, Britain faced increased costs (both financial and in human life) due to the stiff resistance offered by Egypt and the other nations around the world that had for decades been rising up against British dominance. Its desire to actually liquidate the Suez Canal base stems from these increased costs. Second, and connected to the first, were international calls to "get with the times" and reject late 19th century imperialist mentality. This particular discussion recalls the arguments of Loy Henderson in 1952 and 1953.

Take, for example, an editorial in *The Times* from September 3rd, 1956: "the TUC (Trade Union Congress) says that, should the present talks with Egypt break down, force should not be used until the question has been referred to the United Nations and then not used without the

¹⁷⁴ Extemporaneous Remarks by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles at the Second Plenary Session of the Suez Canal Conference, September 19, 1956; Box 6, Folder 2nd Suez Conference, Misc; Records Relating to the 1st and 2nd London Conferences on the Suez Canal; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

United Nation's consent."¹⁷⁵ This corresponded with the TUC's demands for proper wages and other domestic economic concerns. The effect that this pressure had on Britain's image internationally was immense. The Suez Crisis highlighted the disunity within Britain, presenting a weak front to world opinion that was both hostile and suspicious. A disunity noticed by American intelligence agents who, in a weekly intelligence report on the Suez Crisis, noted "the powerful Trades Union Congress, however, representing some 8,000,000 trade unionists, in its annual conference this week demanded that Britain not use force against Egypt without the approval of the UN."¹⁷⁶ During the invasion of October and November as well, American politicians noted the disunity within Britain when discussing whether or not the United States should aid its allies in Egypt or resist them. On November 1, Secretary George M. Humphrey, President Eisenhower, and Dulles discussed "developing fissures in British public opinion...not only to the split between Conservative and the Labour Parties, but to differences of opinion among the Conservatives themselves."¹⁷⁷ Humphrey used this disunity to argue against aiding Britain, a stance generally agreed upon by Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower.

One article from *The New York Times* reported on September 16 "a week of alarms, surprises, and bitter parliamentary debate has left Britons confused, divided, and almost as angry at each other as they are at Egypt...They [suspected the tripartite plan] as a means to provoke military action [which] raised war jitters to their highest pitch in the two-month-old Aswan Dam-Suez Canal crisis."¹⁷⁸ The article also stated "the conflicting attitudes in the British body politic

¹⁷⁵ "T.U.C in Opposition," *The Times*, September 03, 1956.

¹⁷⁶ Office of Central Intelligence, "Current Intelligence Weekly Summary," CIA-00927A000900110001-2, September 6, 1956; accessed through CIA Records Search Tool, Declassification Database; NARA, College Park, MD, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Memorandum of Discussion at the 302d Meeting of National Security Council, November 1, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 910.

¹⁷⁸ Kennet Love, "Britain's Mood Less Angry but Suez Debate Continues," *The New York Times* September 16, 1956.

over the question of using force went deeper than a mere party controversy."¹⁷⁹ Members both within the American government as well as the press paid close attention to the movements within Britain. Reporters and press agents would filter these reports into the American public where disillusionment with the British cause festered, especially as Egyptians easily moved into a lead role operating the canal.¹⁸⁰

The long term divide that the crises precipitated between Britain and the United States was evident in the press before the invasion. As one article discussed on August 6,

if [Britain and France] were to knuckle under to President Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, their prestige would suffer greatly...If, on the other hand, they used force, they would have the entire Arab world up in arms against them...United States officials, meanwhile, observed regretfully the extent of British and French resentment at United States insistence on 'moderation' in this case.¹⁸¹

Thus the Suez Crisis was a matter of prestige, a matter that situated Britain and France between a rock and a hard place, and, finally, a matter which made American leaders hesitate and thus drove a deep wedge between all three western allies.

Within Parliament debates also raged. In one session on the 23rd of October, just prior to the British invasion of the Suez Canal base, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, gave a speech bringing its members up to speed on recent developments and outlining British plans and strategies. However, a number of MPs quickly turned the speech toward the issue of whether or not Britain had the right to use force. Labour party members Mr. Robens, Bowles, Yates, Brockway, and Gaitskell in particular grilled the Conservative Lloyd on the position of the Egyptians, the possibility for a peaceful solution, and the rights of the British in

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Shaw, *Eden, Suez, and the Mass Media*, 183.

¹⁸¹ Dana Adams Schmidt, "West's Loss Cited in the Suez Crisis," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1956.

the crisis.¹⁸² Mr. Bowles launched an especially damning assault, attacking Lloyd's biases against Egyptian pilots and accusing the hard-liners of deepening the crisis. "Why is the Foreign Secretary assuming that transit is not being given completely indiscriminately and efficiently? Does he not realize that by withdrawing the European pilots and now threatening to withhold Canal dues the Government are giving a lead in the stoppage of transit through the Canal?" demanded Bowles.¹⁸³ These politicians reflected the growing disillusionment with Britain's policies in the public body. As Tony Shaw states, "with the Americans pursuing their own agenda and dampening down any prospect of force, the British and French governments could do little but drift with the rising tide of public apathy."¹⁸⁴

Eden also postulated that internal difficulties made the United States hesitate in assisting Britain. "Doubt about British national unity had its repercussions in the United States. It was constantly quoted to us by American negotiators and helped to weaken American resolution."¹⁸⁵ One can sense Eden's frustration: if his country would have stood firm, perhaps so too would have its most powerful ally. However, he lamented, "public opinion in our own country held steadier than appeared from press reports. Left-wing and doubtful-minded journals saw in the possible use of force a handy stick with which to beat to the government."¹⁸⁶ Eden utilized the media in order to sway both domestic and international opinion. However, he bemoaned how such attempts were unsuccessful and, as seen in discussions between Secretary Humphries, Dulles, and President Eisenhower the disunity within Britain had a clear effect on American decision making.

¹⁸² House of Commons of the United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 23 October 1956, vol. 558, cc. 491-6, accessed August 2, 2014, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1956/oct/23/suez-canal-1>

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Shaw, 63.

¹⁸⁵ Eden, 497.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 496.

The Times, at least, largely stood behind Eden's arguments concerning Nasser and the danger he represented. One editorial on September 1, 1956, remonstrated that "even some of those who have been protesting loudest may come to suspect that the will to free the canal by every peaceful means possible is not the real dividing line. That remains whether, if every possible peaceful means fails, the canal (and with it the safety of the West) is to be abandoned to Nasser's ambition and caprice."¹⁸⁷ Nasser, *the Times* argued, stood to directly impair the safety of the entire West in order to satisfy his own lust for power. *The Times* states that force was not the real issue; the true crux of the situation was whether or not the people of Britain and, indeed, the entire Western world would allow Nasser to flout international law for his personal gain. One can see a return to Eden's words: Nasser stood as powerful and dangerous a figure as any from Europe and threatened the security of the west with his actions. This definition of the situation and connection of international law to the sanctity of the west served Eden well and helped give him and his supporters moral high ground. However, the potential for such an approach to influence the United States and others remained questionable.

British prestige also factored into diplomacy across the Atlantic. Eden directly connected the United States' and Britain's prestige in the Middle East in his correspondence to Eisenhower. Letters came fast and thick, with the British prime minister making many direct appeals to the president of the United States. In a letter from early in the crisis on July 27, 1956, Eden argued that should Britain's prestige sink and Nasser successfully nationalize the Suez Canal then the United States' prestige would correspondingly be damaged. "If we take a firm stand over this now, we shall have the support of all the maritime powers. If we do not, our influence and yours

¹⁸⁷ "Widening the Circle," *The Times*, September 01, 1956.

throughout the Middle East will, we are convinced, be irretrievably undermined."¹⁸⁸ Secondly, he emphasized the danger of a large oil shortage should Nasser control the Suez Canal: "The immediate threat is to the oil supplies to Western Europe, a great part of which flows through the Canal."¹⁸⁹ However, he states that this threat remained secondary to the long term dangers the nationalization posed to "an international asset and facility, vital to the free world."¹⁹⁰

Eden's letter had two different, important elements to snare American support. First, he pointed to an abstract concern for the Americans. He appealed to the traditional US need for British support in the Middle East. Should Britain's position suffer so too would the American. This recalls the British argument in 1953; the American's needed British presence and support in the Middle East. Because of this, the only logical conclusion left to Eisenhower was to support his British allies in all capacities. The second element to Eden's argument pointed to more material challenges that the Americans faced with Suez. Britain repeatedly warned of a catastrophic oil shortage throughout the entire crisis, from appeals for American assistance with pressuring the Egyptian government to calls for American support to pick up the slack when Britain needed to bolster their oil reserves. Though this tactic failed, it provides an example of the useful tools that Eden had in his repertoire to help secure American support beyond the use of the Cold War.

Eden's ploy may have failed given the United States' low usage of the Suez Canal. In 1955, the US was fifth on the list of canal active users shipping petroleum and its derivatives North to South at 206 tons for the year.¹⁹¹ The United States shipped a sizable amount that still

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Eden to Dwight Eisenhower; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956*(Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 9.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁹¹ "Movement of Merchandise through Canal," 1955; Box 7, Canal Maritime of Suez; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 1.

paled in comparison to the Netherlands (248), Italy (302), Romania (353), and the Soviet Union (who came in at a whopping 467 tons).¹⁹² The U.S. still shipped more North to South than France (153 tons) and the United Kingdom (71 tons). On the other hand, the United States ranked third on total tonnage of petroleum shipped South to North via the canal sitting at 8630 tons.¹⁹³ Yet, it was still far outstripped by France (12,148 tons) and Great Britain (20,543 tons).¹⁹⁴ The British and French economic motives at play in the Suez Crisis are obvious and eclipsed similar motivations for the United States.

A comparison to factors in 1953 can elucidate why British arguments fell flat in 1956. Questions already existed in 1953 about America's need for British support in the Middle East, particularly in the intelligence community. Doubts about the professionalism of the British intelligence officers stationed in the region, an unimpressive intelligence and control network, as well as rising American independence in the Middle East had surfaced at the end of the coup. Three years later, the British were embroiled in another nationalization crisis; one that, should the Americans have marched to war, would have had an even wider influence than the Iran situation. Britain appeared all the weaker and Eisenhower's administration seemed all the more willing to move away from the traditional position of supporting the Middle East as a British area of influence. The strategies that the British employed in 1953 secured American assistance and made the United States more confident of its abilities in the region. These same strategies actually broadcast a weaker image to Washington as British holdings in the Middle East fell one by one to nationalism. In a conversation between Secretary of State Dulles and Vice President Nixon on October 31, Dulles said "two things are important from the standpoint of history--it is the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Empire--the second is the idea is out that we can be

¹⁹² Ibid, 1.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 2.

dragged along at the heels of Britain and France in policies that are obsolete." The British had gambled and lost as Washington decided to pursue a more independent path in the region.

As noted, a sense of declining British prestige animated American discussions of the Suez Crisis. In a conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles about the reports out of London, mostly discussing the somewhat optimistic reports of Robert Murphy, Dulles' more pessimistic views loomed large. During the conversation, Dulles noted that the British and French governments were mostly talking about their collapsing prestige. "The Secretary said the British and French want to use force not really because of the Canal situation primarily but because this act should be knocked down or have grave repercussions in North Africa and British position in other countries," argued the secretary.¹⁹⁵ As we have already seen, Dulles felt harshly toward what he would deem outdated, useless policies of domination by the United States' western allies. Important figures throughout the American government found themselves worrying over British international standing. However, there are far fewer statements discussing the American need to stand by its allies or support their position in the region. Instead, these conversations continued the theme begun in 1953 with Eisenhower's administration resolving to slowly and painlessly supersede the British in the region. Instead of slowly and painlessly, however, the transfer was far more violent. The Suez Crisis became a breaking point for American frustrations which had begun with the coup of Mossadegh. Unlike arguments from London that the American standing in the Middle East was tied to the British, Eisenhower and Dulles sought to distance themselves from their allies in order to *preserve* America's own prestige. Still, the careful ways that the United States sought to resolve the crisis peacefully shows that the decision to break with their allies did not come easily.

¹⁹⁵ John Foster Dulles to Dwight Eisenhower, "Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation," July 30, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 47.

The above explanation helps show Washington's disinterest in a forceful approach and Eisenhower's refusal to assist Britain after the eruption of the Suez Canal War, along with the need to negate the threat of a larger war with the Soviet Union. However, Washington still fully pursued peaceful solutions on behalf of the British Empire. The press in the United States particularly emphasized the role of the US as negotiator. As one intelligence report on press opinions made clear, "[Kennet] Love, from the [*New York Times*, after discussing greater opposition today than at first London Conference, remarks US influence has been decisive throughout Suez dispute but has changed significantly from negative function restraining British and French militarism to positive role providing leadership and ideas."¹⁹⁶ By the time of the Suez Conferences, the United States increasingly portrayed itself as a peace seeking mediator and leader and this role was embraced by the American public, making it difficult for Eden to employ his strategy of influencing the American people.

Bureaucrats continued to comment on important influence that Nasser held over the proceedings. On August 1, American ambassador Byroade sent a message to London advising Dulles, who met with British leaders in England, to wait to take action until "Egypt violates its international commitments and put Nasser on notice that we would not tolerate such violations."¹⁹⁷ He drew parallels to the Iranian oil crisis, stating "in drafting this message, Mossadeq case is clearly in my mind...we could not with success move against Mossadeq at the height of his prestige and I believe same applies here, with added factor that support for Nasser and Egypt will spread across much larger area than relatively politically isolated Iran."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Herbert Hoover Jr., "Intelligence Press Summary," September 19, 1956; Box 7, Intelligence Press Opinions; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Henry Byroade to Winthrop Aldrich, "Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Embassy in the United Kingdom," August 1, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 106.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 107.

Byroade considered the lessons learned from the oil crisis and the subsequent coup. However, he warned that Nasser may never provide that opening: "the use of a vital facility has not been discontinued and I believe implications clear enough to [Nasser] that if left alone he will most carefully avoid violation of international agreements."¹⁹⁹ Byroade disagreed with Eden's argument that the nationalization itself violated international agreement and law. He argued for the adoption of a patient approach and did not advocate standing strongly by the side of the British.

There is one final important note about American discussions of the Suez Crisis. Discourse within the political and press spheres lacked generalizations of the Egyptian character. Compare this to 1953, which saw upper and lower American diplomats, agents, and reporters who came to mirror British views on the Iranians. While, the American government had undoubtedly, erroneous presuppositions about Egypt and its people, these are far less obvious in American in 1956 than in 1953. American leaders feared Egyptian pilots would fail miserably and the canal would become clogged and unusable. Pro-invasion members of the British government stressed this particular point. After noting that the canal remained open and unaltered, however, then U.S. Under Secretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr. commented "that the Egyptian pilots thus far had been handling the job well."²⁰⁰

The divergence in American and British portrayals of Nasser and the Suez Crisis contrasts with the similarity of violent imagery of Mossadegh at the head of a nasty mob. In the Iranian oil crisis the press shaped discourse with its portrayals of the Iranian prime minister. However, given the clandestine nature of the coup the press' role never reached these heights in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 107.

²⁰⁰ "Report Prepared in the Executive Secretariat of the Department of State," September 27, 1956; US Department of State; *FRUS, Suez Crisis, 1956* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), XVI, 592.

1956, where Eden found control of both the English and American press vital. Given the more direct role of the press in 1956, it is interesting that there existed less of an overlap between British oriental stereotypes and the imagery found in articles and press estimates.

The British did try to sway the conversation to include generalizations about the essential nature of the Egyptians and of Arabs. Take, for example, comparisons to Hitler and Mussolini found in Eden's correspondence to Eisenhower. However, these largely fell on deaf ears and never factored into American policy making or dialog at any level. Both within Washington itself and in those reports directly coming from Cairo, discussion of the nature of the Egyptian people is largely absent. This is especially interesting considering that those in office largely overlapped between 1953 and 1956. Note the American government did not gain any "true" understanding of people in the Middle East or even that its education in that regard improved a noticeable amount by the time of Suez. Rather, these discussions and the adoption of British prejudices did not develop in Washington in 1956--unlike 1953, reflecting the more independent nature of the United States in the region three years later.

Sir Makins and the Press in the United States

From the very beginning of the crisis the British had a close eye on the reaction from the American public and the effect this reaction had on the government in Washington, which generally translated into a careful examination of American newspapers. A reading on the British concern for the American press, and how London's ambassador to the United States, Sir Roger Makins reported such news back to London, can help explain why the British took American support for granted or found the American position erratic. The information compiled by Makins point to two main threads in the writings of American reporters immediately following the nationalization. First, that the United States was definitely affected by Nasser's

decision to nationalize the canal. Second, that the United States and its allies should avoid force at all costs.

Tony Shaw's *Eden, Suez, and the Mass Media* expertly tracks Anthony Eden's use of the mass media in the Suez Crisis to influence the United States, Egypt, and Britain itself. Shaw challenges a prevalent idea within the historiography that Eden had no clear understanding of the media or reporters or a strategy to use the advantages of mass communication.²⁰¹ Rather, he determines that Eden had a very specific approach in mind for the employment of the mass media in all the three nations. Shaw argues that Eden had too much of a direct influence, which muddied the waters and alienated both the public in all three of those regions as well as reporters throughout the press world.

Shaw shows how Eden sought to influence the press in the United States in order to sway American public opinion which the prime minister saw as the most important factor in determining U.S. aid. Shaw argues that the British Foreign Office crafted extensive machinery to influence the U.S. press, such as the Number 10 Press Office and U.S. Regional Advisers Office communicating closely with American reporters, feeding them information approved by Eden's administration.²⁰² Taking a direct, hands-on approach with American news agencies, Eden paid close attention to these sources as a means to gauge public opinion. Thus Sir Makins' reports, rather than superfluous studies into American press opinions, were serious initiatives and occupied a vital place in London's decision making determining how to proceed within the Anglo-American relationship. However, the conflicting nature of these dispatches added to the confusion in Eden's government. On the one hand, Makins argued that the American public

²⁰¹ Tony Shaw, 2.

²⁰² Ibid, 157.

largely stood with the British government. Yet at the same time, he paradoxically wrote that American commentators found British solutions untenable.

Makins reported back to London on the general public sentiment of the American people, as one report on the *Washington Post* from just after the nationalization highlights. "The act of nationalization is generally regarded as of less importance than the policy which the Egyptian Government will pursue now that it has seized control. 'The key question is whether the nationalization will in any way affect freedom of transit.'"²⁰³ The British ambassador also reported that "the great majority of commentators have taken the line that the United States' interests are directly affected, and many are conscious that American actions precipitated the crisis."²⁰⁴ This shifting of the blame from Britain to the United States speaks volumes for why the British government felt America had a responsibility to assist them. One can also see the reinforcement of Washington's traditional, dedicated interest in assisting Britain. This is a positive message, reassuring the British government that a staunch ally heavily leaned in its favor. Makins also reported that while "the Administration's handling of the Suez crisis has so far attracted very little criticism. There is a growing awareness that America's interests, and notably her oil interests, are in jeopardy"²⁰⁵ Makins stated that elements of American public opinion thus stood with the British government. He grasped these particular examples because they corresponded with the needs and desires of the British government.

Adding to the confusion back in London, Makins also discussed the resistance that Britain faced from much of the American public. He reported that the *New York Times* was

²⁰³ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, July, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 310.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 312.

²⁰⁵ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, July, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 319.

initially against the use of force asserting "Nasser's bluff will have to be called-not by force, but by reason, economics, and law."²⁰⁶ He drew from further press sources that "although the press now assumes that the Cairo talks will break down, there are few helpful ideas about what is to be done. Though there is a general feeling that 'this bandit [Nasser] must not be allowed to get away with it' there is no disposition whatsoever to contemplate the use of force"²⁰⁷ The British ambassador argued that while much of the press shared and conveyed the opinion that talks with Nasser would break down, force remained an impossible solution to the situation.

Makins also suggested that many in the United States shared the opinion that while the Suez Canal was vital for American interests, it was not vital that Britain or France operated the canal. He wrote, "commentators are now almost unanimous in opposing the use of force, at least so long as the canal remains open, and many are critical of Britain and France for contemplating any such thing."²⁰⁸ Finally, Makins reported on the Cold War concerns factoring into the resistance to join Britain should it go to war: "some newspapers think that, if war must come, the US should in any case stay out, on the theory that 'the chances of keeping military action confined to the Canal Zone are far better if the US stays out of it with the purpose of keeping the Soviets out of it.'" Should the US join Britain the Soviets would join Egypt and thus the conflict could balloon rapidly and dangerously. It would be far better for the world for the U.S. to stay out of the conflict.²⁰⁹

The conflicting nature of the American press did not find its way into American intelligence press estimates. Rather, American intelligence officials and politicians, notably

²⁰⁶ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, July, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 311.

²⁰⁷ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, August, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 328

²⁰⁸ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, July, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 319.

²⁰⁹ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, August, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 328.

Herbert Hoover Jr. who paid careful attention to news articles and editorials coming out of the United States, Britain, and Egypt, highlighted how American reporters discussed the way that Dulles and Eisenhower strove to keep the western allies together, find a compromise solution, and punish Nasser for breaking the law.²¹⁰ The conflicting reportage of the press in America highlights an important distinction in how British and American officials viewed the position of the American public. Makins fed his government reports of an American government with no firm position and a malleable people, adding to the confusion of Eden's strategy which hinged on successfully winning over the U.S. public. On the other hand, Hoover showcased an American public decisively critical of the British angle and supportive of American peace-seeking action. Where Makins saw a confused and erratic American response, U.S. personnel portrayed their actions as firm and clear. The American public was a hinge on which the crisis turned for both the Eden and Eisenhower administrations, and if their understandings of that public misaligned so thoroughly there was little hope for a reconciliation in policy.

Makins' message to his government was clear: the United States' sympathies lay with Britain, despite their confusing response. However, these sympathies, as well as the high ground, would evaporate should Britain engage in a forceful approach. Makins offered one other suggestion for why the United States government would hesitate to assist Britain in a military endeavor. He suggests that part of America's erratic response was that the Suez Crisis occurred during an election year. The Eisenhower administration did not want to be seen as dragging the United States into a foreign entanglement.²¹¹ This caused Eden to only push the American

²¹⁰ Herbert Hoover Jr., Intelligence Press Summary, September 18, 1956; Box 7, Intelligence Press Opinions; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 1; Herbert Hoover Jr., Intelligence Press Summary, September 18, 1956; Box 7, Intelligence Press Opinions; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; London Press Summary, September 18, 1956; Box 7, Intelligence Press Opinions; Department of State; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 1.

²¹¹ Roger Makins to Anthony Eden, July, 1956, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (Bethesda: LexisNexis, 2010), VI, pt. V, series C, 315.

public harder because they were the lynchpin to his plan, which in turn actually further drove Washington and London apart, culminating with the sudden and violent split in October with Britain's invasion of the Suez Canal zone and the US' subsequent denouncement.

Conclusions: Suez Crisis

The Cold War tactic used by the British in order to procure American assistance, as well as depreciated British prestige, combined to break the Anglo-American relationship in the Middle East in 1956. British strategies remained rooted in the past, informed by the coup of 1953. The Americans divorced themselves from the old strategy of leaving the defense of the Middle East (against communism and the rising tide of nationalism) to the care of the British. In the short term this resulted in a complete break in the alliance, in the long term a total change in who was regarded as the primary member of the Anglo-American Middle Eastern relationship. Rather than the British situated in that top spot, it was the United States.

Examining American and British sources from the Suez Crisis point to a number of interesting conclusions. British actors struggled to make sense of American policy, viewing it as erratic and unclear. In Operation Omega the United States resolved to work against Nasser's position, ultimately resulting in the denial of funds for the Aswan Dam project. This, in turn, led to Nasser turning more completely to the Soviets for aid and weaponry, factors which would seem to assure American support against Nasser during the Suez Crisis. During the crisis the U.S. did the exact opposite, resisting hostile British approaches and appeals for American aid. The Soviet Union also played a more direct role in the proceedings than in 1953, which provides one explanation for American reluctance to get involved. Rather than pull the Americans in, the threat of a global conflict erupting from the Suez Crisis, made by both the Soviets themselves

and echoed in press reports, made American political and intelligence agents hesitate in offering their support.

Prestige also factored into decision making. Instead of mirroring 1953, which saw the Truman and Eisenhower administrations discussing why they stood by the British, Eisenhower resisted arguments from Eden that tied American and British prestige in the Middle East together. It was the Americans rather than the British that more commonly discussed Suez in terms of prestige while the British generally used language relating to international law. Dulles openly expressed his disgust for the 19th century imperialism that he felt the British engaged in. Eisenhower similarly showed frustration at the British strategies to again draw the Americans in.

Finally, depictions of the Egyptian national character and Nasser did not align between American and Britain as in 1953 with the Iranian people and Mossadegh. The discussions that did take place in the U.S. expressed minor concern about the ability for the Egyptian pilots to successfully navigate the canal, a far cry from worries about the Iranian national character being one of untrustworthiness. The two leaders were also presented differently. Nasser behaved in a more traditionally western way, even Eden's analogy that Nasser represented a new Hitler or Mussolini recalled European antagonists, rather than an oriental despot. Mossadegh, on the other hand, was shown to be effeminate and irrational which quickly found steam in American audiences, both in Washington D.C. and the public. While more research should be done before offering any strong conclusion, the diverging orientalist depictions are strongly evident in both the coup and Suez Crisis.

On the American side, the Suez Crisis was seen as fundamentally different from the situations that arose earlier in the 1950s. However, these conclusions were only reached after the Americans were drawn into Iran in 1952 and 1953. Connections can be seen when one examines

how the British appealed for American support and the themes that unite the two crises. The British again turned to the dangers of the Soviet Union and connected American and British prestige in the region. It was the United States that rejected these appeals, and growing American independence in the Middle East seen in the Suez Crisis stemmed from the joint Iranian coup.

Conclusions

British diplomatic tactics link the story of Anglo-American relations during the coup against Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 with the story of their relations during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Yet American reactions to these tactics changed in these few years causing a divergence in their responses to the Middle East. In particular, the British consistently relied upon highlighting the Cold War strategic value of Iran and Egypt for the United States. From Tehran to Suez, the British strategies followed a natural and logical curve from subtle to overt. In 1953, British politicians like Shepherd, Walker, and Middleton carefully tracked Soviet movements, preached the importance of solidarity with America, and emphasized the Anglo-American connection in the face of Soviet expansion. At the same time, Middleton sought to use Soviet threats in a way that could help Britain while, unavoidably, leave the Americans in the lurch.

Similarly in 1956, the American ambassador in London, Winthrop Aldrich, faced overt pressure from Eden's administration stressing the immediate threat the Soviet's posed to both London and Washington's position in the region. This heightened alarm on Britain's part connects to increasing concern not of Soviet pressure in particular but also Britain's own global position in general. While Aldrich faced greater demands from his British peers, London discussed ways to push more of the economic and military burden of the Baghdad Pact on the United States in the crucial weeks immediately preceding the Suez Crisis.

These pressures strained the already cracked Anglo-American relationship in the Middle East. Britain faced two crises in short succession which called into question its control over the region and cast the earlier supposition of leaving the Middle East to their care into doubt. The growth of Cold War tensions in the Middle East between the crises in Iran to Egypt, stemming from the more overt role played by the Soviets in 1956, only heightened American concern over

the declining British position. From Eisenhower's call for Anglo-American unity in 1953 to high level discussions about no longer needing British support in the Middle East in 1956, a clear progression can be witnessed of mounting American frustration at the actions of its ally.

There are other ways that the growing Cold War theater in the Middle East influenced events. First, the Korean War put pressure on the United States to not alienate the British, an important international ally. Washington needed London to continue its huge support for NATO and to help support its global war against communism. Yet even this drove a wedge between the allies, as containment and the inescapable connection between the Iran crisis and the Korean War forced the United States to expand the Cold War globally. In such a global war led by Washington, British control of the Middle East became an outlier and did not mesh with the strategy employed by the United States in other theaters.

In 1956, the Soviet Union itself provided a reason for the United States to not involve itself with any plan that involved the use of force. Where Soviet movements within Iran were subtle and opportunistic, in Egypt the Soviets made clear their support for Nasser's actions from the outset. Moscow declared its want for a peaceful solution like the United States. Still, the Soviet leadership also stated that should force be used against Egypt, especially if the United States became involved, then the USSR would have little choice but to intervene as well. This, Eisenhower feared, could turn a regional, late imperial conflict into a conflict with catastrophic results.

British prestige also informed both the Iranian Coup and the Suez Crisis. Prestige essentially measured the legitimacy of British domination. Imperialists to the end, Eden, Churchill, and other first and second tier politicians and intelligence officers remained devoted to protecting it throughout the decade. The United States buoyed the British position in the region.

As the dominant western power it commanded respect beyond what Britain could muster. Britain realized this and thus sought in both crises to procure American aid by any means necessary.

Transforming the Middle East into a Cold War battlefield was a vital element to this overarching British strategy. Britain also employed other simpler means to receive the assistance it required. Notably, the correspondence exchanged between British and American heads of state, especially seen with Anthony Eden and Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, personalized the appeals to the Anglo-American "special relationship;" but these petitions failed. The United States had a vested interest in supporting the British position in 1953 beyond the Korean War; specifically, the traditional strategy of leaving the Middle East in Britain's care. Whether one accepts Kermit Roosevelt's thesis that Truman and Acheson provided a clear divide from Eisenhower and Dulles or Steve Marsh's rejection of the presidential synthesis, 1953 and 1956 combined showed a clear turning point in American strategy. Before the Iranian Coup, the United States allowed the British freer rein in the Middle East in part because the American government had cared little for the economic and political implications of a region it considered an absolute backwater.

The Iranian and Suez crises changed this mode of thought and, connected to the lens of the Cold War discussed above; the problems introduced by Britain's obsession with its prestige eventually hurt its position rather than save it. The internal debates within Britain did little to present a solid front of confidence to Egypt, the US, and the world in general; a fact which greatly frustrated Anthony Eden who criticizes those within Britain that resisted imperial tactics. Indeed, a strong call to modernize their approach and drop what was seen as late 19th century imperial practices coursed throughout both Britain at large and Parliament in specific. These

same debates were sparked by the Iranian Coup as well, especially in Parliament, but were far less pervasive and did not capture as much public attention. Still, arguments to change British strategy, such as by Herbert Morrison, gathered steam from 1953 and erupted with the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956.

On the other side of the Atlantic in 1953, Eisenhower and his team discussed ways to supersede the British in the region. Yet they still saw a break as untenable; the old strategy still lingered of allowing Britain its way in the Middle East. America resolved to follow, but only to a certain extent; the change from British to American domination was already under way in 1953.

By 1956 anti-British calls from the US government grew in strength. At the end of the crisis, a general sense that London held back American policy in the region had broken through. These calls were strengthened by diplomats like Aldrich, who found the strategies suggested by the British to end the crisis and their suggestions of Soviet intrusion into friendly nations tiresome and alarmist. The intelligence community was far quieter in 1956 than in 1953, especially in the United States with its stronger divisions between government officials and intelligence agents, as opposed to Britain with its more blurry lines between the MI6 and the Foreign Office. Yet the CIA presented and circulated sobering images of the internal difficulties within Britain and the danger posed by the Soviet Union. Newspapers themselves circulated similar stories, telling of Anglo-American difficulties and Parliamentary troubles.

Through utilizing the lenses of the Cold War and British prestige to examine the connections between the Iranian Coup of 1953 and the Suez Crisis of 1956, it is clear that the strategies pursued by the British worked in the short term. However, after the overthrow of Mossadegh and leading up to the seizure of Suez, these same strategies tore apart the Anglo-

American relationship in the Middle East. This shift culminated in the United States becoming the most powerful Western power in the region. When it became obvious in 1956 that the United States would not resolve to come to Britain's aid as it did three years prior, the British leadership clung to those strategies all the more tightly. American support was a necessity for Britain in the region, yet it was these same strategies that made the British presence difficult to justify for the United States.

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